

# American Blood

An Essay

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“I will bleed on the American Flag to make sure those stripes  
stay red.”

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Theodore Brassel,  
Mission Impossible III

“Join, or Die.”

-

Benjamin Franklin

In the cold November air, the crisp and crystal sunlight of the same texture as the leaves that crackle beneath my shoe, I hear the rhythmic drub, the distant tattoo of a heartbeat – not my own – that pulses through it all and I wonder what it sends, through veins unseen, to every extremity and limb of this patchwork Nation to keep it alive and breathing, fit for the millions who ask: “What can I do for my country?”

May it answer.

It is Water.

As the sun burned the denim at the back of my legs I bent down and knocked at the rock-dry clay of the Ninth Ward. I watched a honey bee spiral a flower like a drain. I picked at what I thought was a stone but a rainbow appeared across its soft curved back as I pulled it from the dirt. Not an opal nor a pearl but a shell from the sea. That Gulf a mile away left a scale from its back glistening in the earth. To my right and left and rear an acre of grass, ahead a gentle slope. Along its spine a square concrete ridge that I climbed the hill to touch. I placed my flat palm on the heated grey slab and pressed against its solid weight. This time it did not move, this fresh levee.

In 1988 a hundred million dollars was saved over the lack of 14 feet

of steel pilings below those slabs. For the sake of a few feet the state gained millions. In 2005 Katrina cared little for the paltry 17 feet they had installed and it burrowed below and crashed over those levees. From the canals we built that served the city, she came spitting and foaming between the cracks and washed away more than just investor's and financier's charters and logs. The water that seeped into every niche and fold, fell from the eyes and mouths, that drenched the dead in the graves and sent their coffins floating down the streets, then soaked the music as it was played.

That levee stood not a head taller than me. In the sea, 10 feet from the shore on the coast of my hometown I have struggled to find sand beneath my feet. On the pillars of the memorial garden in that acre where the levee broke marks the height of the water that found least resistance, it's about a head taller than me. The expense was 14 extra feet of steel added to the 17 feet proposed at a value of a hundred million but the cost is now infinitely higher at a price of life, a toll that is still in debt.

It is Rails.

We stood for many long minutes watching the train rattle past as the road behind us filled with a queue of traffic with red lights above the barrier beating left right left right, chambers of the heart pumping carriage after carriage across our view until we lost count altogether of its

load but it had to have been miles long as the engine's blare now echoed far away.

They even call them arteries, arteries that feed America its people and produce. Nearly as old as the country itself, traverses each corner and through the 'heartland', a vast rocky wilderness, insular and closed off that you would need to crunch through bone to open and reveal. Its history is bound up in the development of the States as the Union reached west and the rails made it accessible, opening up the expanses of desert and sky, revealing a whole other ocean in which to plant a rippling flag. The railroad was industry, was commerce, was employment, was exploration, was adventure, was hope – loud, screeching, clattering, cloud-belching, whistling hope. Now the infrastructure of America is literally crumbling. Bridges and Dams with widening death cracks that rain rubble on the traffic and rivers far below, disintegrating roads, power grids that plunge cities into darkness, levees that are too shallow and railways under constant repair. With the biggest source of funding for infrastructure being the highway trust fund, supplied by a 18.4¢ per gallon federal gas tax that hasn't increased in 24 years – taxes being an unpopular mainstay of government funding – these arteries are fast becoming starved.

Though the giant, two floor, steel bullets that breathe across a state bear no resemblance to the puffing majesty of yesteryear there is still that feeling of the old as you are shaken left and right in your seat. That sense

of distance a plane does not give, the sense of urgency a car won't impart and a view of the changing landscape and chameleon communities that only walking might reveal. Or horseback. But travelling that kind of distance at that kind of speed would be a little cruel.

Finally the tail disappears behind the treeline, the lights cease blinking and the traffic drags its own bulk over the tracks with muted bumps. I can see why so many risk crossing as the barriers drop, comments my friend, People just don't have the time for it. Death being preferable to spending anything, even time, it seems.

It is Hallowe'en.

I walk through a store, rented on short term solely to sell only Hallowe'en goods: pumpkins real and fake, costumes from sexy through topical to scary with weapons, smoke machines, dummies, fake trees, projectors, CDs of scary music or sound FX, candy and sweets, cobwebs-in-a-can, dioramas, fake fires of waving silk and more all lining the shelves. But as we pass three archways filled with life size rubber models asking we push a button to animate them, is when I finally feel compelled to engage with it. I press one of the buttons and a man, hung upside down by wire that threads painfully through his skin, clad in the black and white stripes of prison garb, screams in piercing agony as lights flicker making the wires, his teeth and eyes glow as he shakes so violently he rattles

the whole scene as electricity is passed through the terrifying corpse of a man condemned to an electric death. And it kept going. Charge after charge convulsed the hideous fake cadaver, swinging by his pierced skin. I turned away to see a snarling werewolf reaching for me, eyes wide and hungry.

