

FLYING THE PLANE AS WE GO: BUILDING THE FUTURE THROUGH A HAZE

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I've noticed a common thread across my dreams over these past six months: I'm helpless and stuck in a situation that I'm unprepared to face. Sometimes I'm the pilot of a plane that I was never taught to fly. Other times I'm paralyzed by fear as my friend sitting next to me is being attacked, unable to help her. Sometimes I'm managing the kitchen at a fast-food restaurant, yet I was never given the recipes to do what's demanded of me. Rather than my pre-pandemic typical school day mornings of sleepily pulling my sheets over my head and praying for five more minutes to stay in bed, I wake up peeling my eyes open and clenching my pillow in a state of profound fear. This feeling of helplessness that I experience in my nightmares is not too difficult for me to interpret, unpleasant as it feels. When I jot down my thoughts in my yellow journal, the key events and emotions I feel when I awake from these dreams, I realize that I've felt this way many times before. Gripped by fear, unprepared and unknowing.

At this moment, in this country, I feel helpless. Regardless of the chills I feel on my skin when I'm marching at a Black Lives Matter protest or viewing my search history filled with petitions I have signed to support reform towards justice and peace, I know I am just one teenager in a nation of millions, a nation that is both fighting a deadly pandemic and confronting a vile history of extortion and prejudice against my black and brown brothers and sisters.

Suddenly, I'm awake and I'm still flying that plane with no directions or even a destination. I grieve for the lives that have been lost at the hands of a police system largely built on a foundation of racism and violence. I worry for COVID-19 patients being treated by selfless and heroic healthcare workers, yet ignored by a mask-less President who cares more about his ego than about our country.

I reflect on my crumbling America and hope that one day, I will unite with the rest of my generation to enact the change that our children and grandchildren deserve, that we deserve too. I make a quiet promise to myself that I will be a part of the change that we are pining for, that we know we need. I wish for my voice to be heard among the others, for my words to be read, and for the unconditional passion of youth activists to fill the voids of our troubled country with fresh thought, morality, and soul.

The present is only the start of this long journey, but I vow to become a better ally for those who are struggling racial injustice by reading, learning, and profuse question-asking. I will continue to write for my school paper and *The Bullhorn* about the injustices I see in my own backyard. I will demand that those who we are meant to trust actually stand by us and for us--our lawmakers, administrators, and educators. I will work towards a career that will allow me to help rid my community of silence when something feels wrong. I dream of a nation that we are not yet able to see yet because it has not yet existed. However, my generation will be equipped to pilot the plane of our helpless nightmares. One day, we will make a safe landing, and the damage of fear, uncertainty, destruction, and apathy will be behind us. We can create the directions together.

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