

KINGSLAYER THE RECLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Dr. Jeffrey Gordon for helping me get started, Kate Asaff for keeping me going, and Dr. Vincent Luizzi for seeing me through to the end. I couldn't have done it without you three, and I thank each of you from the bottom of my heart for sticking with me and believing in me even when I didn't.

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### **White Stars in Action**

As of today, April 3, 2014, there are four active White Star cells. One in Austin, Texas, another in Stockholm, Sweden, a third in Denver, Colorado, and a fourth in Sacramento, California. Upon release of this work, the web site [www.whitestarnation.org](http://www.whitestarnation.org) will go live, and from it a Youtube channel as well as a Twitter page posting constant updates about White Star activity on the local and global scale. This is only the beginning, but the White Star Initiative getting under way so rapidly with punk rockers is not coincidental. These people tend to be self-determined, independent, tenacious, and kind hearted and the White Star Initiative vehemently promotes these qualities.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### *Stoicism in Kingslayer*

The White Star Initiative is a modern social and political movement that emphasizes strengthening the people through education and liberation from government oppression. It is currently taking hold in the Punk Rock music cultures of Austin, Texas and Stockholm, Sweden. In the White Star Initiative's manifesto, *Kingslayer*, the core philosophy of the movement is based on Marcus Aurelius's Stoicism. Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor from 161 CE to 180 CE, commanded more power than any other ruler of his time. His will was law, and his actions affected not only the lives of Roman citizens but also all of Rome's allies *and* enemies. He carried the weight of the world on his shoulders, and yet he never gave in to the corruption that so often accompanies power. Unlike his Stoic peer Epictetus (55-135 CE) the Roman slave set free due to his mastery of Stoic philosophy, and Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE) Stoicism's Greek founder, Aurelius commanded nigh infinite power. It may seem fitting and natural for a slave such as Epictetus to adhere to a modest, reserved, humble, disciplined lifestyle, but it seems quite unlikely for an emperor to do so. Therefore, when looking for a model upon which to base the White Star's values of education and liberation, I thought it best to turn to a leader whose greatness hinged on an adherence to values conducive to education and liberation. While Aurelius observed that "man's worth is no greater than his ambitions,"<sup>1</sup> the claim should be understood within the framework of ambitions which the *educated*

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<sup>1</sup> Aurelius, Marcus. "Marcus Aurelius - Quotes." Marcus Aurelius. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2014

person chooses, ambitions which are compatible with the rational order of which we are a part.

For any movement to have sway it has to influence people and move them to act to change the world. Stoicism by its very nature is the antithesis insofar as it requires people to introspect and take inner actions to change how their emotions and desires affect them. I find its teachings to be the best suited to the task because through individual growth and strength of character (as demonstrated by Aurelius) the most widespread, significant, and lasting social changes can be made. Aurelius led by example, not words alone. According to one commentator, "His greatness was in his character; his influence for good was in his noble example."<sup>2</sup>

He knew the tremendous influence that he held over the Roman populous, and chose to show his power by decidedly *not* abusing his power. Most of the impact and potency of each of Aurelius's actions lay not only in what was done but also in what was deliberately left *undone*. Aurelius, as Roman emperor, was essentially a god made flesh. If he were angry, he could have had entire villages burned or cities leveled. He could have demanded the death of anyone in the empire, and his guards would have seen his wish fulfilled. No one could escape his wrath, were he sufficiently angered--so, he never was angry. In this consisted his power. He learned how to keep anger at bay or eliminate its influence over him. White Stars follow this example in every choice they make.

One of the core ideas to the White Star Initiative agrees that there is no such thing as inaction because refraining from acting is itself an action and sometimes the most powerful message of all. Those who know that they cannot make other people do or think

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<sup>2</sup> Lord, John. " Marcus Aurelius." Marcus Aurelius. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

things don't try to. They lead by example. They embody the change that they want to see in the world, and leave it for other people to imitate them. The choice to imitate is never made *for* another, only *by* another. The Initiative extends this thinking in its stance on political issues in contemporary society. An example is how White Stars are non-partisan. They never tell you who to vote for, or even that you *should* vote--they only emphasize that voting is your voice, and if you want to be heard then it's important to vote. They remain non-partisan as they urge that you are knowledgeable about matters you vote up and down. The choices to vote and who to vote for still reside with the voter, but White Stars are there to stress the importance of the informed vote to people who otherwise vote Red or Blue simply because they were brought up doing so.

As we will see in the sections which follow, White Star thinking ties in with the three fundamental pillars of Stoic philosophy: logic, determinism, and ethics. This ordering was outlined by Zeno of Citium himself, whereby those "who studied Stoic philosophy under him always started with logic, then progressed to physics, and ended with ethics."<sup>3</sup> Translated into advice, these pillars can be summed as "Think before acting." More specifically Aurelius said, "Let it be your constant method to look into the design of people's actions, and see what they would be at, as often as it is practicable; and to make this custom the more significant, practice it first upon yourself."<sup>4</sup> In order to understand the actions of others, one must examine the thoughts behind those actions--and the best way to practice that is by self-examination.

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<sup>3</sup> William Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, pg. 33

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Aurelius. "Meditations." Project Gutenberg, 25 Dec. 2008. Web. pg. 176, paragraph 37.

## Stoic Logic

The Stoics adhered to a theory of natural law wherein a rational power created the universe. "The Stoic god is providential and benevolent in that he purposively acts on the cosmos and cares for it."<sup>5</sup> This god, they believed, manifested its power through logic. Although human reason is far more limited, it can perceive some of the order in the universe as Natural Laws for the guidance of conduct. They apply universally and equally to all. A distinctive tenet of the Stoics was that the mind rather than the sword established order--to them, it was a ruling principle of nature. Stoics adhere to other basic principles: they offer a unified account of the world using logic, a non-dualistic physics (determinism), and a naturalistic ethics. Of these, they found ethics to be fundamental, as it emerges from the other two. The Stoics believed they could discover and interpret the rational order of nature. Human reason gave them the capacity to perceive the Creator's logic inherent in nature, and through their view of causal determinism they could examine and understand what causes took place to get them to their current position in life. Their ethics is what governed how to proceed from there--what they would contribute as the next link in the universal causal chain. That ethics is based on the Stoic idea that states only through cultivating self-control and fortitude could one overcome destructive emotions like anger and jealousy and truly become an unbiased thinker: in other words, thinking logically.

They believed that only when one became truly unbiased could one begin to understand logic (namely, universal unbiased reason). The Stoic method of logic, called 'propositional logic,' ran parallel with Aristotle's. It simplified the search for and

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<sup>5</sup> Ricardo Salles, *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*. pg. ix

approximated the truth by stripping away fallacies in reasoning. With this logic, they established objective principles which reason, free from bias, could perceive.

The Stoics did not seek to *extinguish* emotions and desires (as the word ‘stoic’ has come to mean today) to further these logical pursuits but instead to control their emotions for inner peace. It was not emotion itself that they wanted freedom from but the clouded judgment that comes from passion. They sought to transcend suffering and anguish through reason and rationality. The Stoic view on emotion is further explained by Dirk Baltzly in, “Stoicism.” He found that, in regard to emotion:

It is perhaps more accurate to call it the Stoic view of the passions, though this is a somewhat dated term. The passions or pathê are literally ‘things which one undergoes and are to be contrasted with actions or things that one does. Thus, the view that one should be ‘apathetic,’ in its original Hellenistic sense, is not the view that you shouldn't care about anything, but rather the view that you should not be psychologically subject to anything—manipulated and moved by it, rather than yourself being actively and positively in command of your reactions and responses to things as they occur or are in prospect. It connotes a kind of complete self-sufficiency.<sup>6</sup>

Aurelius's expression of this general Stoic view stresses how it is our judgment about external events that can lead to their disturbing us. *We* judge pain to be evil and respond accordingly. As we are able to free ourselves from this judgment of evil, we are able to eliminate the distress that accompanies evil. As we train and educate ourselves in this way, we liberate ourselves from what troubles us. Says Aurelius,

If pain be an evil, either it is in regard of the body; (and that cannot be, because the body of itself is altogether insensible:) or in regard of the soul. But it is in the

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<sup>6</sup> Dirk Baltzly. "Stoicism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

power of the soul, to preserve her own peace and tranquility, and not to suppose that pain is evil. For all judgment and deliberation; all prosecution, or aversion is from within, whither the sense of evil (except it be let in by opinion) cannot penetrate.<sup>7</sup>

This process served as the groundwork for Stoic epistemology--logic alone can govern what can and can't be known, so uncontrolled passions and mental states that vexed the soul can play no part in that process.

This method of reasoning is paramount in Marcus Aurelius's explanation of the first of his four virtues: wisdom. To find wisdom, Marcus Aurelius tells us that people need look no further than their own mind--to remember that all things are merely a matter of perspective. He says in *Meditations*, "Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life."<sup>8</sup> Attaining wisdom requires one to seriously consider the truth of all positions, even views that seem obviously false. Another dimension of the quest for wisdom, in Aurelius's view, is an understanding of how this education of oneself that leads to inner harmony aligns with that of nature. As Aurelius said in *Meditations*, "He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe."<sup>9</sup>

The White Stars apply this advice to their everyday lives. Chapter four of *Kingslayer*, develops the White Star analysis of Aurelian wisdom:

To have Wisdom, you need experience... You will learn more by actually going for a walk through your city than any tourist pamphlet can ever tell you. It's not the encyclopedia of the world you should turn to, but the hitchhiker's guide. Worldly wisdom comes from getting your hands dirty, and scholarly wisdom comes from the ability to think critically. It's not the ones you already agree with that you need to hear, but the ones who are arguing against you. Do not shut out the criticism of others, but *learn* from them. Use their critiques to examine your own actions and beliefs, and question *why* you did them, and why you believe

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<sup>7</sup> *Meditations*, Book 8, section XXVI, The Project Gutenberg EBook of Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius

<sup>8</sup> *Meditations*, Book 3, section XI, The Project Gutenberg EBook of Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius

<sup>9</sup> *Meditations*, Book 2, section II, The Project Gutenberg EBook of Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius

them in the first place. You must first question everything if you want to be free to learn anything. Winston Churchill said, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” If you have no willingness to hear your own criticisms, how can you expect others to listen to yours? Moreover, how can you know you’re doing the right thing if you don’t have the courage to ask yourself “What if I’m wrong?” The dialectic is our model of progress. Without an antithesis to a thesis, there can be no synthesis, and therefore no step forward. Wisdom must first guide you if you are to have any hope of guiding others.

The Stoic’s approach to inquiry is embodied by the question “What if I’m wrong?” That is to say, to find the truth of something, the easiest place to start is by describing everything that something isn’t. In *Kingslayer*, White Stars are urged to undergo this form of self-examination every time they have a choice to make. “What if I am wrong?” becomes a mantra for them which serves not to inhibit, but to empower them. A willingness to question oneself is a mark of courage, and by showing that one is willing to do so, others may freely choose to follow suit and question themselves. Mistakes happen, accidents happen, and sometimes plans fall through. White Stars view this as an opportunity to learn what they can do better next time, by examining what didn’t work on the first go. Aurelius said, “Accustom yourself as much as possible on the occasion of anything being done by any person to inquire with yourself, For what object is this person doing this? But begin with yourself, and examine yourself first.”<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of this method of self-examination surfaces when one analyzes Aurelius’s virtue of justice that is second only to wisdom at least when we consider their order of presentation. To Aurelius, justice was that which one did for the community. He subscribed to the Stoic belief of the “cosmic citizen,” i.e., that each person is a citizen of the cosmic city (namely, the universe as a whole), and should always conduct oneself in a

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<sup>10</sup> *Meditations*, Book 3, section XI, The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Meditations*, by Marcus Aurelius

way that would be beneficial to the communal goal. Any action that harms the community in any way is therefore, by Aurelian reasoning, unjust. Thus, just actions are as much characterized by the absence of a negative impact on the community as they are by their positive effect.