All Hallows Eve is the night before All Hallows Day (funnily enough), the day where respects are paid to the dead. Hallows Eve is the evening in celebration of mischief and horror that is celebrated more today in America than ever before and anywhere else in the world. A family festival of horror, where adults and children dress up, eat too much sugar and harass people for reparations against the threat of pranks that alternate between the harmless to the pernicious. Far from being just a day in American life, today - like Christmas - it lasts all month long.

Billboards on highways depict hollow eyed zombies, shedding necrotic flesh, open maws dribbling gore, reaching out to you; lawns adorned with faux graves and bodies hung from trees; supermarkets populated by pitch black representations of women hoping to feast on a child's flesh; the souls of the deceased parodied and shaken in faces to startle where once people hoped a loved one may have returned to offer peace to the grieving; the most cruel and monstrous blackness in humanity from burning and drowning women men feared, to the slaughter of races buried in piles beneath hotels, to torture, rape and murder of our fellow

human, all sealed in plastic and inoculated against true ingestion for the price of a few dollars.

From a festival of possibly the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to ward off the Autumnal cold and superstition for an evening to a multi-billion-dollar industry. I walk away from the shop to the car in uneasy silence, haunted by the horrific visions rendered in plastic, but more so the lack of fear, even rejoicing in their graphic depictions of the worst in us all.

It is the Land.

No other country can claim the vast oceans of land America does. A continent-made-nation where the populace outside the cities must drive to see their neighbours, lakes as big as the sea, vast tracks of forest or farmland between villages teeming with flora and fauna found nowhere else on the planet, a myriad of differing geological landscapes from tundra and desert, to frozen wastes and mountain ranges sandwiched between Atlantic and Pacific. Ingrained in every American the visions of the land that lends them their character; the buttermilk skies of dawn spread across the scrub of the southwest; the fireworks of Autumn in the foliage of the North East; the beating sun and desert scars of the west coast; the water sodden air heated to make even trees exhausted by the humidity in the swamps of the southeast; the tornado scratched plains of the centre to the white canvas winters of the North.

Across every stitch of these state borders a body lies. Be it a Native of the land forced out, a buffalo slaughtered to starve them, a deer hit by a car as it crosses the state line, a horse put down for buckling under the pressure or the bald eagle hunted to near extinction, they litter the landscape with invisible tombstones. To say nothing of the knife of industry gouging the letters 'U S A' across the trunk of the country, like lovers for the affection of each other but never the tree.

Yet America cultivates its parks and worships those that tend the crop that feeds its characters, namely corn, and paints it on cinema screens for all to admire in Panavision and pastoral colours, immortalized by the likes of John Ford and Budd Twain, that same rolling, matter-of-fact, dirt rich poetry that coats the heritage of American ideas and culture from Thomas Paine through Whitman to McCarthy all with the same expansive and wide tones of the American plains shaping their words, their senses and their view.

It is Oil.

You can watch from afar as a blaze spouts into the dark of the night sky, a series of burning beacons that parallax as you pass on the road. Or the giant nodding steel grasshoppers that bow to the earth to dredge up the gouting black fluid, mainlined into the Economy. The crippling addiction to rotting dinosaurs, crude in all senses. That milkshake we all

must have.

It need not even be from America's veins either. Across the globe run richer wells in deserts and oceans, tapped by men in slick black face deemed heroes yet lives priced at \$2.50 a gallon. Once drilled from another soil its jelly can be burned to be hurled at their people so it might better stick to cloth, to wood, to skin, whilst we coat our metals with it so they might better slide and turn in our industries. A mineral made of the dead.

Which coats the Guns.

A series of simple clasps, hinges, springs and pins marinated in oil so better to deliver a pointed lump of breakable metal through a tunnel to imbed and break apart in flesh as efficiently as possible via a controlled explosion. A fluid laced with death coating a tool to better deliver death seems morbidly poetic.

I had never seen a real, loaded gun before I came to America but the moment I landed it was all I saw. The men at the airport roamed somberly about, their arms in the sling of a cannon they clutched preciously to their breast; the officers who wandered Time Square a pistol hanging limply at their hip, exposed for any waiting hand; the shops where they sat, laid out like the plush velvet display tray for the finest silverware, advertising their quotient of harm they can deal, respect they command and power

they impart. And in that, I can see their appeal.

