

react. A great public cry of lamentation and outrage did not rise up across the land. The president and his highest officials were not compelled to abase themselves publicly, apologize, and resign, nor did they find themselves thrown out of office, nor did the political candidates from the party out of power grow hoarse with denouncing the astounding crimes that were witnessed by almost everyone alive all over the world. As far as one could tell, over a period of weeks, the atrocities shown in the pictures had been assimilated into the list of things that the American public was willing to consider normal and that they could accept. And so now one has to ask, Well, what does that portend? And so we have to think about being Americans and living in the United States.

To be absolutely frank, the words “the United States” are not interesting to me, and I would much rather think about something else and talk about something else. Life is shockingly short even for those lucky enough to live to be a hundred, and I’d rather fill my brain with, for example, the gorgeous songs called “Book of the Hanging Gardens” by Arnold Schoenberg than with thoughts about men in Washington, D.C., who have a sick need to set fire to cities, wear enormous crowns, and march across crowds of prostrate people. In a way I find those men very, very boring, but the problem is that *they* would say that all of the marching and trampling they’re doing is actually for the benefit of me and everyone I know, and unfortunately I have to admit that that actually is true. It’s simply true, certainly in regard to me. I lead a very nice, very easy life, thanks to

the oil and other supplies that these boring and unappealing men have collected and delivered to my apartment. So I’m up to my neck in being an American, whether I like it or not.

Of course I *don’t* like it, because I don’t feel a loyalty to this or any other place, apart from our very beautiful planet as a whole. It’s not about the United States. Yes, the United States was created through a genocide, but on the other hand the United States has always had some wonderful characteristics. I don’t love it, and I don’t un-love it. The point is that if things had been left to me, nation-states in general would probably never have been invented. I don’t believe in passports or laws on “immigration.” I resent going through “Customs and Immigration” at my own country’s borders or anyone else’s, and I resent the fact that I need anybody’s permission to go anywhere, or that anyone does. I don’t value an American life more than I value a Nigerian life. I don’t think it’s more important for an American to have a job than for a Guatemalan to have a job. I just happen to have been born here. That’s it. Well, and then I stayed here—in large part because New York City felt actually like a somewhat thrilling microcosm of the world to me—part of one country, part of the United States, yet not really.

In confusing times and bad times, it seems natural to collect around oneself a group of friends and people one trusts, to try to figure things out. So that’s what this is. It’s not going to be an institution, because I don’t understand institutions or usually enjoy them, and in general they might be part of the grandiosity that is

part of our problem. So that's why this magazine is going out of business after its first issue and has therefore been given the name *Final Edition*.

FIVE

PATRIOTISM

1991

In July 1991, the Nation asked various people to submit brief reflections on "patriotism."

"Patriotism" can seem to be as harmless as the love of certain musical instruments, food, a landscape. Certain personalities from one's own country can seem so charming, so delightful. But "patriotism" always seems to mean: If you feel a fondness for your country, then it ought to be worth it to you to do "x."

Patriotism is considered to be an emotion a person ought to feel. But why? Why is it nobler to love your own country than to love someone else's? Why is it particularly wonderful to think that the place you're from is the greatest in the world? Why should individuals speak in the first person plural about "our ideals" and "the things we believe"?

If certain great figures from our country's past have had valuable insights, by all means let's be inspired by them. But let's not make a fetish out of it. The United States is a monster that must be