Book XI of *Meditations* similarly discusses justice subsequent to his discussion of wisdom although here Aurelius concludes with the identity of the two virtues:

The natural properties, and privleges of a reasonable soul are: That she seeth herself; that she can order, and compose herself: that she makes herself as she will herself... As proper is it, and natural to the soul of man to love her neighbour, to be true and modest; and to regard nothing so much as herself: which is also the property of the law: whereby by the way it appears, that sound reason and justice comes all to one, and therefore that justice is the chief thing, that reasonable creatures ought to propose unto themselves as their end.<sup>11</sup>

The following passage illustrates how Aurelius's analysis of justice figures large in the manifesto:

To cultivate Justice, you must first ask yourself what justice even is. Is it to abide by the law? What if the law is unfair? What if the law *is* the problem, such as segregation laws before the Civil Rights Act of 1964? If justice is not found through the law, then where can we turn to *find* justice? Is it through divine edict? What if our particular dogma commands us to harm those of another? Justice can never be found through bloodshed, divinely commanded or otherwise because justice does not favor one side over another. Simply because movements in the past have used violence to further their means does *not* mean we should. You reap what you sow. Violent movements are met with violent opposition. Those that were once freedom fighters become terrorists at the drop of a hat. Peace is our answer. Reason is our method. Through reason, we can find the thread that binds laws, dogma, and everything else together. We can find justice. We all know what it is like to be treated unjustly in one form or another, because we have all been wronged in the past. Therefore, as we examine what justice *isn't* we are better equipped to find what it *is*. Through every unjust action we have witnessed or heard about, our understanding of justice grows. We see pain, and we see cruelty, and we *act*. We *see* injustice, and we do our best to stop it. Moreover, we do *not* repeat that injustice on anyone else. Why would we ever do to another what we would not want done to ourselves? We want to be treated with respect, dignity, and understanding--so that is how we treat others. To be just,

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<sup>11</sup> *Meditations*, Book 11, section I, The Project Gutenberg EBook of Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius

simply never repeat an unjust action. After all, where else can justice be found if not through the utter absence of injustice?

In other words, justice comes from the platinum rule, coined by Dr. Tony Alessandra: "Treat others the way they want to be treated." Though this iteration of the rule is relatively recent, the rule itself is a concept that has emerged all over the globe throughout human history as examined by Robert Kane, in *Through the Moral Maze*. In short, act for the sake of others instead of always for oneself. All are equal beneath the Black Flag. All for one, and one for all. To wear the White Star is to embody this philosophy. Your actions must be consistent with your beliefs. If they are not, then they are empty. In the words of the explorer Freya Stark, "There is no happiness in the things that we believe if they are different from the things that we do."

Through this repeated method of introspection and application, the White Star Initiative literally *becomes* the change that it wants to see in the world. By their actions, they strip away the negative aspects of the world and promote those positive aspects that they want to see more of. In so doing, they actualize Aurelius's ideal of harmonizing human justice with the natural order.

### **Stoic Determinism**

To understand Marcus Aurelius's specific worldview, it's worth considering it in relation to the worldviews of determinism and fatalism. Stoic determinism differs from fatalism in that Stoics believe (as defined by Chrysippus in his explanation of causal determinism) "All things happen through antecedent causes," as opposed to the view of the fatalist that "All things happen through fate."<sup>12</sup> "In the Stoic theory of universal fate, the teleological and mechanical aspects of Stoic determinism are combined."<sup>13</sup>

Dirk Baltzly, in his article "Stoicism," explains this difference:

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Taylor. 1974, *Metaphysics*, 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. pg. 59

<sup>13</sup> Susanne Bobzien. *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998. Print. pg. xii

One way to see the difference between Taylor's fatalism and Chrysippus' causal determinism, is to ask, "What makes it the case that we won't have a sea battle tomorrow?" The Chrysippean causal determinist can say, "the lack of wind" or perhaps even "our decision not to go out and fight" and these things could all have been different, if only things had been different at some earlier time. So, though the present state of affairs determines that the future will only be one way, nonetheless there is a sense in which other things are possible.<sup>14</sup>

The fatalist would respond, "It was never fated for there to be a sea battle on this date."

Aurelian determinism is best described as a combination of these two things as evidenced by his quotations, "Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart,"<sup>15</sup> and "Adapt yourself to the things among which your lot has been cast and love sincerely the fellow creatures with whom destiny has ordained that you shall live."<sup>16</sup>

He believed that fate was an accumulation of antecedent causes, and that while we could not fight what brought us to our current situation we could still adapt to and overcome it. In other words, we cannot change what has already happened but we do play a hand in what is to come.

This reasoning is embodied in chapter three of *Kingslayer*, wherein the world is described as a maelstrom beset upon by a rain of stones. Each stone represents an action, the ripples of which all stretch out chaotically and interfere with one another:

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<sup>14</sup> Dirk Baltzly. "Stoicism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

<sup>15</sup> *Meditations*, Book 6, section XXXIX, The Project Gutenberg EBook of Meditations, by Marcus Aurelius

<sup>16</sup> Aurelius, Marcus. "Marcus Aurelius - Quotes." Marcus Aurelius. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

Imagine a turbulent ocean, relentlessly pummeled by a rain of stones upon its churning surface. The thunderous splashes form huge waves that clash, oppose, and absorb one another, plunging the ocean into utter chaos. This ocean is the world. These actions are our own. The choices we make, no matter how small, never stop influencing the world around us--whether we are aware of it or not. Few people are truly malevolent by nature, and though they may feel that the stones they throw are bigger than everyone else's, their impact is completely impotent compared to the waves caused by little actions performed by many people working together. For example, one person stealing from a donation basket compared to a million people donating a dollar to the same organization. The issue is that sometimes those million people inadvertently contribute to a negative cause, and those rogue waves swallow up the hard efforts of good people just as easily as the other way around. That's where we come in.

We can't control what other people do, but we *can* control what *we* do. The only thing that we truly any control over in this life is ourself. You alone make your choices, and you alone perform your actions. No one can make you do anything, and you can't make anyone else do anything. There is always a choice. Now, imagine looking upon this maelstrom, forever assailed by the eternal onslaught of stones, and to you falls the labor of soothing the rage of a particularly violent wave by tossing towards it a single pebble. If the sea is the world, then the pebble you hold is your life. You must commit it, at the right place, at the right time, to doing the right thing. The ripples caused by a single pebble, no matter how small it is, can detract even a little bit from the mightiest waves if it is cast in at the right time. While alone the action may seem futile, what if we *all* tossed our lone pebble in at the right time with you? The wave we create could be strong enough to engulf the chaos, and restore a prime direction to the turbulent sea.

To know when and where to cast in one's stone boils down to one's understanding of Stoic ethics.

### **Stoic Ethics**

Marcus Aurelius's ethics are the cornerstone of his philosophy and emerge from a combination of his logic and determinism. Through Stoic determinism, one can examine how one came into their situation in life, and through Stoic logic they could see how to proceed rationally. We saw above the interrelatedness of wisdom and justice and complete this basic account of Aurelian ethics with the inclusion of temperance and fortitude. Aurelius's case for acquiring these virtues hinges on their being the best things to strive for and the logic of striving only for the best. He confidently challenges people

to find something better and offers them god speed in pursuing whatever that may be, knowing full well nothing can compare:

If thou shalt find anything in this mortal life better than righteousness, than truth, temperance, fortitude, and in general better than a mind contented both with those things which according to right and reason she doth, and in those, which without her will and knowledge happen unto thee by the providence; if I say, thou canst find out anything better than this, apply thyself unto it with thy whole heart, and that which is best wheresoever thou dost find it, enjoy freely. But if nothing thou shalt find worthy to be preferred to that spirit which is within thee; if nothing better than to subject unto thee thine own lusts and desires, and not to give way to any fancies or imaginations before thou hast duly considered of them, nothing better than to withdraw thyself (to use Socrates his words) from all sensuality, and submit thyself unto the gods, and to have care of all men in general: if thou shalt find that all other things in comparison of this are but vile, and of little moment; then give not way to any other thing, which being once though but affected and inclined unto, it will no more be in thy power without all distraction as thou oughtest to prefer and to pursue after that good, which is thine own and thy proper good. For it is not lawful, that anything that is of another and inferior kind and nature, be it what it will, as either popular applause, or honour, or riches, or pleasures; should be suffered to confront and contest as it were, with that which is rational, and operatively good.<sup>17</sup>

Aurelius acted as a beacon of temperance and fortitude, always thinking before acting, and never acting out of spite or bitterness. He modeled the life of one guided by the Stoic virtues to elevate the moral lives of the citizens of Rome. One commentator makes the point especially well: “He was one who, by example, even more than by precept, lifted the moral possibilities of mankind, displaying in prosperity humility and temperance and adversity, fortitude. With his family he was gentle; with his friends, benevolent; with his enemies, forbearing; with all men, just; with God, reverence.”<sup>18</sup>

The White Star Initiative builds on this understanding of the Stoic virtues as it sums its sentiment about temperance as, “the privilege of the strong is to be gentle. The

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<sup>17</sup> Marcus Aurelius, and Gregory Hays. *Meditations*. New York: Modern Library, 2002. Print. Book III, sec. 7

<sup>18</sup> *The Current*, vol. 4, issues 81-105, edited by Edward L. Wakeman, 1895, Google e-book, p. 184

weak don't have that choice." In other words, the true measure of a temperate use of power (such as the example set by Marcus Aurelius) is using it to benefit rather than harm others. Temperate use versus intemperate abuse means having the capability to inflict harm and never choosing to do it.

In *Kingslayer*, the White Stars define temperance as follows:

You have no power over the actions of others, but you can influence the direction in which they sway. This we know, but it is equally as important to remember that people will try to sway you as well. We are all given orders, but it's the ones that we choose to follow that define us. Reason is what guides White Stars. There is no sense in getting upset or emotional over things that you cannot control. Not everyone is going to agree with you, and you cannot make them. Don't let this make you angry. Don't let this impede your progress. Just see it for what it is: something that you cannot change. Remember the pebbles and the waves--if you are to have any hope of taming the storm, you must make sure that you act rationally. Timing is everything, and if you miss your opportunity to act then you may never get another. Panicking at a crisis, no matter how large or small, will always exacerbate things. Those around you will see your dread, and respond with hysteria of their own. White Stars lead when others are afraid to. Shaky walls do not build a strong fortress. When you wear the Star, people will turn to you in times of need, and if you are in trepidation, so too shall they be. Therefore, don't panic. It is alright to be afraid, for we all feel fear. It is alright to be alarmed, for we all suffer the occasional unwanted surprise. But you must not let these feelings overwhelm you. You must become the master of your fear, and learn to use it to give you strength. Your words and actions must be the product of reason, not the fallout of dread. As Marcus Aurelius

said, “Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.” The Star you wear is not only an example to others, but to you as well. Look to its strength, and you will always find strength in yourself.

It applies moderation, reason, and patience to one’s actions as Aurelius would. As White Stars interpret fortitude, we see its advice amounting to “Steel yourself first if you are to have any hope of protecting others.”

To have Fortitude, one must have unshakable willpower. As a White Star, you will be the shield of the defenseless--and a weak shield accomplishes little. You must not only have the strength to set about initiating change, but the courage to see it through to its end. You must never give up. All changes take time, and the bigger the change, the more opposition it will face. It’s like Newton’s third law of motion: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Do not let the opposition, no matter how vicious, overcome you--for White Stars are a threat to ignorance, and ignorance will fight tooth and nail to preserve itself. Instead, become the very bastion that you represent. To prod a beast is to invite its wrath. You must be ready. You must be strong. Your fortitude alone decides whether or not you are still standing when the beast tires, and only then can you hope to overcome it. The key to immortality is living a life worth remembering, and to do that we *must* endure. You are not, and never will be, alone. You will have White Stars at your sides and at your back in every action you undertake. Be brave, be strong, and endure. Together, we will never be overcome--for we are as one. In these words it becomes absolutely clear why the White Star Initiative’s core principles come from Aurelian teachings rather than Epictetus or Zeno: White Stars act.

## Conclusion

White Stars *are* change. They defend people, just as fervently as they defend themselves. They speak out. They build. They recruit. They grow. These are things traditional Stoicism has little place for--but Aurelian Stoicism embodies them. Aurelius didn't have the luxury of sitting on the sidelines, and neither do White Stars. They have chosen their place, and they will grow in power as their individuals become educated and liberated in the Aurelian tradition.