I have never held a non-replica gun, nor do I wish to. They have effectively been banned in the UK for twenty years and are always depicted negatively, if at all, in the media but that is for fear we understand them. There is a strength and solidity in weapons that they offer the user, if not invulnerability then a sense of it. The power they impart to the wielder is as potent as any drug and just as addictive. In a country of hundreds of millions, many land locked in central states, unused to seeing the oceans or the travelers they bring, left behind in the progress and advancement of their state or seeing change around them at an alarming rate, it would make anyone feel powerless. The ability, nay right, to purchase, to keep and to wield a fresh power seems almost too enticing. But power corrupts and I am too easily corrupted, and if a multi-billion-dollar industry profits from powerlessness I would be more concerned about their designs on my ever-changing moral landscape than my government's.

The martial ideals of America were formed in the era of The Enlightenment, when the country itself was born from the gun, the gun is therefore a symbol of the personal freedoms defined in the constitution and its amendments. As Thomas Paine (an Englishman but founding father) in his 'Crisis' series noted: "Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it." The gun is a modern machine so it is fitting it serves as such a founding characteristic

of the American psyche being such a relatively new country compared to the more ancient military traditions of Europe or East Asia. The soldier of these older traditions is that of a Knight or Samurai, whose power rarely comes from their weapon, the Gun on the other hand is an easily purchased 'tool', a one-size-fits-all approach to combat. The sword or bow a completely separate entity to that of the gun in both mechanics and ideology, a juxtaposition well described in Star Wars when a character states that a lightsaber is "a more elegant weapon, for a more civilized age" (it is no small point that Star Wars was based heavily on the Akira Kurosawa film 'The Hidden Fortress' from Japan made in 1958). This places the gun outside the self, whereas a sword and cultures born of that weapon is an extension of that soldier, often taking a hand in making the weapon. A sword is a discipline, a tool for study and meditation, the gun is a machine that fits the hand, fired by anyone has the same force and impact. The most common example I see of this is those who defend a citizen's right to owning a gun in the face of the accusation that they kill many civilians is that "Guns don't kill people, people kill people". It is in the nature of a Gun that it can be externalised in this way, a sword cannot be defended like this. A sword is an extension of your hand and thus your will. Any death by a blade is the fault and ownership of the one wielding it. A sword at rest is sharp but lies silently and can be held with little fear of damage or injury so must be wielded with intent for injury or death to

occur. A gun does not need that intent. The Gun Violence Archive states that there were 1,962 accidental deaths by firearms in 2015 but the FBI website states knives accounted for more murder weapons in 2015, this is an example of the mentality behind the gun. It is a tool that allows the expression of its wielder's will without the constraint of discipline, contemplation of its use or relative lack of damage. An individual gun is an object without personality, swords have names and are handed down through generations, a gun's meaning comes from its ability to empower, a sword's from its ability to be imbued with the power of its wielder. The Cowboy and his gun is the American archetype, an expression of individual liberty that has been adopted by the military developing the citizen soldier, an extension of the American dream that sees a soldier as anyone unlike in the far East, say, where it is reliant on the person's caste or class and then trained, typically from childhood, to be a soldier. In America it is that expression of individuality that is a justification for violence, personified by the overall availability and utility of the gun.

But even the constitution has a caveat for this. Too often the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment is truncated to simply state: "the right ... to ... bear arms". The full amendment is still only one sentence but far more explicit in its definition: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." The first half of that sentence is often ignored making

constitutional defence of weapons somewhat problematic. I posit that most gun owners are not a 'well regulated militia' and absolutely not 'necessary to the security of a free state'. America is a wonderfully free nation, its citizen's right to freedom enshrined in law, no State's freedom – as far as I am aware – is in jeopardy and requires defence. This amendment is the most context dependent of them all; written at a time when armed dissidents roamed the country and the guns were single bullet loading rifles that were difficult to use, maintain and carry. The 200 year old definition of bearing arms is woefully out of date compared to the modern weapons of today and the relative peace and safety provided by a national police force and a lack of any invading foreign nations. And yet these caveats are ignored in the defence of American constitutional ideals and an individual's right to have a weapon that kills more people by accident than with intent.

The NRA's emblem is a bald eagle stood atop a shield emblazoned with the stars and stripes crossed by two rifles. Any hand-held shield would be insufficient defence against modern rounds. Bald eagles were illegally shot and nearly extinct by the 1970s.

It is Ink.

The ink that formed the nation, the ink that declared independence, that called for common sense, that asked you join or die, that coated

the tongue of Washington, that emancipated the bound, that certified them free, that enshrined those weapons, that cemented free speech, that formed those Leaves of Grass and Sang for Myself, that removed the drink then handed it back, that revealed a gate in water that flooded the plains, the ink that covers my fingers and smudges them with blame, the ink that killed a Mockingbird, the ink that signs your name.

It is Her.

The first thing people would see as they shipped to New York from across the Sea after 1886 was a woman, arm in the air, torch aloft, tabula amasta in her hand, a broken chain at her feet. She signaled the arrival to a new world of freedom, liberty and independence. A gift from France, the Statue of Liberty still stands today welcoming visitors, travelers, asylum seekers and residents all in the same way.

