

US dream now a nightmare

The chaos and hatred in America has been brewing for centuries



PAUL MURRAY

Why would anyone be surprised by the scenes of chaos and hatred emanating from America over the past week?

It's not just about the death of one black man and a nation scared witless by a rampaging virus. This eruption has been brewing for centuries.

When you mix normalised violence with ingrained inequality, a history of unpunished extrajudicial killings of black men by police, bilateral deep racial distrust and the necrosis of addictive drugs that destroys whole inner-city neighbourhoods, expect social disintegration.

Add in the constitutional right to bear arms which creates a national mentality that weapons and violence have a role to play in a civil society.

Any nation that feeds its citizens on an electronic diet of aggression and violence for several generations should expect to see it bear fruit.

When young people are indoctrinated with apocalyptic visions as popular entertainment, it is likely to breed adults with a nihilistic outlook.

The problem for us with this American plague is that they export it to the world.

We reap what we sow.

The world witnessed in the past week a broken America.

Once the envy of civilised people everywhere, the self-proclaimed leader of the free world, the United States is exposed as a sick and divided nation.

Donald Trump did not cause these riots. His election was a symptom of the sickness and he certainly does not offer the solution.

Once again he has been humbled by a crisis that can't be fixed with his limited armoury of bluster, business acumen and distraction.

By tweeting the racist slogan "when the looting starts, the shooting starts" he lost any

authority he had in this crisis. No decent leader threatens his people — not even its criminal class — with indiscriminate slaughter.

Many want to blame Trump for the savagery in the streets.

In doing so they just contribute to the ongoing failures because he is only a sign of the infection, not the sickness itself.

And if the civil disobedience continues, he could end up being the beneficiary of it as white middle-class America fears for its future.

It is easy to be distracted by the opportunists who have taken advantage of the legitimate protesters and who have done so much

damage to their cause. Looters have been an unfortunate parasite on these protests for many decades and represent personal greed as much as disadvantage.

But the anarchists like Antifa not only trashed businesses and neighbourhoods, but harmed the legitimacy of those who sought to right the injustice of another senseless death at police hands.

Antifa has been allowed to flourish in American cities with so-called progressive administrations that were powerless when the thugs turned against those who have previously appeased them.

I'm old enough to have been affected by the hope that sprang from Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiatives, which began in 1964.

When Johnson took

over the presidency in tragic circumstances, he confided in two trusted aides:

"You know, when I went into that office tonight and they came in and started briefing me on what I have to do, do you realise that every issue that is on my desk tonight was on my desk when I came to Congress in 1937?"

They were civil rights, health insurance, federal aid for primary and secondary education and anti-poverty programs. Any way you view it, the efforts of American democracy in these areas have been plagued by failure.

Who in the Congress this week would be as honest as LBJ?

Not the Republicans, who have been too keen to provide the benefits of American prosperity to too few. And not the Democrats, who were happy to harness the black vote, but failed to deliver on the promises made to get it.

At its heart, the thing that eats away at America is its inability to solve differences based on race.

America's first black president got a Nobel prize for imperceptibly advancing world peace, but he made no progress in the race war that tears apart his country.

What we see in America should be sobering for Australians. We have our own unresolved racial problems.

America has been unable to fix the cancer that slavery introduced to a young colony four centuries ago. We have yet to come to terms with the lasting legacy of two centuries of colonialism that dispatched many indigenous

Australians to an underclass from which they see no escape.

No one in Australia should feel comfortable as they watch America burning.



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Call centre reliance dials up a growing form of frustration

Just as the country crushes the COVID-19 curve, a new public health crisis is emerging that threatens to put the wind up even the calmest, most considerate and courteous among us.

Dubbed the Call Centre Contagion, you may have already succumbed to this debilitating condition.

With face-to-face customer experiences almost non-existent, there is a more than even chance you have had to dial up a call centre to query a bill, cancel a flight, locate a missing shopping item or defer a mortgage payment.

There is also a very good

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chance the experience left you "pressing 1" to experience extreme frustration, "2" to be totally hacked off, "3" for your time to be completely wasted or "4" to bang your head against a double brick wall — or "5" for all of the above.

You suffer from CCC if you break into a cold sweat the very moment you realise your query cannot be solved online and that you will have to contact a call centre.

When you are asked to repeat your details for a third time as you get transferred from department to department, your temperature will soar and you will feel like dying when, after waiting for two hours, you finally get through to an operator only to be told you will be "popped on hold" for a moment.

And you will want to curl up in a bundle and cry when you are greeted by that all-too-familiar recording: "We are experiencing a high volume of calls and are unable to take your call."

Dealing with call centres has always been something many of

us have tried to avoid like the plague.

But the call centre's new-found status in the COVID-19 era has put them under a powerful microscope, with consumers demanding a much-needed reset on an increasingly familiar but sorry situation.

Yes, call wait times have increased significantly as agents themselves struggle to work from home with dodgy internet connections and increased customer demand. And let us not blame those who don the call centre headsets and are simply doing their jobs.

The new normal is

guaranteed to see online and phone queries reach new and dizzying heights, so is it not time we drew a phone line in the sand?

The bottom line is that if we are totally honest we would agree that some call centres are more about customer disservice than service.

Maybe it is time to vote with our feet and call for a call centre reboot to put an end to pressing phone buttons in a never-ending procession that leads nowhere fast.

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