They represent the personal aspect of Stoicism by empowering themselves through the realization that the only thing people can control is themselves. They use this knowledge to liberate themselves by understanding that in turn, no one has any power over them. They are free to act however they so choose--and White Stars choose the four chief virtues outlined by Aurelius: wisdom, justice, temperance, and fortitude.

## **Invictus**

Out of the night that covers me  
Black as the pit from pole to pole  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud;  
Under the bludgeonings of Chance  
My head is bloodied but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate  
How charged with punishments the scroll  
I am the master of my fate  
I am the captain of my soul.

- William Earnest Henley (1849-1903)

## Preface

This text, like all others akin to it, is not dogma. Its purpose is to serve as a catalyst for change: to set about the groundwork for a nation that once again reflects its Founding Father's dreams instead of their nightmares. To interpret this work as scripture is to misunderstand it entirely. These words are merely a spark. A call. And, should that call go unheard, then it will return again in another form, and another after that, until finally, no matter how many generations it takes, its words are heard.

While the words will change with time, the message will always remain the same: Freedom, Peace, Equality, Respect, and Love. This is the plan for a better Tomorrow; a Tomorrow that *we* can bring. This is our Reclamation of Independence.

## CHAPTER II

### DEMOS

#### The Opiate

Too long have we been lost in the lotus eater's haze. In our absence, a world designed to numb our minds and fatten our bodies has emerged uncontested. Our self-imposed ghostly trance has kept us impotent, cursed to be forever on the outside looking in--dreaming of the world we want to live in, while we let the one we have fall into irreparable ruin. In this modern age, we have at our fingertips the gateway to infinite possibility, but our pursuits are shackled by our lethargic imaginations. The specter of indifference has haunted our minds uncontested, and we have allowed it to do so. Until now.

It's time to wake up.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau said "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."<sup>19</sup> Our chains, though invisible and weightless, bind our every action and steer our every thought. They control us. They limit us. But they are not indestructible. We alone bear the key to freeing ourselves, because *we're* the ones that locked ourselves up. In order for us to break our bonds, we have to see them for what they really are: no longer the literal chains of our ancestors, but figurative. They exist only in our minds. They are constricting misconceptions about the world around us, and the people in it. They are the

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I, paragraph 4.

nagging realities in the backs of our minds that we are too weary to face, and they alone are what is inhibiting our growth. They are Distraction, Debt, and Doubt.

Every second, from the time we wake up to the time we fall asleep, our minds are plagued with Distractions. What to wear, what to eat, what to watch, who to listen to, and who to agree with. We've become walking billboards and mouthpieces, parroting sound bites and wearing name brand items that tell strangers who we are so they don't have to talk to us. Our distractions tell us how to think, because we're either too tired to do it for ourselves or just never learned how. We take our information in minute-long videos, and glean our news from headline snippets. Our media, our culture, is designed around sitting down, plugging in, and tuning out. All we want is the fast high--the quick, easy fix. Our illusory need of it all, the white noise, keeps us chasing our tails. Once we catch it, we don't want it. But, when we see it again, it's all that matters. And so we go, round and round. Never forward.

We're told to grow up, told to calm down, and taught that everybody is a winner. We're taught equality is a sea of cubicles, and environmentalism is a corporate park. We're taught that reading is hard, and T.V. is easy. We're told that drugs and alcohol are our only releases, and that going outside is boring. Other people's problems are pointless, and education ends at the classroom doors. We're taught to believe that the media can always be trusted, and that politicians (at least the ones with the right color tie) are on our side. We're taught to let our dreams die, and that standing out from the crowd is a death sentence.

We're taught that we don't have a voice.

Round and round we go.

Deep down, we have an idea of what's really going on. We've all heard whispers of the truth, or have at least glimpsed a little thread of it here and there. We *know* we're just treading water. But so many people are afraid to pull on that thread and see what will unravel. People often say that they want to know how a magician performs their tricks, but in their hearts they don't really want to spoil the illusion. In much the same way, people accept what the media feeds them (even when they know deep down it's mostly lies and polarized partisan pontification), and plug back in to the meaningless noise of the "civilized" world. Ignorance became our bliss.

Even if we want to fight, we're conditioned from birth to give up at the faintest disappointment. We're made to believe that intellectual laziness is acceptable. It's so much simpler to shift our attention to something else--something easier. Even our "deep" conflicts, our pop political culture debates and our current social "crises", are nothing but needless polarization meant to distract us from the truth. They're little problems meant to preoccupy little minds, and we're *better* than that. It keeps us fighting each other, instead of the ones *making* the unjust laws and policies that we're quarreling over. People don't vote for presidential candidates on what policies they stand for, but on the person whose spin doctor did a better job behind the scenes. Red or blue is all that matters now. The individual gets brushed aside, and the billion dollar platform of empty promises built from propaganda is the only thing that gets pushed through to us. It's the only thing we *see* anymore. It's no longer what a candidate has actually *done*, but what they've *promised* to do. Yet, when they break those promises, we make excuses for *their* failures--not because we can't see them, but because we don't want the other side to think they're

right. So, we're stuck fighting each other instead of the liars and failures that we put in charge.

It's all a distraction; empty polarization to keep our tires spinning, but ensure we never go anywhere. We're the ones suffering under anti-Constitutional legislation, and not doing a damned thing about it. We are not the ones who voted for the Patriot Act, but we *are* the ones who let those who did get away with it. The House, the Senate, even the President, are *elected* officials. They are meant to serve the *people* during their terms, not the other way around. When we let Senators and Representatives that aren't doing their jobs run uncontested and remain in office for decades, *WE* are to blame. When a politician no longer reflects the will of the people they've been elected to represent and starts making choices for their own personal benefit rather than that of the state which put them in power, they *need* to be removed from office. Some of these people are racist, sexist, homophobic has-beens who sit on thrones of lies and blood, and instead of doing everything we can to get them impeached, we ask them if they'd like a coffee.

Their empty arguments and their impotent debates are all smoke and mirrors. It's all a confidence game designed to rob us of our time and attention, and it works. It gets uninformed, uneducated people out on the streets holding signs and yelling about something they don't understand and haven't bothered to research. It keeps real change from happening. It keeps the revolution a docile animal, bound in bureaucratic red tape and regulations. It makes the good people look crazy, and the crazy people look good. It impedes progress. We can be so much more than a nation chasing its tail, pausing every so often to whimper, unheard, at passing cars.

You want to free yourself from Distraction?

Then Focus.

There is only one force on this earth more powerful than a focused mind: a motivated one. Change doesn't always happen because of monumental events. Real change, real *progress* happens when the *people* decide it does. It needs individuals willing to make a move, not just talk about it.

Pull on that little thread of truth, and watch the tapestry of lies come undone. Find answers. Find the truth. See just how connected everything really is, and know what tremendous potential that holds. We live in the information age. Nothing is beyond our grasp. With the press of a few buttons, we can see who owns what, where their money comes from, and where it goes. We can *see* who commits the crime, and who gets punished. See what happens to the poor, and see what happens to the rich. Our movement isn't about *not* using what's in front of you--it's about using it to the fullest. You have a computer? A cell phone? Then use it to educate yourself where schools failed you. Use it to spread that information to the people around you. Your eyes and ears are all you need to start noticing the true face of the world you live in. If you want a better system of government, a better *country*, then it's time to light that fire in your belly and make it happen. Start researching, start hunting. Together, we will make a difference.

Information is power.

Almost all of us are in Debt, one way or another. Mortgages, student loans, credit cards, and whatever else. It's a leash that always keeps us tied close to the porch. It keeps us working jobs we hate, for people we can't stand, to buy stuff we don't need. Debt is there to keep people procrastinating. Debt is what makes "I'll start Tomorrow" a good

answer. Debt is the castration of motivation. Debt creates a bond that shackles us to institutions, corporations, and people that we would have otherwise long since outgrown. Debt keeps us tame. It's an excuse, and a hard one to overcome. While you may have stopped chasing your tail, you're going to have a Hell of a time getting out of the front yard with the chain of debt still around your neck. It keeps you working. It keeps you tired. It keeps you focused on it and nothing else. So, what's the answer? Do we struggle to pay it off as fast as we can, and *then* start educating ourselves? Do we knock out the last few thousand dollar payments before we're freed up to start a proper revolution?

Wake up.

"Debt" is just another way of saying *Arbeit Macht Frei*: "Work shall set you free." Those iron words that loomed over Auschwitz are the very same that bleed through motivational posters plastered over mazes of cubicles. It's a simple promise to make, but it's seldom kept.

You're the only one that can free yourself. No one else. In a Capitalist system, your dollar is your voice. Every one you spend is a vote. Debt is there to keep your voice, your vote, unheard. It keeps you working, silent, for years and years and when it's finally paid off, you're too apathetic to fight anymore. You want to eradicate debt? You want to free your shoulders from its burden? Then see it for what it is: math. Simple arithmetic. To overcome debt, you have to make a budget. Find out how much it costs for you to live each month--rent, bills, food, and so on, and tally it together into one sum. That's the bare minimum you can make to sustain your current way of life--but debt has interest rates. It will only get worse the longer it's left looming over you. So, you need to make at least 20% more than that monthly sum. Consolidate your payments (be they bills, rent, credit

card, loans, or whatever else) into one easy to manage sum that you add on to your monthly budget. If you can come up with *that* amount of money monthly, you're living a sustainable lifestyle *and* digging yourself out of debt. It's slow, but it's progress-- and it *can* be done. Money is not your master.

Once you're on your way out, it's critical that you don't fall back in. It's all too easy to let even a little bit of progress blind you and make you think you're done working just because the ball is rolling. That kind of naivety is what makes people spend money that they don't have in the first place. That kind of naivety makes people forget that when they pay for something with plastic instead of paper, that money is still gone. We're just too far removed from it to actually notice--until it's too late.

The dollar *has* no power of its own: it's only what good people are willing to do for it that gives it its strength. You decide its value. Not the other way around. Money is a means, not an end. All it will ever give you are more choices, not personal authenticity.

The key to Debt's chain is hanging around your neck.

All you have to do is take it.

The only chain remaining is Doubt. Doubt in the system. Doubt in the people. Doubt in yourself. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."<sup>20</sup> Doubt is where that silence comes from, and silence is this nation's disease. We stop thinking that our voice matters. We stop thinking change is possible. We want to rise up and fix things, but we're afraid that we'll be alone

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream" (speech, Washington, DC, August 28, 1963), American Rhetoric, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>.

when we do it. We're afraid no one will help us, and it's that fear, that *doubt* that keeps so many people trusting the *needle* more than the people they *elected* to help them.

One of the hardest things anyone can ever do is stand up, alone, and face the coming storm--and there *will* be a storm. There will be people who misinterpret what you stand for, people afraid of change, and people who just plain don't like you and feel like being contrary. The thing to keep closest to your heart is the knowledge that you aren't championing this cause only for yourself: you're doing it for them, too. You're fighting to give *them* a better country to live in. You're fighting to keep their children fed, and their clothes clean. You are fighting for their children's children. You are making *history*, and nothing can stand in your way. Your interests *and* theirs are the same.

Once you realize that truth and internalize it, you'll see that you aren't standing *against* the storm. You *are* the storm.

There is no power greater than a motivated, focused mind.

Imagine what a nation of them can do.

The most important thing to remember is that change *is* possible. If you hold steadfast to what you believe in, and refuse to give up, then that change can be found. One day it will be *your* name in the history books. Your name, alongside everyone else's who stood up alongside you. Every person has the chance to either make history, or be buried by it. We can sit idly by and watch time tick slowly away as our nation crumbles around us, or we can unlock our chains and keep from becoming the next fallen republic.

It's not bread and circuses we seek. It's Freedom. It's Equality. It's Respect. It's *Discipline*. We want our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, to

stop dying overseas. We want our nation's hungry to be fed. We want our children's beds warm, and their futures bright.

And we can make damn sure that happens.

All we need is for you to be brave enough to stand with us.

You are not, and never will be, alone.