What seems most problematic about Lady Liberty, or rather most hypocritical, is not the resistance to welcome for immigrants and asylum seekers by America at large today but the fact the personification of America's greatest efforts and highest standards is a woman. In a country where the largest provider of women's scholarships demands you have never had children and be judged on your attractiveness in a bikini, a country that continually revokes an individual woman's rights to make decisions about her sexuality, orientation and reproductive organs and a

country that voted in a President who is an open sexual aggressor whilst painting his opponent as a 'Nasty Woman' seems to have a deep seated acrimony toward women in general. Demanding they be 'worshipped' and 'respected', literally placing them on a pedestal but only ever referring to them in the roles of mother, sister, wife, daughter or simply 'Angel' is missing a glaringly obvious dichotomy in all the above terms: a lack of individual agency in favour of a prescribed identity. Too often women are characterized either one dimensionally or not at all, a personalityless vacuum with neither good nor bad defining facets.

Over centuries Feminism in various forms has tended to be applauded by the general public and vilified by the Establishment and since its inception has won many concrete victories which allows critics to say it is no longer necessary as it has accomplished all it has set out to. It is true the cause has become more abstract in recent years: listing the reasons above together under the term 'Patriarchy' doesn't quite portray its complexity and nuance and thus seen as a glib metonym for not-very-much by critics, and rape culture being more to do with attitude and opinion so less visible and harder to rally against but they are very real – and entrenched – disparities between the sexes in America. The Wage Gap is a good visible, evidence based example.

In 2015 the White House Published an article about the Gender Pay Gap stating in five points where the discrepancies lie: 1) The pay gap is

not simply represented in the weekly cheque but in compensations like health insurance, retirement plans and access to paid leave, all of which are offered far less to women. 2) Whilst the gap is closing since the 70s men have (and mostly still do) greater levels of education and experience, yet this number is not representative of capability. 3) Though, again, the number has decreased in recent years, more women work in low income jobs and industries than men. 4) Most damning is that the role many associate with women and form the asinine and reductive declaration that women should be ‘worshipped’ – motherhood – is simultaneously associated with a wage penalty and lower future earnings. And 5) The pay gap grows over a worker’s career due to a woman’s cultural disadvantage in a typically male hierarchy of a poor negotiating stance resulting in fewer raises and promotions. You need only look to the entertainment industry to see how weighted in favour of men the world still is: fewer roles for older women (over 45), romantic cast couples normally favour a younger woman and much older man and the difference in pay between male and female actors is in the millions.

When we look at a near 50/50 split in a Nation’s loyalty to one cause or another as we see day on day at the moment all over the world, it cannot be unreasonable to factor in that women account for 50.8% of the American population or 125.9 million adult individuals identifying as female.

A woman represents the founding ideals of America and wields the flame of knowledge but today women are brutally undermined and un-ashamedly so by many including other women and none other than the President himself, yet women who – justifiably – are angry about this are then further patronized and threatened. This treatment of intelligent women as a threat to civilized society has been seen before: Salem in 1692. There are daily Witch trials in our news feeds today and symbolic duckings and burnings almost on the hour through ‘doxxing’, character assassination, death threats, revenge porn and far more overt and subtle forms of abuse and torture, all of which are legitamised by either encouragement by those in power (typically white men) or refusal to acknowledge by others. To truly defend liberty and independence I would encourage everyone to educate themselves about Feminism and defend Women’s rights as strongly as any other subjugated person.

No man is an Island but Lady Liberty has her own.

When she was first erected, visitors saw a shining copper statue rearing before them in, sunlight glinting off her bronzed skin. Today she has turned green and I cannot say I blame her.

It is Skin.

A friend and I left our subway train and went to the elevator across the platform. As we got in we were accompanied by three young black men

of a kind I was unfamiliar with: they wore bandanas, oversized sports shirts, large gold medallions, baggy jeans, worn with a swagger in their gait, and then I felt it. A fear bred into me from years of conditioning a seeing these men as hoodlums, or gangsters, or just plain criminals. As they stepped in the elevator with us a young blonde woman in a smart pin-stripe suit and heels was hastily tip toeing across the platform clutching her bag to stop her dropping it in her rush. The doors began to close and she reached out, pleading for reprieve. In unison all three of the young men reached out in turn telling her to slow down, don't rush you'll hurt yourself, we've got the door don't you worry, you okay ma'am?, what floor?, you take care now. They left the elevator after her without a word when we reached street level and went out into Brooklyn seemingly unaffected. I, on the other hand, was a different person and have never felt deeper shame. The paragons of good manners I had just seen (perhaps due to their own conditioning to treat white people with undue respect whatever the circumstance) I had assumed were on society's lowest rung with nothing but contempt for my comfort and sense of entitlement. If they hated me, they had every right to.

