

Growing up in the 'Age of Disappointment'



ILLUSTRATION BY Celine Huang

By Ella West

Maybe the world has been falling apart for the last four years, or maybe I just have a historian for a parent. Either way, I can see that the culture in the United States is shifting, hopefully for the better.

Amidst climate change that has led to fires and storms and flooding of biblical proportions; police shootings and systemic racial and gender inequality; and in the age of domestic terrorism and mass shootings at churches, synagogues, bars and schools, Gen Z has had enough.

We are, as columnist David Brooks wrote in *The Atlantic*, growing up in the “Age of Disappointment.” In his essay, “America is Having a Moral Convulsion,” he explains that we have reached this point as a result of our mounting lack of trust in political systems, institutions and each other.

Our parents grew up in a time of relative security with a begrudging belief in the government, but the institutions we trusted have repeatedly let us down.

When the #MeToo movement peaked in 2017, women across the country believed this was finally their chance to hold the powerful responsible and raise awareness about sexual harassment. But Amy Coney Barrett’s confirmation to the Supreme Court three weeks ago seems designed to undo Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s legacy of expanding women’s rights.

After the 2018 Valentine’s Day shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the student-led March for Our Lives, we hoped for common sense gun control. Back in March, the United States recorded its first month without a school shooting since 2002. Apparently, the only way to stop school shootings is to close the schools.

Barack Obama’s election was a time of hope — we believed that after hundreds of years of pervasive racism, we were finally moving forward. Just two years after he left

office, hate crimes reached a 16-year high, and this past year, the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others at the hands of the police proved that systemic racism has persisted.

Now, in the midst of a pandemic that has left 238,000 Americans dead, some people still refuse to wear masks.

As we assess the state of our union, we must acknowledge that our nation is breaking. We have a president who is challenging the very core of our political system through his false claims of election corruption, one who is willing to stoke the flames of division in order to preserve his personal power. This begs the question: Who is willing to uphold our democracy?

After an election in which more people voted than ever before, clearly, some people are.

And maybe, despite living in this Age of Disappointment, we can, once again, have the audacity to hope. To hope for change, to hope for better, to hope for decency, to hope for a president who will uphold the fundamental ideals of democracy.

Across America, and even throughout the world, we witnessed people of all nationalities, races, ages and genders celebrating the victory of Joe Biden over Donald Trump. This new fervor for democracy, as evidenced by the massive voter turnout by young people, ages 18-29, makes me believe that our future can belong to us.

But we can’t let this election make us complacent. We, as a country, cannot afford it. If we continue to allow partisan politics to separate the nation, we will be right back where we started, with little progress made on the issues that have defined our lives.

Our generation has done little to create the maelstrom around us. We can thank our grandparents and parents for

that. The fire started long before Trump’s administration and has only been exacerbated since his inauguration. But, fair or not, the burden to solve the same issues that have plagued past generations is ours, and we must take action.

No matter your political affiliation, everything is on the line — right now, at this very moment. We must protect our democracy and the rights of those who are underrepresented. Democracy cannot be a right for a select few. Anyone who says otherwise is blind to history. American exceptionalism is a lie, dominated by the myths of nationalism and patriotism. America has indeed been great, but not for everyone.

Our nation has chosen Joe Biden as our new president. In order to move forward, we must honor the will of the people and uphold democratic values instead of promoting baseless claims that serve to divide. We must continue to do the work of establishing a more perfect union for all people. As Congressman John Lewis said, let’s get into “good trouble” and work towards ending the Age of Disappointment by creating the Time of Hope and Change.

Houston is a shining example of how things can be if we embrace our differences. We are the most diverse American city filled with a multitude of cultures, languages and beliefs. We respect individuality, and it’s time for our country to do the same.

Our generation must fight for an America that reflects the essential ideals of liberty and justice for all. With Joe Biden’s election, we have the opportunity to move forward, not backward, to become a country that values all of its people instead of marginalizing them.

We may have grown up in the Age of Disappointment, but it’s our time to make history.