

## **Michael, How are you holding up? Michael's Rock and Roll Posse**

I have been deluged with calls, emails, and texts, and have been hiding in plain sight. But one of the ways I work things out is to write, and so I have put this piece together, as a means of expiating my own grief. Each of us will have to work out our own important coping with this turn of events.

At first, I wanted to keep my mourning private, especially as my current role as a college president requires me to tread carefully and not give an institutional patina to my personal thoughts. That said, I have come to view silence as the greater harm, not dwelling on the actual electoral results, but upon the possible or likely harm to our immigrant students—particularly those who are now at some considerable risk—as they try and navigate. I am most concerned about them.

This is what I wrote Wednesday, which I have embargoed until now:

I woke up after a fitful few hours of sleep, only to discover a number of my friends and colleagues were in the same place I was: the slough of despond. Because I have so many other wonderful things in my life, I will have to crawl out of this hole, but it will be a slow crawl. Being a lifelong Democrat, I am used to getting my ass kicked on a regular basis, but the narrative here is so dark and so foreboding that I will have to focus and recalibrate in a way I have never felt I had to do. And I deeply fear for the DACA students, many of them in my own institutions, who placed their lives and hopes in higher education and the polity to protect them from acts not their own. This will not be an example of our better angels. I urged them to trust we would do the right thing if they took responsibility for their own lives. They did, and we did not reciprocate or hold up our part of the bargain.

Of the welter of emails, some of them directed to me and most flowing out of a sense of collective solidarity, two struck me, one from a professional colleague and friend,

and another from a brother. My friend wrote: "Let's get ready to resist like we did with Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes."

My brother, who is retired after a full professional career and recent years of personal service in AmericaCorps, generously wrote me late in the night and asked how I "was holding up." I responded: "I am in existential despair. I have to labor on, but my whole life has been for naught, and this is spirit-murdering." I dashed it off, but my first instincts are usually my truest. He replied, "We will all survive ... I have learned that growth and personal progress are only learned with pain and setbacks. My relationship with my kids has proven to me that I can live a full life with unresolved problems. Hang in there....think of all the book titles that are now possible!!"

I have dedicated my entire life to many ideals, but the ones that matter most were repudiated last night, and it will require time and deep reflection for me to soldier on.

And it will require music. I have gotten to the point in my life where several times a year, I lose a friend or colleague who has died, and my eight years of studying for the Catholic priesthood kick in, and I work out of my grief and loss. Then I listen to Satie's "Gymnopédies," Rachmaninoff's "Symphony no.2 op.27, 3rd Movement," or Barber's "Adagio for Strings." Or Judy Collins singing "Amazing Grace," *a capella*. And one of my favorite songs reminds, "I know it's hard for you my baby, Because it's hard for me my baby, And the darkest hour is just before dawn." This song has been recorded many times, but my favorite is the original by the "5" Royales: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC\\_-v3fG-0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC_-v3fG-0o) .

As I have all through my life, I will grieve in private and rejoice in public. This time, it is a lacerating wound, and will take longer to heal.

Leonard Cohen died, and I have been playing “Hallelujah” and “Suzanne,” songs I had forgotten I liked so much. In the late 1970’s, I saw him in a Georgetown theater venue when I was in law school in D.C., and remember how lugubrious, elegiac, and humorless he seemed. That he died during this week seemed fitting.

Attending an Adele concert Wednesday night helped. This irrepressible woman is the dictionary definition of expiating her grief in music, rather like Taylor Swift, who also settles old scores through her music. This is a longstanding tradition, a course that runs through Lydia Mendoza’s “Mal Hombre,” through Billie Holiday’s “Billie’s Blues,” through Brenda Lee’s and Aretha’s versions of “Break It to Me Gently,” through Dusty Springfield’s “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me,” and through almost every country song ever written or sung by a woman. Listening to these songs is enough to make me embarrassed to be male. And Adele adds to the pathos by her nervous stage patter, which goes on wayyyyy too long and has become a little stale. Even so, she has one of the most glorious voices going, and uncanny song selection.

She writes many of her songs—drawing from her personal life directory rolodex—but she also has collaborated with many excellent songwriters, mostly men, and here is the unusual piece: she covers songs about heartbreak and makes them her own. Consider the original compositions and recordings of “Make You Feel My Love” (Dylan), “I Can’t Make You Love Me / Nick of Time” (Bon Iver), “Hiding My Heart” (Brandi Carlile), “Need You Now” (Lady Antebellum), “If it Hadn’t Been for Love” (The Steel Drivers), “Many Shades of Black” (The Raconteurs), and “That’s It, I Quit, I’m Moving On” (Sam Cooke). Most notably, consider her remake of The Cure’s “Lovesong,” and how she reconstituted that great song into an exquisite ballad: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXCKLJGLNs> (The Cure); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5f1D9kHogq0> (Adele)

Everything she touches turns to gold, in every alchemical sense of the word. She also invites fans to stage, and invited up a shy little Mexican American girl and her mother, but it was the mother who jumped up and down like she was on The Price is Right. I think the mother said she was from Mercedes, which is along the border and is among the most Southernmost cities in the country. I wish entertainers would just sing, but this is a part of her style and her stage presence. The little girl will remember the encounter, but it is the mother who will really cherish her 3

minutes of derivative fame and the selfies. (I wonder how in the hell she got front row seats, logging on in Mercedes.)

She has a very tight band, with about ten stringed instruments—and the cellists and violinists clapped when they were not playing, a move I had never seen with orchestral artists. She moved back and forth between two stages, a dangerous move, given the ardor of her fans, and performs with clever scims that added rainstorms and other effects, and a really creepy one with her still, lacquered eyes (see the attachment of the photo Tina took on her iPhone) that was dormant, until she came on the stage at 8:10, when it blinked itself alive. Given that it was the 104<sup>th</sup> date of a 107 concert tour schedule, it was choreographed perfectly. She played “Rolling in the Deep” as her fourth encore song, and finished at almost 10:00 pm, the second night of selling out the Toyota Center, which seats about 16,000 in concert mode. She is not even 30 years old, but has an extraordinary gift and insatiable talent, one that will nourish fans for many years.

While not even Adele could drive out my overwhelming personal funk, she came close for those two hours. It is going to take all my musical balm to heal Gilead. But my students need me to advocate for and support them. Almost half the students at UH Downtown are Mexican American, many of them DACAmented or undocumented, and they and others look to me on this issue, so I have to find a way.

Keep the faith, Posse friends,

Michael