You see the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment like the 2<sup>nd</sup> also has an interesting caveat to it, stating that whilst “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist in the United States” it is contingent on the following: “Except as a punishment for a crime”. So like the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment that

ellipses is doing a lot of heavy lifting. In short, with America housing 25% of the world's criminals, 40% of whom are black – a stark contrast to the 6% of the overall population of the USA that are black, thus the penal system being a gross misrepresentation – the USA has personified, through legislation, rhetoric, policy and financial interest, black people as Criminals. A more wholesome and abstract term than 'Nigger' perhaps but just as dehumanizing. This says nothing of constant depictions of Hispanics portrayed as drug smugglers, Islamic as Terrorists, Japanese as paedophiles and the Chinese as that most loathed transgressive: The Communist.

Of all the problems that blight America throughout history its obsession with melanin is its most damning and most profound. Racism exists across the globe and against all people but there is a deep valley in that ellipses in the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, a gorge worthy of that Grand Canyon. We look across a gulf of time to its passing, the Birth of a Nation, Jim Crow's ruling and movement of the civilian's right, with both repulsion and pride as if that time is long gone. We listen to Martin Luther King Jr's 'Dream' and feel we have woken in it. We see fit to ignore a speech he gave many years later where he said of the resistance to the travesty of the Vietnam war: "I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today

– my own government.” Akin to Nelson Mandela in that their image is that of benevolence, history remembering their more palatable speeches, their rhetoric that can be easier adopted by white middle classes, whereas their truth was more combative, demanding – aggressively – the need for change.

Traditionally, the ‘Northern’ States have accused the southern states of a more overt and entrenched antipathy towards non-white folk, with justifiable reasons beyond simply unresolved bitterness over the Civil War: higher rates of black incarceration, shootings, unequal legislation and voting restrictions, but school segregation is higher in New York City than the rest of the United States, and after Martin Luther’s equivocation on non-violent protest was taken up in Baltimore And Baton Rouge it was beaten down with military force, only to be adopted in peace by wearing apparel adorned with the Black Lives Matter slogan, addressing respectfully in theatre’s or taking a knee when others stand, we then ask them to protest better or just not at all. Which begs the question: Why? What are the white population so afraid of? When they outnumber and clearly over power the non-white population? Because we know its wrong. We know our evil.

In New Orleans I looked for the music I loved born of an ancient black culture, instead I found the music played in the street by the same bearded twenty something whites I hear it from everywhere else. A city

of tourists, like myself, seeking the swampy foundations of slavery for the thrill of ‘Authenticity’ only to find the same gentrification we see wherever passion was sown co-opted to milk it dry. So where did I see black people? With the smaller Audience at best, but mostly serving me fried chicken or waiting tables. I posit this life is not voluntary.

It is Tears.

Lest it be forgotten it is not your country to begin with...

It is only with the abhorrent attack on Standing Rock by the Dakota Pipeline that Native Americans are given the public spotlight again. I can only surmise that this is because to dwell on such a public shame that is the near genocide of an entire race and evanescence of a culture that predated western culture’s arrival by centuries. It is difficult to discuss as history ill records the wars, the poisoning, the forced starvation and slavery of various tribes of the original Americans and it is largely consigned to the bin of colonialism or with the more shameful historical brand of ‘savages’ with the magical hand wave that dismisses this blemish with the “we’re not like that anymore” yet recent events suggest otherwise.

My father took a great deal of interest in Native American Culture, Black Elk was on the bookshelf, Native American Chants on CD, a favour toward films such as Dance with Wolves and Last of the Mohicans, I was brought up aware of a great deal of Choctaw, Cherokee, Sioux, Iowa,

Mojave and Wichita culture but I never saw them. Depicted only as wise and sombre plot device to allow a blue collar American to discover himself or as a comic depiction demanding we smoke a 'peace pipe' or running a Casino. It implied they were so rare as to be gone, a ghost of America's brutal past. Instead they are living families standing in front of water cannon's in freezing temperatures ironically in the name of clean water, a far cry from that hokey 'Spirit Animal' stereotype we foster, slapping our lips whilst howling, hopping from leg to leg with the other arm waving in the air.

It doesn't take a listen too far back in history to hear the DAPL confrontation as an echo. President Andrew Jackson defied the constitution in 1830 by demanding the Native American tribes be removed from their land due to the discovery of rich reserves of natural gold, in a move akin to the covetous magpies stealing another species of bird's nest by flinging the resident bird's eggs to the earth, known as the Indian Removal Act which was brutally enforced with the 'Death Marches' across the Midwest resulting in the deaths of thousands of Native Americans. This pathway to their own destruction is now known as the 'Trail of Tears', and it is those tears that watered the tree of Liberty, seen as it was then by many Americans as a sensible and beneficial move. It is worth remembering Oil is known to many as 'Black Gold'.