### **The Thread**

Stray threads exist only because of problems and inconsistencies. Every social injustice, every lie, every facade, and every cover up are there to mask those tiny little threads just waiting to be pulled. Take some of our society's major issues: health care, poverty, the environment, and education. These are things that we all face every single day. These are street-level problems. These are *our* problems, *our* interests, and only *we* can fix them. Relying on people in office to do it, the majority of whom have never known the sting of any of these issues, won't get us anywhere--they are people who live in this nation without ever actually feeling like part of it. In the words of Alexis De Tocqueville, they are "Colonists, [and] they are so divorced from their own interests that even when their own security and that of their children is finally compromised, they do not seek to avert the danger themselves but cross their arms and wait for the nation as a whole to come to their aid."<sup>21</sup> To colonists, these problems are just buzz words. To us, they determine whether or not we can *eat*. They determine whether or not our kids can get the medicine and treatment they need, and if they can get the education they require to go farther, and fly higher than we did. These are not colonists' problems. These are the

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<sup>21</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pg. 105

problems of statesmen--men and women banded together dedicated to the betterment of their society as a whole, not just bits and pieces--and it is our job as statesmen to solve them. In order to start, each issue needs to be addressed individually so we can see how it connects to the others. That way, we isolate the thread that needs to be pulled in order to start unraveling these problems altogether.

Universal health care is on the table first, and droves of people are up at arms against it. They oppose it for a number of reasons, one of which being the idea that just because everyone may be covered, not everyone is going to get the service (or quality of service) that they need; for example, the approximate 100,000 people that die in America alone from medical errors and inadequate care. Another argument against universal health care is that because some people fall into a certain income bracket, they will end up being the ones paying for poorer people to get coverage, and they don't want that unfair burden placed on their shoulders. Furthermore, many Americans feel that a universal health care system is a big step towards socialism. While we live in a social democracy, many people are afraid of the possibility of stepping into a fully socialist system. These are all factors that need to be taken into account in order for the groundwork of a solution to be set.

Many of those in favor of a universal system, on the other hand, are people that can't afford the care they need and are getting sicker or dying while others debate a more cost-efficient answer. To these people, it's not a matter of socialism or capitalism. It's a matter, in many cases, of life and death. It's easy to view people in need as leeches, just drinking in the money donated from others, but this is a terrible misconception. Very few

people are poor by choice, and even fewer egoistically hop on the welfare train in hopes of a free ride. It's easy to have such a negative view if one has never taken the time to get to know any of the people they bump into on the streets or in the halls every day. It may well be that the person making your food or brewing your coffee has that job because they're down on their luck, and are stuck working their hands to the bone day after day just to afford that next rent or child support payment--not because they have a passion for coffee. It's not negligence or selfishness that put a lot of people on hard times. Often enough, it's just bad luck. Wrong place at the wrong time, zigged when they should have zagged, and so forth. People need *understanding*, not dehumanization for something that might not have even been their fault to begin with. Most people who don't have health care just *don't* have the money for it, not because they wouldn't like it. They might be single parents working two or three jobs in order to keep their kids fed and just *don't* have the money to spare. They might be people who lost their jobs due to outsourcing and couldn't get a new one because of the absolutely abysmal job market.

The mentality of people that view a universal health care system as another form of welfare, essentially that if someone doesn't have a good enough job to qualify for health insurance then they deserve whatever comes to them, is a nightmare. It's exactly the kind of polarized thinking that is splitting this nation in two, and keeps us chasing our tails rather than finding common ground. "Don't get sick" is not a valid health care option. The answer to the question, "Should we just let people die?" in an educated nation is and *always* will be, "NO!"

Suppose for a moment that you are married, and you provide for your spouse while he or she works at home. Things are going well for several years, and the two of

you are thinking about having or adopting children. It would be almost easy to fall into the mind-set of thinking that anyone who has achieved less than you have is lazy or unmotivated. Why should you help them? You've done well for yourself, and no one ever helped you. Suppose now that you are laid off, as happens so often in today's society. You lose your job, and the insurance that came with it. No big deal, right? The COBRA law lets you pay for your own health insurance if you get laid off--minus the employer discount. But, that's okay. \$400-\$800 a month won't be so bad, because you have got unemployment checks (of roughly \$1200 per month) coming in, and it shouldn't take too long to find another job. Except that new job takes longer to find than expected, as more and more companies are going belly-up by the week. The unemployment checks start running out, and as they do, your spouse starts to get sick. So sick that they become bedridden, while you're still floundering to find even a temporary replacement job. So sick that the hospital bills they rack up, even over a short span of time, will be enough to keep your family in debt for many years to come. Is any of this your fault? Was it because of a choice you made? Was it because of personal laziness that other taxpayers have to help you get back on your feet? Should you have simply let your spouse *die*? The answer to all of these is, as it was and always will be, NO!

It is in everyone's best interest to push for healthcare reform. On every side of this debate lays a common complaint: the health care system currently in place is not working. It is an economic disaster, and it is hemorrhaging money (and jobs) every day as it collapses in on itself. It is not sustainable, and needs to be fixed while it still can be.

Whenever there is a distinct polarization on either side of a certain issue, it's important to remember a piece of the preamble to the Constitution: "...in order to form a more perfect Union." The war between Red and Blue has torn this nation asunder. The only thing most politicians see any more are the first two steps of a Hegelian dialectic: thesis and antithesis. They've left out the most important step, the step that actually turns the wheel forward--the synthesis.

In order to get things done, a win/win solution must be found. Unity is our strength as a nation, not dichotomy. To do that, you have to sort the propaganda from the truth on both sides, and find the issues at the core of each argument. Bill Clinton, in an interview with Bill O'Reilly, demonstrated this ability by adopting a conservative stance, and proposed a national market for insurance by letting the insurance companies compete with one another across state lines in order to drive down prices. He cited the example of the Netherlands, where all insurance is private, *and* they subsidize lower income people. O'Reilly argued against switching to the Netherlands' system by saying that the population of America is roughly eighteen times that of the Netherlands, so while the policy may work there, it would be much harder to implement here. Clinton then pointed out that while the population may be different, the economic principles remain the same. However, it's important to factor in the *price* of those economic principles, lest our reformed system take the shape of France's current system: good on the outside, but taking 60% of their taxpayer's income in order to sustain itself.

Nevertheless, Clinton's proposition of modeling our own system after that of the Netherlands is a good example of valuing the key issues of both sides instead of one just ignoring the other. The private insurance companies would keep the government solely in

an oversight position, and also make sure that everyone can get the coverage that they need. The lack of borders on insurance companies doesn't mean that they would be stuck at set nationwide rates, either. Each company would be free to adjust its prices to coincide with the cost of living in each particular state it covered. It's the presence of multiple companies (no longer only a limited number per state) competing with one another over a much wider area that would force the prices down as a whole, and make it affordable for everyone. Furthermore, we can stop one or two insurance companies from devouring smaller ones by stricter anti-trust laws, and harsher revisions to the Sherman Act in order to prohibit monopolies in any form. The term "monopoly" should only be used in reference to a board game, not as a long-term business goal.

The existence of many independent insurance companies would also allow businesses to separate from them completely, and their employees would be able to choose their own systems instead of being stuck under (and sometimes quickly removed from) one system. That way, if they lost their jobs, they wouldn't be without health insurance while they looked for a new one. It would also keep people from going broke trying to stay healthy, and it would let businesses use the money they're currently spending on health care for employees to create new job opportunities and expand their companies.

Jon Stewart, a proponent of a single payer health care system instead of the free market one proposed by Clinton, suggested letting former medics from the armed forces build the framework and governmental mandates for any new system, because they would bring the unique combination of a military work ethic coupled with an intimate knowledge of the health care system that could quickly and efficiently usher in powerful

reforms. The people can solve their own problems, they just need to be in the right jobs in order to do it.

So, how do we get them there?

We don't need a mob trying to burn everything to the ground, we need educated people who are willing to spend the time and effort to reform what we already have. For any tree to grow, the dead branches must be trimmed away. Those branches are born of legalese loopholes, political blindness, corporate nonsense, and bureaucratic red tape. These things need to be trimmed away, and the core laid bare, if we are to have any hope of fixing them. To fix a car, you have to be willing to open the hood--and to do that, we need to give a Voice to those screaming amidst the noise. Clinton and Stewart's proposed reforms won't do anything if they never get off the ground, and the way to do that is to find the threads that tie them together--the common ground held by both propositions that will allow the two ideas to become one, and give the nation something to raise.

One problem isolated.

Now, to find how it connects to the others so we can see where to start the change.

The poverty issue is twofold: crime, and the job market. Every day, people are losing their jobs and being forced out onto the streets. The economy is harsh and, rich or poor, we're all feeling its sting. The middle class is taking a beating, and has been for the past few decades. The problem is that our economy, like our mind-set, is focused on the present instead of on the future. We've been so busy chasing the fast high, that the idea of what our society will be like ten or twenty years from now has slipped most of our minds. As a result, poverty is skyrocketing. People think violent crime rates are a direct result of

increased poverty. In a way they're right, and in a way they're wrong. While impoverished neighborhoods can be more prone to violent crime, it's not necessarily due wholly to that lack of money--it's due to the mentality that people have adapted in order to survive on the streets.

The system failed us. How can we feel that the police or the government are on our side when we're the only ones getting punished for crimes? When *we're* the ones being profiled, when *we're* the ones that can't walk down the street without a cop circling the block twice, just to make sure we aren't up to something? How can we think that the system has our back when we can't even walk down the street wearing a hoodie without having to worry about someone on the neighborhood watch shooting us? Everyone knows laws don't apply to those who can afford it, and everyone knows that we can't. We make up the deficit. Some of us grew up in jail, the system, or both, and are expected to be anything but criminals when we get out--even though we'll never stop being treated like one. We turn to one another for protection because no one else is coming. No one else cares. We learned young that the only way to get respect was by being an adult. No one had time for kids. Sex and violence were just part of that equation. All we have is each other, and it's a cycle that's going to keep repeating itself as long as young people feel that the only way their voice can be heard is if they're holding a gun.

So, what can we do to fix it? We already know no one else is going to. We've known that for generations. How do we keep the next generation of kids from making adult choices when they aren't ready to face adult consequences?

For a start, people can get involved in their communities and increase local funding. If we start free outreach programs and community service projects that intervene

before kids feel that they have no choice but to join gangs, we can stop the problem before it starts. These kids want to be a part of something, and they want to feel like they matter. They need an outlet for their frustrations and their pent-up energy. So, give it to them. Don't just *tell* them they matter. *Show* them they do. *Teach* them that they do. Teach them that it's a hundred times more rewarding to give back to the community instead of taking from it. Raise them up instead of keep them down. Someone failed them, and it's up to us to make sure they don't fail themselves as a result. Get people together and clear the vacant lots, cut the weeds, and fix the broken windows. No one wants to live in a war zone. No one wants to live with the fact that their kid could get shot walking home from school, or even catch a stray bullet while sitting in the living room. The only people benefiting from these environments are the gangs, because people are too afraid to stand up to them. Most of these communities grew up together. They know each other. That's where the fear comes from--the people you're afraid of know where to find you, and know who to threaten or hurt in order to get you on their side.

Marching into these neighborhoods with an army of cops would only get more people hurt, and violence is *never* a solution. That's why showing people that there is an alternative to violence and drugs is the only way to really start making changes. When gangs stop getting recruits, their power base will start to crumble. People can only rule those who let them reign. When the focus shifts from "What can we take" to "What can we fix," the neighborhoods will start getting better. People need to feel like they're being helped in order to want to help. When they feel neglected or forgotten, they're going to act out. It's in our nature. If we start making these free outreach programs, it creates new jobs for the community, and brighter futures for everyone involved. Instead of sentencing

kids accused of non-violent crimes to jail time, give them community service. Show them what can be done if you're willing to buckle down and work for it. Suppose that parolees are given the opportunity to help clean lots and cut weeds, fix cars, or build houses instead of struggle in halfway houses and grasp at whatever job they can find. It would be their choice, and if they were willing to enroll in one of these outreach programs they'd be given the chance to emerge from their community service with marketable skills, references, and recommendations for future careers. If they so chose, they could even enlist with one of the free organizations in their neighborhood or city as advisors after their parole had been served, and help the next kid that's down on their luck make the right choices instead of the wrong ones. Together, we can create an ongoing cycle that will make everyone's life better and more fulfilling. Programs like this exist already, and we need more of them. We need to help get the word out, and spread the opportunity to every community rather than only a few. Together, we can raise each other up higher than any one person can do on their own. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him."<sup>22</sup> Well, you can judge the character of a nation by how it treats its weakest--and our "weakest" have the potential to be one of the strongest forces for good in this entire country. People just need the motivation.

