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A Terrifying Choice Awaits Us



Image by Tiffany Tertipes.

Early voting's underway. My voting site is the Willye White Park fieldhouse, a mile north of where I live — a place I have enormous affection for, even though I only ever go there for one reason, every two years or so: to vote.

It feels like a sacred ritual — a feeling that goes back to the late '60s. As I recently wrote: “The first election in which I was old enough to vote (the voting age was then 21) was Nixon vs. Humphrey. I was a fervid anti-Vietnam war zealot and chose to skip the election, thinking there was no real difference between the candidates. But I quickly began regretting that decision as the Nixon presidency claimed hold of the country; I vowed never to skip another election . . .”

And I haven't. I note this for one reason only: Voting, for me — and maybe for most of us — is personal far more than it's simply political: getting the right man or woman into whatever office is up for grabs. While that's important (presumably), my

sheer *participation* in the process is what resonates at a deeply psychological, and spiritual, level. It expands who I am, or so I feel; it connects me with the country. And in so doing, it creates the country.

I mention all this as a way of grappling with the gaping paradox of the current presidential election. It feels like a complete abstraction: as meaningful as a videogame. Yeah, there's a villain in the game: Donald Trump, who violates all the rules of "political correctness" to address the seething fears and prejudices of his base, and tosses belly-laugh hints to them of his unhinged, fascist agenda: Vote for me now and "in four years we'll have it fixed so good" you'll never have to vote again. Hah!

Our other choice is Kamala Harris, the Democratic savior. She's sane and healthy and relatively young. She's the current vice-prez, emerging from the Biden administration. She's a "liberal," right? Is she the opposite of Trump? She's certainly more articulate than he is, and espouses a certain amount of economic liberalism.

But, oh, there's one other thing: The candidates are not actual opposites. Not when it comes to militarism and our trillion-dollar annual investment in it, including the ongoing development of nuclear weapons. This fact, in itself, is not a new phenomenon. The Democrats have not run an anti-war candidate for president since George McGovern in '72. In the wake of his trouncing, the Democratic Party seemingly made a silent vow: Never again. And ever since, the nation's militarism has been off the table politically.

And thus emerged the party's strategy of telling its base: Vote LOTE, Dems! Your mission is to vote for the Lesser of Two Evils. We're the global superpower and that will never change. We'll wage wars and inflict hell on innocent countries (if necessary), just like the Republicans will, but we're not racists. We believe in Medicare. Yada, yada . . .

This has been the nature of our national elections for many decades now, but I've nonetheless maintained a belief in the process and usually saw a glimmer of hope in the Democratic candidate of the moment, though occasionally I voted Green — maintaining a sense of justification for doing so because I live in Illinois. My vote for Nader won't surrender the state to Bush.

Still, the whole game was getting increasingly exasperating. Lesser-evilism had morphed into the defining characteristic of what we still called "democracy." Voting third party — no matter that the candidate actually reflected our view of the world — was essentially a sin, amounting to a vote for the other guy, i.e., the greater evil. Come on! Democracy isn't about real choice — at least not if you're a progressive. It's about . . . ?

In essence, it's about maintaining an inextricably militarized status quo — plus a little bit of hope (e.g., Barack Obama's "hope and change," which sure sounded good). But here we are in ۲۰۲۴, and the national commitment to militarism — as manifested by the Biden Administration's support for Israeli genocide in Gaza, its endless supply of bombs, its indifference to the deaths of multi-thousands of children, its helpless shrug as the war expands deeper into the Middle East — has pushed lesser-evilism to its limits. Voters' consciences (including mine) are exploding.

And early voting has begun. I'll vote in a day or so. For whom? Will I vote for Jill Stein, who says clearly that our support of Israel must stop now — and who, of course, has no chance whatsoever of winning (and thus will not stop our support of Israel)? Or will I vote for Kamala Harris, a.k.a., Ms. Lesser Evil?

Or how about this: Write in the name Hind Rajab, a five-year-old Palestinian girl killed, along with six of her family members, when an Israeli tank shelled their car last January. This, apparently, is what antiwar groups in New York City are urging progressive voters, who live in safely Democratic districts, to do.

As for me, I'll probably vote for Harris, but only because I also believe this: Voting is only a small part of how to participate in — and continue creating — an actual democracy. Rae Abileah and Andrew Boyd, writing at Common Dreams, put it this way:

“As generations of grassroots organizers have said: Elections are just one small part of larger movements for progressive change, so ‘vote for the candidate you want to organize against!’

“Former U.S. President Abraham Lincoln doesn't deserve credit for ending slavery any more than former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt deserves credit for the massive labor movement of the ۱۹۳۰s, or Lyndon B. Johnson for the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement. These huge historic victories were won by the hard and dedicated work of social movements — millions of everyday people taking concerted action.”

This is true no matter whom you vote for. Palestine is bleeding from the soul. The world is bleeding from the soul. The climate crisis is here, intensified by global militarism. We live in an unprecedented time and we must evolve beyond the current moment: beyond our lethal, linear, win-lose mentality.

NOVEMBER ۴, ۲۰۲۴

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