As a boy Black Elk was taken ill and fell into a unresponsive state

where he saw visions, visions that spoke of his people and his nation as he saw it represented by a tree, perhaps that tree Jefferson spoke of. Trees have roots that feed and support the plant through its life and, as the Jungian metaphor for dreams would read, this encapsulates a people and a nation well. It is poor service to ignore these roots within the earth, tied to the land as they are, yet hidden for their ugliness in favour of the gaudy flowerings above.

Dylan Thomas wrote: “Though wise men at their end know dark is right / Because their words forked no lightning” on the contrary Black Elk (who fought at Wounded Knee) said: “When I breathed, my breath was lightning”. Many young native Americans read the book of interviews with him, ‘Black Elk Speaks’, to better understand their heritage that is buried so unceremoniously, roots in the shape of branches of lightning splayed within the soil.

The Capital city of Washington DC’s football team is called the ‘Redskins’.

It is other Nations.

If you ask any Proud American their heritage they can usually say what generation they are and will normally follow up with their ethnicity. If we go by the personal genealogy of a resident of the United States there are very few ‘Americans’ but there are plenty of African Americans,

Cuban Americans, Latin Americans, Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, Hispanic Americans, Jewish Americans, Italian Americans, Irish Americans and many more. Yet all politicians today stand on their immigration policy.

The DNA of Americans is a proud mix, a global mongrel, a diverse cocktail of all peoples who saw the blank slate of the States as opportunity, the Nation's manifest Destiny and Dream to be all they can be. Today the Migrant is a demon, a leech or vampire come to suck the veins of the land dry and to feast on the same life force that energises 300,000,000 but no more. Why? A nation built on immigrant investment, faith, culture, economy and politics that closes its doors, raises its bridge to financial pilgrims and those seeking sanctuary. We unhooked the IV transfusing us as we are worried about its source. Given the divisions in the citizen population to date, rarely more severe than now, it seems odd to be so resistant to integration as that only forces the divide wider between other nations. Who are we if not our neighbours? Who are we if not our own family? We all know the silence of a house living under the cloud of an argument, slammed doors, muffled sobs, passive aggressive notes and deliberate sabotage of the smooth running of the household. Americans all live under the same roof with many a lodger, if everyone is against their housemates the less inhabitable the home becomes.

As someone who wants to emigrate to the USA himself, it astonishes

me the depth and complication of your border system. Those wishing to seek patriation from any country face a mountainous task of legal and financial depth, and for refugees it is far harder: application through the UNHCR results in only 1% of applicants recommended for resettlement, they are then referred to the State Department who screens the applicant via Homeland Security, the FBI, NCC, and if from Syria you get the Syrian Enhanced Review which includes a review by the US CIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directory, then you get your interview, fingerprint scan and health screenings and if this is all successful you will then be enrolled in cultural orientation classes, all of this typically taking around two years. The VISA application is quicker with less checks but requires certain criteria depending on which VISA you apply for which you are instantly disqualified from unless you meet them and only roughly 5% of complete applications are accepted at all. If you're getting married to a resident many think this is the simplest route, sadly not: the process can take from two to ten years (in some cases), cost over \$2000, is dependent on income and can be denied at any time even on completion of the whole process. In addition, only half of applicants with families in the USA are allowed resident status. And nearly 3 million immigrants were deported between 2009 & 2016. America is nearly 10 million square kilometers or roughly 3.8 million square miles, there is room for these people yet it is insisted there isn't and many are demanding

even tougher screenings.

As I queue to enter this country I am scared. Scared I will be turned away or taken to a dark room for questioning. I am a white, English speaking male, imagine the sheer terror of anyone who isn't, simply wanting to visit Florida for Disneyworld. America is feared by the world mainly because of its fear of the world, despite every nationality dwelling within it.

It is Conflict.

I was watching a movie at the cinema with my father when during a scene of the military combatting a threat, Dad leaned over to me and said why was it the American military was so reverently depicted in cinema? He said it made him uncomfortable. Years later I discovered the American Military only lend their equipment and services to a film on the proviso that the military are depicted in a favourable and positive light. What this doesn't explain is the frequency with which the military are depicted in books, films and videogames and the level to which the hardware and their image is fetishized. Then I was in Georgia International Airport and overheard an automated PA announcement welcoming and thanking them for their service and like my father I felt uneasy. Those serving in the military deserve respect, undoubtedly, anyone risking life and limb for another is a mark of high nobility but quiet dignity and humility I

have found are the hallmarks of former and current servicemen and in most country's respect is paid in the same way.

America was formed amid the scent of gun powder hanging in the air. Battles for independence were still being fought as Franklin signed the Declaration, the first President of the United States under the Constitution was a General, the first settlers fought with the Native tribes and the Civil War claimed more lives than any other in American history. The United States has combat written into its Constitution. It seems little wonder then to me that as a Nation America seems perpetually involved in some form of military engagement across the globe at any given time.