Motivation *we* can bring.

As for the job market, outsourcing is ruining this country. People are looking for jobs that are being given away on the other side of the planet. They're trusting their country to be there for them, and it's letting them down. In the words of Henry Rollins,

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<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe,  
<[http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/285217.Johann\\_Wolfgang\\_von\\_Goethe](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/285217.Johann_Wolfgang_von_Goethe)>

“We are wasting people’s time who put considerable amounts of energy, time, and their youth into hitting those books, when they wanted to go off doing everything else (as a young person is wont to do). They hit the books. They did what they were told. They paid, and paid, and their parents paid, and they’re *not* getting the promise of America because those jobs went away.” The stockholders are benefitting, and the current (as well as the next) generation is suffering.

To get those jobs back, incentives need to be put into place in order to *make* them come back. How? Lower the corporate tax rate, and broaden the base. Again, in the words of Bill Clinton, we need to let these corporations repatriate their money with no taxes if they are using it to hire more people stateside. The corporate tax rate is a joke anyway, so what reason do we have to keep it around without heavy reform? One could also make it to where if a corporation was dead-set on outsourcing, then the pay rate of all international employees would have to reflect the pay rate of stateside employees with similar positions--not just the quality of living in overseas countries given the exchange rate. If corporations stop saving money overseas, and see profit in repatriating, then they’ll do it in a heartbeat. In a capitalist system, money talks--and if you want people to listen, you need to be willing to show them that they stand to gain by doing so. In order to make changes in America, you have to be able to turn a profit. That’s never going to change. What *can* change is the method behind the machine. Same result, different process. Through changes like these, people on United States soil start *getting* the jobs that they’ve spent years preparing for, and the stockholders are still in the black.

We *can* make the change.

The environment has also taken a serious beating, and it's our fault. We're faced with a choice: we can either fix it, or let it kill us. If you side with the former, then it's time to take action. If you side with the latter, then stop reading. At the end of the day, you can take back neither action *nor* inaction--and these words are for people who won't regret their choice.

One solution to help kick environmentalism into gear would be government mandates on recycling and eco-friendly energy systems. That method takes away the delineation entirely and transforms environmentally safe and conscious living into simply living, like how seat belt laws are a direct result of the work of Nader's Raiders. Another take would be making people *want* to do it by providing incentives to businesses and the like in order to make economically beneficial choices more affordable, instead of unreliable and expensive. Faking environmental integrity by greenwashing products isn't going to cut it anymore, and corporations need to *know* that. Again, the thing that gets results in this country is money: when people see that they can make a profit from going green, they're going to make the necessary changes.

Environmental sustainability is not a lofty a goal; all it means is that our system isn't imploding. Often times, people get lost in the romantic notion of sustainability as an environmentalist's dreamlike utopia, forever out of the waking mind's grasp. This isn't true at all. Sustainability is essentially the bottom floor of progress, and presently, we're camped out in the basement. A sustainable system is the first step forward, not the end goal (which alone should show you the state we're in). It's the same with business--if you're consistently losing more money than you're making, then your business is going to collapse. That's just the way that it is. Right now, people treat environmental issues

like they aren't a big deal because they'll be long dead before anyone has to deal with any of them, and it's that very state of mind that got us so deep into the hole we're in in the first place.

If we keep digging, it's only going to get worse.

Moreover, what if future generations *can't* fix it, because everything has gotten too out of hand? The environmental decisions we make today affect the future of humanity, and life on this planet as a whole. It's up to us to make sure that we make the right decisions.

So, what can we do? Get informed, get involved, and get innovating. Remember, your dollar is your vote. When the demand for green energy and products increases, the supply will kick start itself into gear. If you want to get more in touch with your local ecosystem, you can visit farmer's markets, go for hikes, and just get to know the world right outside your door. That park next to you, or those woods just a little ways out? Those aren't the city's. Those are *yours*. That's where *you* live, and that's what *you're* in charge of taking care of. If you get to know your little slice of nature and come to care about it, you can make damned sure that protecting it is going to matter a lot more to you. Don't want a highway or strip mall being built in one of the last wooded areas left in your neighborhood? Then don't *let* them build one. Get involved in your community, get informed, and those "Coming Soon" signs are going to stop popping up. Familiarize yourself with where you live, and what's around you. Clean up the trash you see, don't wait for someone else. Form petitions and take collections to protect it, or even buy the land yourself to keep the "manifest destiny" mentality of some people from turning it into a strip mall. You don't need to do anything more than protect it. After all, we're part of it.

One of the most important things you can do is to get educated about your environment. Environmental changes happen when *you* choose to do them. You can go outside today and make a difference, and you should. You can go to your local city or town hall, find out which areas need the most help, and see what you can do to start fixing them up. Educate yourself, and make a difference.

All of today's issues circle back to a shared source: lack of education.

Education is key. It is the first step towards progress. It governs everything, and enables anything. It's how we build a better tomorrow--and when the education system fails, the nation fails. Ours has several fundamental problems that are crippling it, and each needs to be dealt with: the No Child Left Behind act, the price, the availability, and the mind-set.

No Child Left Behind forced an entire generation to be taught to a test. It tried to bring everyone to the same level, and in doing so, brought them all down. Innovation needs to be encouraged, and motivation needs to be kindled. The way to do that is not through standardized testing. Sure, it's a great way to make assessing the quality of schools easier based off of test scores, but that's *all* it's good for. Teaching kids *isn't* easy, and teaching them to a test is NOT the same as teaching kids how to learn. The primary focus of the education system should be to equip children with all the tools they need to devour every scrap of information contained within a book, and give them the drive to do so. As the system is now, books are the last things most kids want to see. That needs to change, and we can make that change happen by getting No Child Left Behind repealed in our states by our school boards. Get people to sign petitions, and show your

school board that the people in your city take education seriously. We can make the requirements for becoming a teacher (one of the most important jobs in the entire country) more stringent, and get them better pay and better benefits. Being a teacher is an honor, and it needs to be treated as such (as it is in other countries).

As for the price of education, student loans are strangling this country. People are graduating with tens of thousands of dollars (at the least) worth of debt, and no job to help them pay it off. Colleges have gotten so expensive because they've tried to incorporate every possible career they can instead of specializing in scholarly areas. It's because of this that the quality of education in college is plummeting, and the price of attending is skyrocketing. Why do many subjects poorly when you could do a few very well? Universities need to shrink in order to truly expand their parameters, and once they do, free tuition can become an option. We need people who are motivated to get their education, and they should be encouraged instead of bogged down with debt.

For those who aren't interested in academia but feel the need to go to college in order to get a career, initiate a trade school/apprenticeship program that stems straight from high school like Germany's vocational schools. High schools could begin offering more of a work-study program that allows students to specialize in a field that interests them during their early teens, and would end with them graduating with a marketable skill. From there, if they so chose, they could pursue professional training through one of the state's trade school/apprenticeship programs. That would create jobs, as well as new opportunities, and give kids something to *do* to give back to their communities.

Higher education doesn't mean solely university education. Some people just aren't interested in philosophy or the sciences, and forcing them to pay thousands of

dollars for classes they don't want to take just needlessly fills the spaces of people who *do* want to be there. With the trade school/apprenticeship initiative, everyone has a form of higher education to attend. People would stop feeling like their time and money is being wasted, and they could actually see the direction of their studies rather than being submerged in a bunch of classes that aren't related to their discipline but the college is making them take anyway in order to get more money from the state every year. This change would shrink colleges, and expand career opportunities. That way, people could get the training for the career they actually *want* instead of being bogged down with distractions and debts. The availability of education in the field that students desire is what they need to make them want to learn how to learn. Instead of feeling like they're treading water just waiting to graduate, they'll know and *see* that they're on the right course for their chosen career.

The mind-set of many college freshmen in America is essentially 'entitlement.' No Child Left Behind means that they didn't have to work in elementary or high school, and many of them are completely unprepared for the challenges an actual university is going to throw at them. That state of mind coupled with the obscene pricing is why college dropout rates are so high--a lot of people just aren't ready for it yet. In truth, it's not even teenagers' fault. Their brain is still developing, and their hormones are going crazy. Of course they're going to have a hard time focusing. That's why one or two years of service in the military, work for the state, or work in one of the community outreach programs should be a requirement for any college or trade school, and perhaps even for getting a voter's license. It gives people time to come into who they are before they're

twenty years old, and thirty thousand dollars in debt. It also keeps them from being two years towards a degree that they realized they didn't even want. It gives them a chance to learn and mature, to find out who they are, before thrusting the responsibility of deciding their future on them. It gives them a chance to be happy and learn instead of be stressed and overworked. This is of course not to say that everyone will automatically know their path in life by age twenty. It's just a way of giving people a chance to find their way instead of making them think college is the only place to go after graduation, and that if they don't go that they're failures. That is *not* true, and if people simply waited a few years before rushing to college then they won't be thousands of dollars in debt before realizing that college just isn't for them. Learning isn't limited to school. We need to stop pretending that it is.

Though education appears to be the stem of the issues we face, it is only a part of the thread that binds them all together. What links all of these issues together is *You*--because *you* are affected by each and every one of them in one way or another, whether or not you may see it. And, as such, your actions can bring about their solutions. It's not *just* education that will solve these things, but *your* education. *You are* the thread--and to pull that thread is to rev up your mind into a new gear of thinking. It gives you a new lens to see the world through: the knowledge that all things are invariably linked, and to move one is to move them all. You alone can see the pattern as it truly is. Through the emancipation of your mind, you become the prime mover of this nation's progress. Your mind may well hold the answer to a critically important question that has not yet even been thought to ask. You may be the one to come up with the synthesis to the perilous

war of thesis and antithesis. To waste that potential, silent and bound in chains of your own making, is worse than for you to have never lived at all. Now is the time for action, and You are the key to this nation's chains.

With your help, we can make these monumental problems unravel.

### **The Pull**

Call it 'the kindling'-- the moment when your mind is no longer bound by the chains that once weighed it down, and you can gaze upon the world around you with eyes unclouded for the first time. You can not only see, but truly *comprehend* that every choice you make, every action you perform, echoes for eternity. You can *watch* the world change at your fingertips. Imagine a pond at your feet, and for every action you make, a pebble drops into the smooth, clear water below. Some actions are naturally larger than others, and bigger stones create bigger initial splashes. Yet, even the ripples caused by the tiniest pebbles will still stretch across the full breadth of the pond in time--whether or not you can see them.

Imagine a turbulent ocean, relentlessly pummeled by a rain of stones upon its churning surface. The thunderous splashes form huge waves that clash, oppose, and absorb one another, plunging the ocean into utter chaos. This ocean is the world. These actions are our own. The choices we make, no matter how small, never stop influencing the world around us--whether we are aware of it or not. Few people are truly malevolent by nature, and though they may feel that the stones they throw are bigger than everyone else's, their impact is completely impotent compared to the waves caused by little actions performed by many people working together. For example, one person stealing from a

donation basket compared to a million people donating a dollar to the same organization. The issue is that sometimes those million people inadvertently contribute to a negative cause, and those rogue waves swallow up the hard efforts of good people just as easily as the other way around. That's where we come in.

