Twitter Thread by Granite

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“Time is a flat circle,” Rust Cohle famously opined. I’ve always taken that as another form of the biblical proclamation that there’s nothing new under the sun. I think about that on New Year’s Day, as we unite in contrived joy at the rolling over of our astronomical odometer.

Declaring today to be no different than yesterday because of an arbitrary date change is neither novel nor insightful. But it might be worth considering in a year when we were once again reminded how craven and unreliable humanity really is—especially in the western world.

One of the great things about education is that it forces you to think about uncomfortable truths—in this case, the classic “trilemma” and the Westphalian model of statehood. Or in layman’s terms...is democracy all it’s cracked up to be? Has our focus on the individual doomed us?

It strikes me that one of our great failings as humans is that of imagination—rather, our consistent inability to imagine the comfortable, constant structures of our personal worlds crumbling. We are prisoners of the present in that way.

If I could back to 2000 and tell you that in 20 years the Twin Towers would be gone, we’d be embroiled in two decades of war, we’d have a President who supports groups that claim “6MWE” and Mary Ann from Gilligan’s Island would be one of 250k+ Americans who died of a plague...

...well, you wouldn’t believe me. You couldn’t.

You—as someone raised on a steady diet of motherhood & apple pie & American exceptionalism—would not be capable of internalizing those predictions as real possibilities (nor would I, were I not the narrator in this hypothetical).

But all that happened.

Every calamitous event of the last 20 years has happened before, in some form or fashion. Plague. Corruption. Financial collapse. War under false pretenses. There is nothing new under the sun. Time is a flat circle.

I once thought we could beat climate change with global action, but we can’t even unite over wearing masks to stop us from killing one another. The Western world has brainwashed itself into believing that our responsibility to the world ends—quite

literally—at our own nose.

We fell in love with capitalism (for obvious reasons) and have proceeded to remove ever more control rods from the economic reactor. We've pushed so far that the mere suggestion of sensible controls is met with bleats of "SOCIALISM!" from bow-tied pawns of the billionaire class.

Now we stand here—January 1, 2021—on the precipice of a new decade, in this young century, facing a host of calamities we are mentally and institutionally incapable of addressing. We cling to the mantras of the past with such fervor that we have feet of clay.

What does all this mean? I don't suppose to know, other than to say that the world—the physical planet we inhabit and the 7 billion other people on it—will not consent to stay static within the failing systems we have. History is a catalog of dialectical force and destruction.

But we love the idea that this arbitrary new year will be better. It gives us hope. But hope is not a course of action. If anything, it seems like a gambler's wish against house odds—a house that has pharmacists destroying COVID vaccines and lunatics bombing AT&T over 5G.

Maybe the only way out is to abandon our obsession with ourselves and our contrived definitions of freedom and to act like a nation and a world in deep crisis—because that's what we are.

At any rate, it's New Year's Day. The world is quiet, for a moment. I hope you find peace in it. I hope 2020 wasn't the worst year of your life. If it was, I'm glad you survived.

The powerful play goes on, as Whitman said, and you may contribute a verse. Make yours a good one.