The American Military is an awesome and terrifyingly powerful thing with \$522 billion spent on it in 2015 and over 120 million active, fit for service, individuals available in 2016 (just over a third of the overall population) to the armed services with weapons technology that outstrips any other country by some considerable way, yet the US Military Index considers the military 'Marginal' in most areas and 'weak' concerning the Army itself. The GFP however rates the American military the most powerful in the world, above both Russia and China. It should be no surprise then that the GFP is an independent research website but the US Military Index is part of the Heritage Foundation, a Conservative think tank formed under Nixon and a leading force in the election of Ronald Reagan.

More than this Military service is an identity to many, a – justifiable – source of pride, eliciting brotherhood and camaraderie amongst its current and former members. Yet in-built into this identity is a military's need to exist: War. In a time of global turmoil but no sustained threat, i.e. a period of relative peace on American shores a military's purpose decreases so to sustain it a public image is maintained, and one of haunting fervour.

As a fan of comics, I have found they make excellent symbolism for various things in life. Batman has a 'Rogue's Gallery' of Villains, colourful and cruel who the Dark Knight must always be prepared to fight, without those villains or petty criminals far beneath his powers Bruce Wayne would lose impetus, his role becoming marginal at best in light of a regulated police force and morally influenced populace. What was explored in the 80s in Batman comics was his role in creating the villains he fights. As long as Batman exists the Joker et al will always be there. God knows I love Batman but he'd scare me in real life, his Villains – the ones he created and would not exist without him - even more so. I would be terrified if Superman was real...

All through the green, fabric veins of money.

Ultimately it all comes down to this. In the UK, class focused as we are, there are many strata and people are judged on their place within them which in turn is dictated by their income. In America I don't see the

multi-levels of class structure I do at home, it is more resolutely separated by race. In America if you are “just getting by” that is known as doing pretty well in the UK. From there though it is a steep drop into abject poverty, that – due to the wealth of the Nation – is replete with certain luxuries, few that matter and none that imbue any sense of power. All of which are judged on your financial stability, financial responsibility and financial prowess. In essence, it is pure capitalism.

Money informs every aspect of American Life: where you live, who you marry, the books you read, your ideologies, your health, even your moral compass, and it most certainly informs, and has always informed, policy. Organisations like ALEC, a supposedly non-profit organization of legislators and corporate businesses that draft and share models for legislation among state governments, are proof of financial involvement in state government and President Trump, a billionaire industrialist and reality TV star is an example of national involvement. Running a country the size of the USA is not cheap and for a country that bases its entire definition of itself on its credit rating and NET value, from Federal, to State, to Individual, the need for money, and excess of it, is essential.

Forgery has existed since currency itself. It is a serious crime with severe penalties, understandably as with a surfeit of fake money it devalues the real currency, yet it has been a tactic used by many in war. The British printed fake bills and tin coins (where the oft mimicked ‘biting’ of a penny

comes from as a fake coin would bend) to destabilise the Rebel Army's finances during the Revolutionary War, a tactic the Union in turn adopted during the Civil War against the Confederate states, Nazis forged pounds during World War II and in the first half of 2016 around 152,000 bank notes with a face value of 3.3 million were taken out of circulation in the UK. In addition to counterfeiting the value of a country's currency can be undermined through political and economic stability fluctuations: the American depression begun with the Wall Street crash in 1929, the same again in 2008 and the pound plummeted in 2016 after the referendum vote.

I stood in front of a giant wheel in a room of barred windows in the New Orleans Mint reading from a plaque that explained the tonnage with which the apparatus pressed a new coin. I was awe struck, but to the women (for it was largely women) who minted this cash it was a piece of metal, one of many that passed through the machine that day, to be put on a pile and ushered away in a secure transport to far wealthier hands. The mint was shut down during the Civil War and Reconstruction and is now home to a museum of New Orleans' far richer currency: its music. The building sits squat and wide not far from the banks of the Mississippi, no doubt where boats carried the money freshly produced from inside those red brick walls. To my left, in the centre of the room was the bare brick of the smelting chamber, an image above depicting the molten, liquid metal

poured in and out from which would produce the change the Nation required. I imagined the workers as they stood pouring out the white-hot metal, their soot blackened smocks, singed cotton shirts, sweat crested brows as the heat scorched their faces and turned the low-ceilinged room into a financial oven, sparks leaping from the troughs - worth dollars - and drizzling the expensive metal into the moulds, each bouncing flame that burned them, even the very air they breathed, laced with money it would take them days of this torturous work to earn. Yet as a miller loses his taste for bread or a photographic printer his eye for a beautiful image or an Inuit his delight in the fall of snow, what is something that can feed a stomach, ignite a soul or change the very landscape yet can hold no value in a blink?

This is the Blood of America.