We can't control what other people do, but we *can* control what *we* do. The only thing that we truly have any control over in this life is ourself. You alone make your choices, and you alone perform your actions. No one can make you do anything, and you can't make anyone else do anything. There is always a choice. Now, imagine looking upon this maelstrom, forever assailed by the eternal onslaught of waves, and to you falls the labor of soothing the rage of a particularly violent wave by tossing towards it a single pebble. If the sea is the world, then the pebble you hold is your life. You must commit it, at the right place, at the right time, to doing the right thing. The ripples caused by a single pebble, no matter how small it is, can detract even a little bit from the mightiest waves if it is cast in at the right time. While alone the action may seem futile, what if we *all* tossed our lone pebble in at the right time with you? The wave we create could be strong enough to engulf the chaos, and restore a prime direction to the turbulent sea.

What better place than here?

What better time than now?

This sea knows no borders, and neither do we. It knows only the positive and negative nature of the waves upon its surface--as we know in our hearts the positive and negative nature of our own actions. It is not intent behind an action that the sea measures, but only the action's effects. Even a right action, performed at the wrong time, can

inadvertently add to a destructive and chaotic force. But a positive action done at the right time can completely neutralize a negative one.

Moreover, even a negative action perpetrated by those trying to make you fail can end up adding to the positive wave that you have helped create. This balance works both ways. Spontaneous actions on either side can hurt more than they help--it is the well reasoned action that will reach the farthest and last the longest. Strategy, in all things, is paramount. In the words of Marcus Aurelius, "Look back over the past, with its changing empires that rose and fell, and you can foresee the future, too." Watch the pattern unfolding before your eyes. See the state of our nation, and compare it to nations passed. Where are we heading? How long before we get there? What are you doing right now to make that future brighter?

In his book, *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone - Especially Ourselves*, Dan Ariely examines how powerful the effects of little actions performed by people working together truly are (whether for better or for worse). For example, a few bankers raising interest rates can affect the world economy itself. The bankers don't always see that at the time, because they're too far removed from the far reaching effects of their actions. They are only looking at the present, chasing the fast high, instead of looking toward the future. Moreover, most people, as Ariely points out, tend to believe that they are behaving morally while still benefiting from dishonest actions. This is because, as he says, we tend to rationalize our actions, which in turn allows us to cheat "just a little bit" and still feel good about ourselves. He says, "if we can rationalize things to a higher degree, we will be able to cheat more or be more dishonest and think about ourselves as good people."

This is best demonstrated by an experiment he conducted upon roughly thirty thousand people. Of the thirty thousand, only twelve were “*big* cheaters,” and stole the largest amount of money individually. Together, they stole a collective amount of \$150. However, out of the thirty thousand, there were eighteen thousand “*little* cheaters,” who took only a little bit each--and made out with a total of \$36,000 together. He says that this reflects what we have in society: some people who will go “all the way,” and while they will take as much as they can, they are very few in number. In his own words, “the magnitude of dishonesty we see in society is by *good* people who think that they’re doing good, when they are cheating just a little bit--but because there are so many of them, of *us*, there is a tremendous economic impact.” He demonstrates this with an example of a child who stole a pencil from one of his classmates during school. The child’s father scolds him relentlessly, appalled that his own son would stoop to such a level, and then says, “If you needed a pencil, you should have just said something! I can bring you *dozens* of pencils from the office.”

While this may be an amusing example, its consequences can really begin to add up. Ariely says that while we may not feel guilty for taking a pencil, we may feel guilty for stealing the money required to buy one. He explains this as a result of the psychological distance that has begun to influence our ‘cashless’ society. The further the gap between money and what we want, i.e. credit cards, stocks, and so on, the less we truly think about it. We never see exactly whom we affect when we steal something we may think of as trivial, like a pencil. Our ability to rationalize the benefits of only a little cheating as still being moral behavior has created perhaps the most devastating wave in the sea.

So, what can we do to stop it?

Ariely's experiment showed us the answer to that, too. The solution is essentially creating an opportunity for people to "open a new page," by way of being able to open up and confess their respective "little bits of cheating," without fear of reprisal or judgment. We all make mistakes, but which method of dealing with it would suit you better? Suppose you stole a pencil: would you respond better to someone berating and punishing you for it, or to someone presenting you with the opportunity to just give the pencil back without punishment or judgment?

Often times, Ariely found, when we're confronted with the realization that we're "bad," a lot of people will identify with that spirit of defiance, and sometimes even take pride in their behavior. "Yeah, I took a pencil. What are you gonna do about it? If you didn't want someone to take it, then you should have watched it better." This mind set gets us nowhere and creates needless conflict. By giving people the opportunity to confess to these little moral blemishes, they begin to *think* morally--even if just for a while. Moreover, it removes the feeling that they're under attack from their accusers, and so there is no need for any feeling of defiance on their part in the first place.

This method allows us to examine the motivation behind other people's actions, remedy the ripples they cause, and show them a better way to cast their pebble. Most people do wrong simply because they don't know any better, and *everyone* makes mistakes; there is great power in forgiveness. Strength is not found through the cultivation of anger, but rather in the ability to let go of it. Once again in the words of Marcus Aurelius, "The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury."

We must remember that we all have the capacity within ourselves to achieve incredible good or inflict unimaginable evil. It's not punishing those we may perceive as wicked for being "*little* cheaters" that will push us forward, but examining the motivations behind their actions. When we blame politicians for the problems we're in, we forget a crucial fact--while some may well be the corrupt spawn of dissolving dynasties, some of them are doing the best that they can. They just don't always know how best to help. The problem is that when business captains are elected to political office, they try to run the government *as* a business. If they only *know* business, then they will only make legislation to *help* business because they think it will ultimately help the nation. What they have forgotten is that, in the words of Bill Maher, "The government is not supposed to turn a profit." Many elected officials who hold national offices are privileged people, and have been for their whole lives. As such, how can they be expected to feel the urgency inherent in the unresolved issues of our time if they've never felt the weight of them? They want to help but they don't know how, so they do what they can. It's our job, the people who feel these problems and live with them every day, to show these officials *how* to help and direct them to where it's most needed.

Instead of blaming solely the people in office for these problems, we need to focus also on fixing the system that put them there. It's easy to point and say "so-and-so is corrupt," because of some of the things they have done, but it's important to remember that no matter how infuriating their actions may be *they* may believe that they're making the right call. *They* are trying to help. It's our fault for electing people that don't know how. It's our fault that honest people stand almost no chance of winning elections, because they don't have the financial platform some of these people do. It's hard to get a

vote when you're trying to impose term limits on the senate, and make corporations give back to the people instead of giving only to themselves. In this world, all that the meek shall inherit is the short end of the stick. When people are elected, their perspective changes. It's up to us, the people they serve, to make sure that that change is for the better rather than for the worse.

It's time for Change.

The world doesn't need plastic politicians anymore--it needs statesmen.

It needs patriots.

The world needs its people.

We are all in this together, but we can only control our own actions--so if you want to make a difference, then always do your best. Never give up. We are all born with the duty of making this world a better place, not only for ourselves, but for those who will come after us. All throughout our lives, we are given the choice: do we hang an intricate tapestry of beautiful distractions over our eyes, or do we muster the courage to pull the stray thread dangling right under our noses and unravel the curtain between ourselves and the turbulent ocean we've unknowingly helped to create?

Will you see, or will you hide?

Will you act, or will you run?

These are the choices that we all have to face. The result of this very decision is what we will all be remembered, or forgotten, for after we are gone. This is the choice that only you can make, and it will echo for eternity.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **KRATOS**

#### **The Spark**

“We're the first ones to starve, we're the first ones to die,  
The first ones in line for that pie-in-the-sky,  
And we're always the last when the cream is shared out,  
For the worker is working when the fat cat's about.

And when the sky darkens and the prospect is war,  
Who's given a gun and then pushed to the fore,  
And expected to die for the land of our birth,  
Though we've never owned one lousy handful of earth?”

-Dropkick Murphys, “Worker’s Song”

We are the workers, and we take care of our own because no one else will. We are the helping hand to those who stumble. We are the Voice that Will Not Be Ignored. We are the bulwark that holds steadfast against hatred and bigotry. We ride the chaotic tempest born of human action, and we tame the storm. We are the wings of liberty. We are the White Stars.

Know us not by our age, race, gender, or orientation. We are united by purpose, not by color or creed. We are connected by the light that shines in each of us. The spark that ignited in our hearts when our chains were broken. The Light that is the brightly burning symbol from which we take our namesake--the White Star.

Our Stars shine not only for our state or our country, but for all of those in need of a light to guide them. In the words of Thomas Paine, “The world is my country, all

mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.”<sup>23</sup> By bettering ourselves and our nations, we can help bring the entire world together under one cause--the wellbeing of the people.

Our flag--a banner as black as empty space, emblazoned with a white star at its center--is the symbol of both the universal *and* the individual. It is a declaration of cosmic citizenship; no matter where we travel, we are home. We are made of stardust, and to it we shall return. Our flag is the clarion call of peace, and the harbinger of reason. When we fly the Black Flag, it is a symbol of hope for the hopeless. Our mark is a threat to ignorance, not to people. White Stars lead by example, not through fear. Violence only breeds more turmoil, and fighting fire with fire makes the whole world burn. We seek understanding and equality, not bloodshed.

We claim no moral high ground nor any other kind of superiority, for there is none to be found. We are neither above nor below anyone else. We are all equals. We are the People; no more and no less. Our role is to serve as a reflection of us all. We chose to become White Stars because our hearts, the blazing fires inside of us, refused to let us sit idle any longer. If you wish to spark that fire within yourself and fly the Black Flag alongside us, then read on.

To become a White Star, you must adhere to our tenets--the four chief virtues outlined by Marcus Aurelius: wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Through breaking your chains, you have already taken the first steps toward reclaiming your independence, but to be a White Star is not only to *reclaim* that freedom, but to *master* it.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution*. (2nd edition) by Thomas Paine (London: J.S. Jordan, 1791). <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/798>

In order to do that, you must first master yourself. If one is to lead by example, then one must set an example worth following.

To have Wisdom, you need experience. In the words of Henry Rollins, “Knowledge without mileage equals bullshit.” You will learn more by actually going for a walk through your city than any tourist pamphlet can ever tell you. It’s not the encyclopedia of the world you should turn to, but the hitchhiker’s guide. Worldly wisdom comes from getting your hands dirty, and scholarly wisdom comes from the ability to think critically. It’s not the ones you already agree with that you need to hear, but the ones who are arguing against you. Do not shut out the criticism of others, but *learn* from them. Use their critiques to examine your own actions and beliefs, and question *why* you did them, and why you believe them in the first place. You must first question everything if you want to be free to learn anything. Winston Churchill said, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”<sup>24</sup> If you have no willingness to hear your own criticisms, how can you expect others to listen to yours? Moreover, how can you know you’re doing the right thing if you don’t have the courage to ask yourself “What if I’m wrong?” The dialectic is our model of progress. Without an antithesis to a thesis, there can be no synthesis, and therefore no step forward. Wisdom must first guide you if you are to have any hope of guiding others.

To cultivate Justice, you must first ask yourself what justice even is. Is it to abide by the law? What if the law is unfair? What if the law *is* the problem, such as segregation laws before the Civil Rights Act of 1964? If justice is not found through the law, then

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<sup>24</sup> Winston Churchill, <[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/14033.Winston\\_Churchill](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/14033.Winston_Churchill)>

where can we turn to *find* justice? Is it through divine edict? What if our particular dogma commands us to harm those of another? Justice can never be found through bloodshed, divinely commanded or otherwise because justice does not favor one side over another. Simply because movements in the past have used violence to further their means does *not* mean we should. You reap what you sow. Violent movements are met with violent opposition. Those that were once freedom fighters become terrorists at the drop of a hat. Peace is our answer. Reason is our method. Through reason, we can find the thread that binds laws, dogma, and everything else together. We can find justice.

We all know what it is like to be treated unjustly in one form or another, because we have all been wronged in the past. Therefore, as we examine what justice *isn't* we are better equipped to find what it *is*. Through every unjust action we have witnessed or heard about, our understanding of justice grows. We see pain, and we see cruelty, and we *act*. We *see* injustice, and we do our best to stop it. Moreover, we do *not* repeat that injustice on anyone else. Why would we ever do to another what we would not want done to ourselves? We want to be treated with respect, dignity, and understanding--so that is how we treat others. To be just, simply never repeat an unjust action. After all, where else can justice be found if not through the utter absence of injustice?

