

THE DESENSITIZATION OF A DOOMED GENERATION

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2020 has undoubtedly been a year for the history books. It started off with a war scare, when American-Iranian tensions flared after President Trump ordered the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani. We were so terrified of a Third World War breaking out that my generation coped in the only way it understands: a flurry of memes filling our Instagram feeds from head to toe. Meanwhile, the world had already begun to go downhill in a far uglier way. On New Year's Eve, of all days, a small outbreak of a novel coronavirus was announced in Wuhan, China. This would grow into the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst outbreak of any pathogen since the Spanish Flu in 1918, delving our world even deeper into chaos than we could have ever foreseen. Now we're five months into our indefinite quarantine, wishing we could turn back time.

It wouldn't be truthful to say we went into this year with an optimistic attitude. We live in an era with the most controversial president in American history. We've experienced record breaking levels of partisan gridlock, polarization, and Trump's impeachment only added to those tensions. Our nation is being pulled apart at the seams. This level of division in American culture is unheard of, yet politicians and pundits have decided to foster and normalize it. It has been a nonstop state of tension. But it keeps getting worse. In the midst of trade wars and social tensions, more people began to realize how our world is failing, and many came to face the grim reality of our dying planet. It wasn't looking very bright. Despite all this adversity, we thought we would have a clean slate. It wasn't just a new year; it was a new decade. We celebrated the chance of a better world unknowing of what was to come. Little did we know how bad things could truly get.

There has been a snowball effect of sorts this year. We constantly face new challenges, especially with the virus and domestic tensions. Following the lockdown and the largest economic collapse since the Great Depression, our society was on edge, nearing a breaking point. The widely publicized videos of the brutal murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, among countless other victims, helped bring the issue of institutional racism to the forefront of national politics. Protests have gone on for months at this point, including many I attended myself. It was quite moving to see so many people uniting for such an important cause, and more Americans have begun to confront the reality of racial inequality. The protests against police brutality and militarization have been countered with police brutality, which is pretty hypocritical if you ask me (and millions of other Americans). We've reached the brink of fascism, with federal agents deployed in Portland, among other cities, to test executive power. The political landscape of 2020 has been shaped by these controversies and the government's failure to respond to the ongoing pandemic. The media has fanned the flames, with political pundits on major cable news networks polarizing the population. Even Jeff Zucker, president of CNN, has admitted that "the idea of politics as sport is undeniable, and we ... approached it that way." Partisanship has become a priority over anything else, even policy. The near indistinguishable "left" and right have been at each other's necks nonstop. This is all leading to one of the most consequential elections in American history. We're stuck between a racist, fascist, failure of a president or an incompetent establishment politician with a failing memory. There doesn't seem to be much hope either way for America, and our failed system has become the status quo.

That's just been the running theme the whole year: hopelessness. It has even become a running joke that the next month will always hold something in store unimaginably worse than the last. There has been a point of complete desensitization for most of us, especially younger generations. We fight to improve our nation and our world, yet subconsciously accept this downward spiral. It has been one of the longest, most stressful years in our lives, with no end in sight. One can only hope that there is light at the end of this tunnel and come out of this year alive and hopefully thriving. But I doubt it, the Mayans just seemed to have misspelled the year of the apocalypse. Maybe 2021 will make 2020 look like the year of our lives. As citizens of the world, we can only hope this isn't the case.

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