Each of these flooding the circulatory system like anti-bodies, plasma, cells and shrapnel, clotting, clogging, feeding, starving and growing a whole Nation, yes but it is still embodied in Blood. The blood that stains the water in canals, the blood that coats the railroads and bodies locked in the concrete of dams, the bottles of fake blood on the shelves, the blood matted in the fur of the Bison, the very stuff that powers the Nation – Oil – is made of it, the Guns that bring it out by the gallon, the names signed in blood, the blood gorged chains still hanging from wrists, the

familial blood of the native mixed with that of another Nation with both DNA viewed as toxic, with flecks of gore smattered across every dollar bill. It is a Nation built, sustained, emboldened and ultimately undone by conflict, aggression and violence. Every corner, niche and crevice of American life fed by blood or smeared with it, an inescapable torrent of dark crimson that rises higher year on year. Jefferson even demanded the tree of Liberty, that tree of the Nation, its roots of the dead buried in stolen soil of battlefields be watered regularly with the blood of Patriots and Tyrants. It seems appropriate then that this is embodied in the literal fabric of the nation, the ol' stars and stripes: the Flag.

Wherever I travel in America and whether it is suburbia, rural areas, industrial districts, cities, bridges, on packaging, in living rooms, book covers, on porches, anywhere and everywhere flutters the flag. I will not mince my words: it frightens me. There is something creepingly sinister about the display and worship of the flag, the chanting in the classroom, hand on heart, staring at its hanging shroud, given as a gift to mourning relatives whose child or sibling or parent died in service to it, more blood to keep those stripes a bristling, vibrant red. The demand for its sanctity and protection, the immediate and vociferous response to its 'desecration' to the extent of proposed legislation against its damage, the cry for blood of any who abuse that fluttering symbol of blood, near dripping with it. It represents all the good and great achieved in the Nation but too easily

is its representation of all the evils it flies above ignored, with any and all who criticize its function as a field dressing for the various hemorrhaging wounds that keep it so fresh and glistening red, taken to task so severely that they are afraid to speak against let alone pull at a loose thread of that bittersweet symbol of progress and blood. Anyone who has truly loved will tell you that beyond passion and desire and lust, those blood tinted glasses that blind us so violently, we see our beloved as they are: imperfect, flawed, difficult, frustrating and even unattractive and then we choose to love that person in spite of all this and begin the work of loving and helping the object of our love grow, develop and become the best they can be, aiding them in achieving happiness. Sometimes it fails, sometimes it succeeds, real love is sticking to the hope that it will get better. To me, that is a Patriot.

The idea of Patriotism to me has always been “The Last refuge of a scoundrel” as Ben Johnson put it and a “Virtue of the Vicious” as Wilde said, placing the idea of a Nation or simply its symbol – the Flag – above that of what truly builds a Nation: Its People. And so the blood thickens as the people carry many other flags with them whilst calling America home. Their blood is different yet they are America’s Blood. These are the true patriots, those who would not be considered as such by those emblazoned with, wrapped in and waving their flag proudly declaring themselves ‘Patriot’ with the same aggression and violence in their blood

as those they would have for their own country and flag. Yet that is not the America I fell in love with. The times America was great, when it truly transcended and set the example was when it cooled that blood, even let itself bleed. The times when it knew its aggression accomplished little to nothing and removed the blood from its language then flew a different flag. It found power in the word, in silence, in submission, in admission of its faults, in aid, like any great Nation it found its promise in its growth via error, acknowledging its place in the world. These are the stars to those bloodied stripes: the cold, distant sparks shining in an infinite black cloth, indifferent and unconcerned with the slow destruction on our insignificant blue dot. A believer in the flag and what it stands for, a lover of democracy, a true American Patriot is one who argues for the stars not the stripes, their cold and objective clarity, someone who does not use the language or the image of the Patriot but questions it and lets the blood dry and coagulate to heal the wounds that would strengthen a Nation and a people and most importantly find its place amongst the other Nations of the world and offering that blood up as a donor, a shared blood for anyone who would call America enemy or friend for as the saying goes 'Blood is thicker than water', those oceans on either coast.

Today too many scoundrels seek refuge in those bloodied stripes and make their viciousness a virtue under the guise of the 'Patriot' whilst calling for a transfusion of this robust blood line. America stands at a

crossroads, a still young country, whose blood “burns not with such excess as gravity’s revolt to wantonness,” and has fallen for the rhetoric of blood, the stripes and the Patriot. I return to Martin Luther King Jr now: “I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken.” But we all know the world is not changed by those that govern, as a country is not defined by them either, it is its people that are the real life, the real Blood of a Nation and it is the people who decide and the people who create that change we all hope to see. “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism.” THAT is the stars and stripes, THAT is the purpose of people of ANY Nation, THAT is true Patriotism,

That is all of our American Blood.