In other words, justice comes from the platinum rule, coined by Dr. Tony Alessandra: "Treat others the way they want to be treated." Though this iteration of the rule is relatively recent, the rule itself is a concept that has emerged all over the globe throughout human history as examined by Robert Kane, in *Through the Moral Maze*. In short, act for the sake of others instead of always for oneself. All are equal beneath the Black Flag. All for one, and one for all. To wear the White Star is to embody this

philosophy. Your actions must be consistent with your beliefs. If they are not, then they are empty. In the words of the explorer Freya Stark, “There is no happiness in the things that we believe if they are different from the things that we do.”

To have Fortitude, one must have unshakable willpower. As a White Star, you will be the shield of the defenseless--and a weak shield accomplishes little. You must not only have the strength to set about initiating change, but the courage to see it through to its end. You must never give up. All changes take time, and the bigger the change, the more opposition it will face. It's like Newton's third law of motion: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Do not let the opposition, no matter how vicious, overcome you--for White Stars are a threat to ignorance, and ignorance will fight tooth and nail to preserve itself. Instead, become the very bastion that you represent. To prod a beast is to invite its wrath. You must be ready. You must be strong. Your fortitude alone decides whether or not you are still standing when the beast tires, and only then can you hope to overcome it. The key to immortality is living a life worth remembering, and to do that we *must* endure. You are not, and never will be, alone. You will have White Stars at your sides and at your back in every action you undertake. Be brave, be strong, and endure. Together, we will never be overcome--for we are as one.

Lastly, Temperance. You have no power over the actions of others, but you can influence the direction in which they sway. This we know, but it is equally as important to remember that people will try to sway you as well. We are all given orders, but it's the ones that we choose to follow that define us. Reason is what guides White Stars. There is

no sense in getting upset or emotional over things that you cannot control. Not everyone is going to agree with you, and you cannot make them. Don't let this make you angry. Don't let this impede your progress. Just see it for what it is: something that you cannot change. Remember the pebbles and the waves--if you are to have any hope of taming the storm, you must make sure that you act rationally. Timing is everything, and if you miss your opportunity to act then you may never get another. Panicking at a crisis, no matter how large or small, will always exacerbate things. Those around you will see your dread, and respond with hysteria of their own. White Stars lead when others are afraid to. Shaky walls do not build a strong fortress. When you wear the Star, people will turn to you in times of need, and if you are in trepidation, so too shall they be. Therefore, don't panic. It is alright to be afraid, for we all feel fear. It is alright to be alarmed, for we all suffer the occasional unwanted surprise. But you must not let these feelings overwhelm you. You must become the master of your fear, and learn to use it to give you strength. Your words and actions must be the product of reason, not the fallout of dread. As Marcus Aurelius said, "Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present." The Star you wear is not only an example to others, but to you as well. Look to its strength, and you will always find strength in yourself.

Wearing the Black Flag is not difficult. It can be anything from white spray paint on a black t-shirt, to street art on a brick wall. Your uniform is as unique as you are. It can be whatever you want it to be: from t-shirts or hoodies to business suits. We come from all walks of life, and our uniforms show it. From spray paint and patches to lapel

pins and tie clips, all you need is a white star on a black surface to show the world who you are. While your uniform can be as creative as you want, flying the Black Flag alone is not enough to be a White Star. Being one of us means embodying everything that the Flag represents. It means upholding our tenets, and being true to our cause. Though the flag is new, the idea behind it has always been around. Every time someone advocates freedom, every time someone stands up for liberty, every time someone gives freely of themselves for the sake of another, we have been there. We have existed throughout time and history, but *you* exist now. Fly the Black Flag, wear the White Star, and help to forge history's next chapter. A spark by itself can be powerful, but many together can be unstoppable. With you at our side, we can make a government by the people, for the people, answerable to the people.

### **The Flame**

Few people through time have had the luxury of knowing exactly when they were creating history. That luxury is yours, because your chance to change the world is here. Now. Find the courage to act, and find immortality. From many sparks emerges a flame.

The Revolution is calling.

This is a revolution born beneath the Black Flag, guided by White Starlight. White Stars see the pattern. They see the ebb and flow of history playing out before their eyes. They know that in truth there is no such thing as a "small action." Everything, even the tiniest pebble, creates ripples that echo into eternity. This very same realization also makes them vividly aware of their own place in that pattern--their place in the maelstrom of Time. The savage waves will swallow all of us eventually, but in those blackened

deeps dwells the potential for your rebirth. From within the waves, swept up in their tumult, you can see your actions from the inside out. You can become part of the movement, become part of the sea, become a force of nature and *ride* the tempest. You can master its fury, and soothe its rage.

You can break the storm.

The power of the individual is far stronger than is given credit for. Sometimes all it takes is just one person in the right place at the right time to make all the difference in the world. *Be* that person. Your chains are broken. You are free to change the world. All you have to do is be brave enough to try. It's not a war that will end corruption, but the everyday deeds of good people. White Stars bring light to the darkness. *You* can make the world a better place.

Through cultivation of the four chief virtues we can attain inner peace, and through mastery of the White Star's five points, we can give that peace to the world. The virtues soothe the tempest within, while the Five Points soothe the one without.

## **THE STARS FIVE POINTS**

**1 LIBERATION THROUGH EDUCATION:** We hold at our fingertips limitless knowledge and limitless potential. It's up to us how we use it. We bring injustices to light. Nothing escapes our eyes. We are the people. We are the streets. We are the future. If you want tomorrow to have a better chance than today, then make tomorrow's people smarter. We don't tell people what to think, we show them how to learn and let them come to their own conclusions rather than regurgitating hollow ideas that have been crammed down their throats. Reforming the school system is paramount to our pursuits, and doing it is easier than you may think.

Remember, schools only got into the condition that they're in now because of legislation and school boards. Find out the curriculum of local elementary, middle, and high schools and see what kids in your city are being taught as well as what is being omitted from their education. Do this, and you'll see how easy it is for kids to slip through the cracks of our education system. Those cracks can be lack of direction or motivation, inferior textbooks, inferior teachers, or any number of other things. The issues will change from school to school, but they can all be fixed. We did not escape our chains just to see our children put in them. Start petitions, spread the word either online or on the street, and get people interested in the next generation's education. We may not have been the ones who let our school system become an international laughing stock, but we *are* the ones who are going to fix it. Look at the countries with the best education systems in the world like South Korea, Finland, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan, and see what they're doing differently than us. No Child Left Behind has taken away our drive to move forward. We can set things right. All that takes is a quick online search, and a fire in your heart. Find your local school boards, and see what you can do to help model our education system after the countries leaving us in the dust. Never forget that you will not be alone in this. Even if we have to march on Washington D.C. together, we *will* see it done. Our minds, and the minds of our children, deserve nothing less.

**2 WE ARE STEWARDS OF OUR CITY AND OUR ENVIRONMENT:** No one is going to save the world for us. If you want your city to be a brighter place, then take an active role in cleaning it up. Likewise, if you want to promote a sustainable environmental structure, then start implementing one into your daily routine. White Stars don't wait for others to take the first steps--we *make* the first steps. Do something every

day to further your ends, even if it's something small. You want a cleaner environment? Then stop walking passed litter and leaving it for someone else to clean up. Take the time to dispose of it properly, and you're one step closer toward cleaning the world. Get involved with your local Parks and Recreation departments, and see what you can do to help them. You can get online today and organize a park clean-up, or find one with a date that's already set. Just because someone may not be wearing Stars on their shoulders doesn't mean you shouldn't help them. Even if you're the only one at your community clean-ups flying the Black Flag, you're not alone. We're all with you, in every action you undertake. You can even follow in the footsteps of Austin, Texas's Rhizome Collective and find a nearby Brownfield to tackle next. Brownfields are properties potentially contaminated, polluted, or under the presence of a nearby hazardous substance that *need* to be cleaned thoroughly if they're ever to be healed or otherwise re-used in the future. Most cities have a Brownfield Redevelopment Office, and getting in touch with them is your first step toward organizing one of the biggest, most rewarding, and potentially most lucrative clean-ups most people will do in their entire lives. You can do it. You can do *anything* you put your mind to. That's what wearing a White Star means.

If you live in a more urban environment, there's no reason you can't help clean up your city. Outreach programs, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters can *always* use more helping hands. You don't need a judge to tell you to help people. Volunteer work is what we're all about. It's a chance to give back to the community that brought you up, and helped make you who you are. There is *always* something going on in major cities, and that something is *never* hard to find. Check in with your local City Hall, neighborhood watch, or anything else. Just remember, you're not there to distribute street justice.

You're there for *true* justice: the kind that helps people back up onto their feet, instead of makes them bite the curb. White Stars help people. That's who we are. If you see someone who is having car trouble, then stop and help them. Chances are, no one else is going to. Give them a jump, or help push them out of the street. Give the help to someone that you would want yourself. The act alone *is* the reward. If someone looks hurt, see if they're okay. If you see a crime, report it. Cities fall into disarray when people treat things like someone else's problem. With that state of mind, other people's problems become invisible, and the plight of those in need gets worse and worse. Every time you help someone, you remind them that maybe things *aren't* all someone else's problem. Maybe it's their turn to pay it forward instead of always having to pay something back. When you act, you remind the world that we're here, and that we're watching. The more good you do, the more it will spread. Be the first to light the spark in your neighborhood, and shine a light that others can follow.

**3 UPHOLD A TRANSPARENT, SECULAR GOVERNMENT:** Governments should not play favorites. It should neither favor the wealthy nor the poor. It should never seek to put one religion above any other, and it should not kneel to corporations because they bring the money in. Legislation should be based off of the interests of the people politicians have been sworn to represent, not the personal beliefs of the politicians themselves. People in political office shouldn't be there to get rich, they should be there to make this country a better place for everyone who lives in it--not themselves.

We can do that by making "donations," or any other form of bribery not only illegal, but punishable by removal from office. Why? It means that that politician is no longer upholding the ideas of the people they were sworn to represent--it means that they

would rather line their pockets, and help a corporation create yet another loophole it can slip through instead of doing their *job*. So, why do they deserve that job in the first place? Our economy doesn't have to be a leaky bucket. Once we see where our nation's money is going, we could stop waging wars for oil and start feeding our people. Start petitions, go to your local city halls, and demand that they make their funds transparent. Some places (like Kyle, Texas) have already done this, and even show their financial records on their city hall's website. There's no reason other places can't be like them. Follow the money, and you'll find the snakes. Bring them to light and they will strike, but we are many and they are few. They may want to kill us, but they can't. Dead men get listened to. To silence us, they'll have to discredit us--but we are White Stars. We are *everywhere*. We are their security detail, their drivers, their chefs, and their neighbors. We are the face in the crowd that *sees* them. They cannot hide from us, no matter how much they may like to. Silence one, and a dozen more will take their place. Any illusion of authority that these snakes have stops at their neckties. They can't make us do anything we don't want to do, and we are *sick* of giving them money for nothing. People are starving. People are freezing. People are living in the streets, and their greed is sucking those people's hopes away. How long are we going to let them do it? They have forgotten that they *represent* the People, not themselves. They were put there *by* the People, *for* the People, and now they need to be reminded that they are answerable *to* the People. White Stars bring the snakes to light. When you see someone accept a dirty check or any other kind of bribe instead of following the will of their people, Tell the World. We are the watch dogs, and we hunt the snakes.

**4 THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT PLACES:** We neither need nor want politicians who deal in snake oil and empty promises. We require men and women of action, integrity, and intelligence. We need people capable of looking at this nation's future instead of only its present. Elect people who aren't opposed to term limits and view accepting bribes as the crime that it is. To ensure people are elected on merit instead of their bank account, there are a few steps we can take. Dissolving the Electoral College is paramount. We can make the popular vote the *only* vote, and keep people like former Governor George W. Bush from being elected even after they've lost it. From that point on, it's in our hands who gets elected or not. If they're liars, then expose them. If they're crooks, then stop letting them pick our pockets. Merit is what matters, not money. From the internet to the streets, show people who is worth voting for. Remember, Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin. Imagine who else of his magnitude we may have missed because we were too busy watching the rat race of two competing dynasties. The changes we want can all be found--just don't expect them to be handed down.

