

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Burning of a Flag

Gabriel Murillo · Wednesday, September 7th, 2016

(“Tomorrow’s Voices Today” is a new series curated by poet and educator Mike Sonksen.)

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I stood still and scanned the chaos around me. People were shouting, throwing signs in the air, throwing their fists above their heads, and blasting their emotion against the line of police in front of them. It was a very disturbing scene. But it was the only way we as people could form a voice. It was the only option we had left. Compromise and peaceful protest couldn’t overcome the selfish nature of each and every one of our leaders. Even in these very moments they were probably locked up in their offices drowning themselves with liquor, shoving pills down their throats, or pushing cocaine through their nostrils. Pushing our efforts into the extreme and radical was the best solution we had came up with.

A boy of about fifteen years old pushed his way up to the front of the crowd holding our nation’s flag and lighter fluid. Everyone backed away as he poured lighter fluid over the top of the flag, even a section of the line of police took steps away from the boy. With people and police surrounding the boy, he held the flag high in the air and lit a match. He began to burn the flag while holding it high above his head in both hands. You could see every one of the policeman’s eyes widen as the flames illuminated their faces which were behind a layer of tinted plastic.

The whole crowd went quiet as the flames began to swallow the fabric of the flag and move its way down the wooden pole it was attached to. The heat of the flames made the boy’s arms tremble but he still held the flag up high for everyone to see. People gasped as the flames touched the boy’s fingers. You could see tears streaming down his face as his hands began to burn. Some people cried with the boy and some people put their faces in their hands. Even a few of the policeman began to move their faces away as the boy screamed in agony.

With the strength that he had left the boy yelled at the policeman, “You cowards! Every one of you better watch me burn! If you look away you are nothing but a fucking coward!” The boy collapsed onto the floor as the flames moved farther down his arms. His hands were already charred and you could see pieces of his flesh stuck to the wooden pole. The flag was almost nothing but unrecognizable ash.

You almost couldn’t tell the difference between this boy and our nation; he reflected each part of this crumbling society. This moment of revelation showed each and every one of us how much our leaders have injured us. They were beginning to kill the innocent which was the only hope we had left. I shed tear after tear, praying that this event would not only be remembered as a horrible day in history but a day in which our society realized that we couldn’t continue living as individuals. This boy wasn’t just a symbol, he was a God-sent martyr. In these moments people question if

there really is a God and if there is why would he kill his purest creation. These people don't understand that you have to kill the weakest part of yourself to become stronger. This is what each and every person in our nation was witnessing, The killing of our weakest so we can become stronger.

By this time, flames completely engulfed the boy as his cries began to turn into nothing but low groans. In a few minutes life would completely leave this boy's body. Everyone watched in complete silence as the smell of burning flesh filled the air.

I looked around at the solitude surrounding me and it was as if you could hear our leaders put their bottles down, push the cocaine off the desk, and throw their pill bottles to the floor. You could feel our society pick itself up and push its way through the wall it built around itself. You could almost see the life leaving the boy and rising up into the sky. But following behind that piece of life was a piece of every person that was killed along with that innocent boy.

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