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# OPINION

## Many Fault Lines and a Massive Fissuring

### America's promise is in peril

by Hakim Hazim

The Founding Fathers mulled over various approaches to governing before establishing the outlines of our nation. When they framed our constitution, they did so with care, deliberation, and foresight.

Believing that axioms, self-evident truths, would remain relevant in people's judgment and conduct, they constructed a new approach for future governance. They factored in various aspects of human nature — paying careful attention to the morally corrosive nature of unchecked power. To guard against this, they instituted three branches of government, along with a free press, and empowered citizenry.

America was not just a place; our nation gave birth to an inspiring idea that people, collectively and individually, could, despite their differences, flourish. Leaders trusted the collective will of the people over tyrants, and the people trusted their leaders. This powerful, fragile, dream gave birth to revolution. We became a shining light, a place in which people armed with aspirations, gifts, work ethic, and morals, could come and start afresh.

Now, America's promise is in peril. Our leaders have failed us.



Today many feel a sense of angst, and powerlessness — believing they no longer matter. They are waiting on a new movement or political figure to arrive on the scene and change the direction we are headed. That direction is likely void of godly principles, logic, and critical thinking.

America has always been imperfect and flawed, but the dream has remained and carried us. Today, there are many fault lines and a massive fissuring taking place. Cynicism about the other is systematically being fed to us and replacing “we the people.” Despite this, my optimism springs from my forbearer's history in this country.

I recall the salient imagery of my ancestors crossing the North Atlantic under some of harshest and most inhumane circumstances ever thrust upon a people. People deprived of the very things America supposedly stood for helped build the American Dream for others, while being subjected to centuries of nightmares.

We were excluded; yet, we longed and labored for our piece of the promise.

Generations of our leaders fought for the futures of their children, bearing patiently the injustices of our nation, while keeping a long-term view in mind.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., understood the landscape. He employed godly principles, strategic logic, and critical thinking to arouse

a nation's conscience. He knew that the legal system, religious institutions, and scientific community, had long agreed upon our inferior status.

As a Christian, I marvel at Dr. King's use of spiritual values. He shattered those racist perceptions, while unifying a nation. King understood and trusted that the original idea was good, but it needed to be fully implemented for all. He was grateful to be an American, because the dream, though delayed, proved true.

America, from its inception, was a collaborative effort in which the founders considered history, philosophy, principles of governing, and the passions of the people when they decided to wrest power and their future from British tyranny. They rightly placed their faith in God and the people. Today, we are returning to the old, divisive politics of exclusion. We are returning to a tribalism that shuns those we don't agree with and critical thinking about issues. We see politicians on both sides utilizing strawmen arguments, victimizing victims, ranting about selective prosecution when justice is at work against them, and not shockingly, debating when a baby can be terminated. Missing from these discussions is our voice. We matter, and a great deal more than we think.

I am challenging you to step forward and get involved in your community and political discourse—no meme sharing and Facebook rant-

ing. America was based on the notion that every citizen matters and has a voice. Do you believe that? If you do, are you willing to engage with people you disagree with?

Will you break bread with people who are different than you in race, ethnicity, beliefs, and political party? Will you seek common ground? What if we rejected the cynical news cycles that show one side of an issue only? What if we, the citizenry, took seriously our civic duty to be educated on matters and critically thought about some of the things taking place in this country? If we did, things would change, and politicians could not get away with their business as usual approach. Corporations could not slant the news they have purchased with impunity.

We matter and what we do matters. If we lose sight of this, the American Dream dies, and our children's dreams will die with it. We can secure the results we seek if we return to the original principles of our nation, trust in God and one another. What we are seeing today are the results of our entrenched political party system, and our apathy. This approach will fill us with fear and angst, while stripping us of our voice. It is time to return to civil, informed conversation. It is time to return to the American Dream.

*Hakim Hazim is the founder of Relevant Now, a nationally recognized consultancy that focuses on security, criminality and decision analysis.*

## Five Years Later and Relisha is Still Missing

### Out of sight, out of mind

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



Baby dolls, tiny trucks, toy food and dress-up capes. Scattered about the ballroom of a motel in northeast Washington, D.C., and captured in a Washington Post column by Petula Dvorak, these hallmarks of child's play are not merely a sign of productive imaginations—they're evidence of a larger child and family poverty crisis that must end in our affluent nation.

Twenty minutes outside the city's downtown, a stretch of budget motels along a major highway serve as overflow shelters for homeless families in the nation's capital. They have strict rules about where children are seen and heard. Signs dotting the hallways announce “No Playing on the Ho-

tel Premises” and children are forbidden from gathering in common spaces.

The Homeless Children's Playtime Project, a local nonprofit, reserves event spaces to carve out areas where children can be children. However, the lack of space and high cost of reserving ballrooms and conference halls means pop-up playtimes are much too limited.

Away from the hustle and bustle of Capitol Hill where big deals are made and bills become laws, the motels—and the 1,000 homeless children within them—are largely out of sight and out of mind. Other shelters are similarly isolated.

Until it closed in October 2018, the city's largest family shelter was D.C. General, a former abandoned public hospital whose neighboring buildings included a jail and a morgue. Out of direct view and tucked into the nooks and crannies of a dense, bustling city, it is too easy to overlook out-of-sight homeless children.

Until tragedy strikes.

Eight-year-old Relisha Rudd was abducted from the D.C. General homeless shelter in March 2014. Relisha loved art and baby dolls and would exuberantly spell V-I-C-T-O-R-Y on her school's cheer team. For months, Relisha's disappearance dominated the news cycle and brought the glare of national attention to D.C. General.

City officials, pundits, locals and anonymous online commentators heaped blame on Relisha's family, her teachers and her social workers. But assigning blame did nothing to bring Relisha home. Five years have passed and Relisha is still missing.

Why do we fail to see our poor children until their faces stare at us from a Missing Child poster? Why do we blame parents rather than blame our broken, unjust system that fails to provide affordable housing for families?

Thousands of Relishas live everywhere among us, without safe places to live and grow up. They are homeless because housing is

too expensive and their parents' jobs pay too little; unaccounted for because affordable quality child care is out of reach; finding pockets of playtime in motel ballrooms because play is otherwise forbidden; hurting because poverty hurts.

It's time to stop assigning blame and start taking action. This month, the Children's Defense Fund will release a new edition of our report Ending Child Poverty Now with an urgent call to action. We must make poor children's struggles visible to our political leaders and policymakers at all levels of government and in every state and community. We must lift up child poverty solutions that work including a higher minimum wage, housing assistance vouchers for struggling parents, transitional jobs programs and child care assistance.

We must keep children front and center, invisible no longer.

*Marian Wright Edelman is Founder and President Emerita of the Children's Defense Fund.*



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