This method doesn't stop solely with politicians, either. It extends to every facet of our society. A police officer who abuses their power doesn't need to be a police officer. A banker who takes advantage of people and steals the money they've been charged with looking after doesn't need to be a banker. These people aren't just guilty of minor infractions; they're ruining people's lives and they need to answer for these crimes. They deserve to go to jail, just like *we* would have been if we were guilty of even a fraction of the things they've done. Imagine a world where everyone actually *got* the job they deserved. You can help make that happen one tiny step at a time, and you can do it by showing people how to make the educated vote instead of just the impulse one.

**5 NO KING AMONG EQUALS:** The last of the Star's five points is a mind set held by each and every White Star, no matter what: no one is more important than anyone else. Wealth or station doesn't put one person above another no matter how grandiose the split, and imagine how much the world would change if everyone thought that way. Take the example of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor, and Epictetus, the slave--one of Marcus Aurelius's most admired role models. Intellectually, the two stood as equals. You are not your job. You are not the contents of your wallet. You are your actions, and your moral character. You are your integrity. You are your word. You are your honor. No more, no less. No one should be awarded special treatment under the law that would be denied to another. Our job as White Stars is to see that sentiment made manifest. Our justice system doesn't need more martyrs, like Aaron Swartz or Trayvon Martin, to see how far it has fallen. It's become a bad joke, and it's ruined (or ended) enough lives.

Our system, our *culture* is run by money. So much so, that we give it away for nothing. In 2013, the yearly income of the President of the United States was \$400,000. Why in the Hell should anyone make five or ten *times* that amount for throwing a ball around a field or being in a movie? Our nation over pays the *wrong* people, and as such the focus of our youth is horribly skewed. People will still be celebrities if they're paid less. We'll still know their names, and we'll still care about them all the same if they can't afford a diamond encrusted collar for their pet tiger. Their antics have become a joke, a selling point for magazines and tabloids, and it's distracting us from the fact that some of them spend more money in a week than most of us will make in our entire lives. Now ask yourself, what in the Hell did they do to earn it? There are some celebrities, like Angelina Jolie, who care more about people than status. She honestly wants to help the

millions of people that are suffering in the world, and does what she can to actually *do* it. Almost everyone *wants* to help, but few have her courage and actually *do*. If we stopped throwing money at people, and shifted our focus of celebrity to scientists, philosophers, and humanitarians instead of weed jokes on late night television, imagine what the world would be like.

If you have the money, then help. If you have the ability, then help. This world starts with you. Give what you can, and do what you can. Some people may say it's easier for wealthy people to donate larger and larger sums of money, and use that as a justification for giving nothing at all. Well, in a sense they're right. It *is* easier for a millionaire or billionaire to give one hundred thousand dollars than it is for a middle class person to give ten thousand dollars. Some people don't even make five thousand dollars a year. That's why it's so important that people give what they *can*. If all you can do is pick up a piece of litter and dispose of it properly, then do it. If you can hold a sign, and you're free the day of a protest that's for something you believe in, then get out there and do it. If you have enough money to spare, then donate some of it to someone who needs it. Help fund clinics, shelters, soup kitchens, clean-up projects or whatever else. Move, and the world moves with you. We can't take anything with us to the grave. The time of warring dynasties is over. We are all the People, no matter our wealth. We are all equal, no matter our station. We all have the same rights, and the same wants, and need to show each other the respect that we each deserve. No more, and no less.

These Five Points shine in every White Star. Each of us is unique, and will find pursuit of a certain point more fulfilling than another--and that's what we need. Each of

us is different. Our lives are different, our hobbies are different, our talents, dreams and goals are different: but our interests are the same. We want a better future, and we're making it happen each and every day. We believe in each point, and while we may spend our life pursuing only one of the five points, we know that our brother and sister White Stars live pursuing the others. Together, we make the Star complete. Together, we are unstoppable.

We live in an age where sharing information takes the blink of an eye. Each and every one of us has the capability of overthrowing corrupt officials--not through confrontation or violence, but through information. Evidence. Proof that they aren't who they claim to be, and don't need to be in job they're in. If you're tired of living under surveillance, then why not do it right back to them. Edward Snowden showed the world what happens when one person speaks up. He showed us what the government was getting away with, and how *we* let it happen. Imagine ten people with his courage, or even a hundred. Why not a thousand? Why not a *nation*? We are everywhere. We are everyone. Spy on us, and we'll spy on you. Lie to us, and we'll expose you. Hunt us, and we'll hunt you.

We See You.

Chuck Palahniuk said it best in his book, *Fight Club*:

Remember this. The people you're trying to step on, we're everyone you depend on. We're the people who do your laundry and cook your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you're asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your call. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you. We process your insurance claims and credit card charges. We control every part of your life.

We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact. So don't fuck with us.<sup>25</sup>

We are not history's forgotten generation. We are not consumers. We are *citizens*.

We deserve respect and equal treatment, and we *will* have it. No longer shall we lay dormant and let these travesties unfold in *our* nation. We have finally awoken from the American dream, and none of us like what we see.

We are White Stars, and *we* watch the watchmen.

We *are* the Revolution.

We Are Here.

### **The Revolution**

“It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom—for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.” -*The Declaration of Arbroath*, Scotland, 1320.<sup>26</sup>

We are the People. We are the Streets. All politics start with us. They exist because of our choices and the votes we make with our dollars. Any ‘power’ held over us by strangers in suits is illusory. *We* put people into power, whether by voting ourselves, or by inadvertently giving money to people who fed us the lie that our vote didn't matter.

We are in chains no longer.

White Stars ferret out corruption wherever it may hide. We find those unfit to serve the people they swore an oath to, and expose their misdeeds to the public. We show the uninformed the error, and the consequences, of the uneducated vote. When the wrong

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<sup>25</sup> Chuck Palahnuik, *Fight Club*, New York: W.W. Norton &, 1996. Print.

<sup>26</sup> *The Declaration of Arbroath*, <<http://www.nas.gov.uk/downloads/declarationArbroath.pdf>>

people are in power, they legislate out of spite, keeping certain politicians from getting anything done merely out of petty rivalries, or for their own personal gain. With White Stars walking the streets and scouring the Internet, we can keep politicians from merely getting the job for the sake of getting rich. No more bribes, no more corporate “donations.” We see their bank statements. We see where the money comes from, and how much each snake’s loyalty costs. So, show the world. If they aren’t ashamed to take the money in the first place, why should they be ashamed if the people who elected them found out about it?

The word “politician” used to *mean* something.

Now, it’s an insult.

It’s up to us to reinstate Statesmen to these positions: men and women who care about the well-being of the people more than the special treatment they might get because of their office. It is so easy to forget that once a dollar is spent on something frivolous, it’s forever lost to someone who actually needed it. When we throw money at people who don’t deserve it for things we don’t need, we are taking it from someone who could have used it for better ends. The White Star means all for one, and one for all. The people we elect need to be of a similar mind if we’re to see any real change in the political atmosphere. “Profit” means more than just monetary gain, and it’s about time we started electing more people who believe that too.

Adam Smith, often considered to be the leading theoretician and defender of Capitalism, would be absolutely disgusted by what this system has dissolved into in the West. We hear a lot about the One percent vs. the 99%, but the truth of the matter is that 5% of the population owns 87% of this nation’s wealth. Capitalism was supposed to

symbolize a rising tide that would lift all the boats together, not incite a corporate war that leaves only 5% of the boats floating while everyone else drowns. We *see* what these people are doing. While we endure the noise and strobing lights any time we walk through a city, White Stars see these things for what they are--Distractions. We see the people behind the smoke and mirrors. We see that they don't care about us or our needs; they only care about the most efficient way to take our money.

We will suffer deception no more.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, "You can't fool all of the people all of the time."

The illusion is finished; the tapestry unraveled.

It's time for change--change that will actually *come*.

We *are* hope. We *are* change.

We don't just *talk* about it, we actually *do* it.

We are born of the ideas of equality, respect, and liberty for all. Wherever people have risen and rallied for these ideas in the past, we have been there. We were there when Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus served as tribunes in 2nd century Rome and fought to redistribute major landholdings back among the poor who were dying in slums. We were there when Spartacus rose up and led his fellow slaves in a rebellion against their masters in the Third Servile War, 73-71 BCE. We were there at the Green Dragon Tavern during every meeting of the Sons of Liberty. We were there when the Founding Fathers drafted and signed the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

We stormed the Bastille.

We marched on Washington alongside Martin Luther King, Jr.

We *were* There.

We *are* Here.

Here to reclaim our Independence.

*Be* the change you want to see. The time of violence is over, and the cry for blood rings no more. We bring a change that we can make without bureaucracy and red tape. We bring a change we can make by educating ourselves, and anyone else who wants to listen. The pebbles we drop into the turbulent sea are the dollars we spend in this maelstrom of an economy. The timing, the location, the force of our pebbles against the water--these are the actions we take every day in the streets, and online. When a White Star has evidence of a politician doing the opposite of what they promised, when they see school boards stuffing their heads in the clouds and offering a padded version of history or science to tomorrow's youth, when they see a rich person walk free after committing the same crime a poor person got a life sentence for, they tell people. White Stars show people the truth. White Stars expose war profiteers, corrupt officials, and anyone else who tried to squeeze a dollar out of someone else's tears.

We bring darkness to light.

Every advance in society throughout history has only happened when the people have had the courage to stand up. Look around: do you see equality? Do you see liberty? Do you see fair treatment under the law?

No?

Then it's time to get out there and do something about it.

If you're only screaming in your head, you'll never make a sound.

We can depose the electoral college, and make sure that it's the vote of informed and meaningful thinkers that puts people into office instead of money. We can create and implement healthcare and environmental policies that won't implode. We can make education free, and usher in a brighter future. All we need to do is Rise. Carry within you the four chief virtues, and give your time to fulfilling even one point of the Five-Pointed Star. If you're done getting walked on, then stand up.

They can't sell bullshit if we aren't buying.

The only reason we have a five day, 40 hour workweek is because people stood up; but how many generations had to die or be maimed before someone finally did? Take *nothing* for granted, because every freedom we have was bestowed through the blood of someone who came before us. Show them the respect they've earned, and utilize every liberty you have to make sure those who come after us will have it better than we ever did. White Stars represent equality for *everyone*. We pursue liberty, freedom, and fair treatment for *everyone*.

Give us your sick, and we will make them well.

Give us your hungry, and we will see them fed.

Give us your lost, and we will see them found.

Give us your wayward, and we will show them home.

Give us your discontent, your frustrated, your unsatisfied, and we will show them purpose. We will show them Life.

We will show them the Revolution.

A new wave is rising--one that we have caused: on which side of it does your pebble lie?

White Stars are the unsung heroes of every generation. We are men and women who look tyranny in the face and oppose it, because that's just who we are. Justice is in our nature. We are known through history as "rebels," "freedom fighters," "guerilla soldiers," and any other name bestowed upon those who stand up for the people instead of the government. We are forever the gadfly that stirs the sleeping horse into motion. We are the *Vox Populi*. Be we spurned, defeated, or buried, one fact remains--we are *never* forgotten. We always endure, and in the end, we always overcome.

We are the nightmare specter that haunts the dreams of the bloated kings who see people as pawns, forgetting that at the end of the game we all go into the same box. We are the ever vigilant sentinels who expose lies for what they are, and bring people the Truth--and we will never walk away.

To those who oppose us or our methods, there is only one thing to say: "Our interests are the same." We seek better treatment, better wages, smarter legislation, and better education not just for ourselves, but for everyone. We want you and your children to have a future better than their past, and we are fighting to make that happen.

If you have the courage to join our cause, and the will to embody the four chief virtues of wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance outlined by Marcus Aurelius, then declare yourself one of us. Justice doesn't cost a thing. Fly the Black Flag in the streets, and wear white stars on your clothes. Your uniform can be as unique and creative as you want it to be--just never forget what it stands for. Always find ways to better yourself and your community, and show others how to do the same. We've been waiting for you.

There's a Revolution calling.

Take up the Black, and fight for the Light.

*Semper Vigilare*

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