

Mix Speech

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>
> On my walk across the nation several years ago, I had the honor of speaking
> from a pulpit where Dr. King once preached. How I felt the power of his
> words and his love somehow still echoing in that great room! More recently,
> on the anniversary of his death in Memphis, I had the honor of speaking from
> the balcony where he took his last breath.

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> You understand how his politics of nonviolence was informed by the
> sacrifices of Gandhi, and how Gandhi's nonviolence was informed by Tolstoy
> and Ruskin, who, in turn, were inspired by the American Quakers working for
> the abolition of slavery. The great Quaker voice was William Lloyd Garrison,
> who spoke to this very group so many years ago as did Emerson and William
> James and Julia Ward Howe and other voices for justice who spoke to you in
> dark times. And so, in the long shadow of these people, I humbly raise my
> voice today.

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> We meet in a time when two great and growing divisions are separating us as
> Americans: rich versus poor, and left versus right. I would like to speak to
> the second of these, as its resolution would help solve the other.

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> The political issues that divide the American people are great issues, with
> severe consequences for the moral life of the nation and the fate of the
> planet. These are issues equal to the issues that divided us in 1860, and we
> should fear the historical similarities.

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> In some ways the conflict of the Civil War was not resolved, but rather
> accommodated, in the same way that smoldering coals under ashes are but a
> fire asked to bide its time. Do not the sparks now swirl up fresh? Is the
> heat and danger we feel not the old conflict between those who believe that
> authority comes from above: from an Old Testament God, delivered through
> husbands, presidents, preachers, ayatollahs and plantation overseers to
> people arranged in layers according to their worth (it is not a conflict
> between those and those others who instead believe that all men are created
> equal, and that the authority to govern issues forth from them, upward to
> their government (their common vessel of community--and not downward? Is
> this not the divide of 1860 and also of our own time?

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> We have an advantage that our countrymen did not have in 1860, for, despite
> our tendency to assign colors to states, our differences are not locked into
> the different economies of different regions. Our differences are with our
> neighbors, our friends, our family members. We can argue this out peaceably
> across fences and dinner tables instead of across a bloodied continent as
> before.

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> But again it is the work of ending slavery. This time it is a slavery of the
> mind, which the hardest kind to deal with, as it is usually characterized by
> an unwillingness of the victims to be emancipated. But it must happen if the
> suffering of this nation and of the world is to end.

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> Let us consider the self-repression of the political right. And in this
> argument, I am talking to some of my own friends and hoping they will open
> their minds to a new thought from me, for I offer it in good faith and
> friendship.

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> Where authority and power flow down from above, from heaven to the White
> House to husbands and ayatollahs, the free and joyful living of people can
> be quite the enemy. If you will remember the free spirit of those who grew
> up in the 1960s, for example, you will also remember the harsh attitude that
> attended to their joys from the more traditional, often more rural, elements
> of our society. Those political leaders who rose from this time, who lived

> in this more open and free way--less constrained by the rules of
> authority--were especially vilified by the authority clan. You need only to
> think of the special treatment given to the Clintons, who were of this
> generation and climate, to know the truth of this. And it fits the
> international pattern, of course, that the woman, Mrs. Clinton, would be
> singled out for the cruelest stones.
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> What attracted such hatred? It was their freedom and its joys.
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> Here it is: those in the clan of authority are not given the privilege<the
> natural right<of living their own lives. They do as they are told, say and
> think what they are told. Smothered, then, is their curiosity, healthy
> skepticism, imagination, joy, freedom, and lust for life itself. When they
> see others actually living lives, they react with anger, as if someone had
> cut to the front of a line that, for them, never moves.
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> What is the proof of this theory? Those enthralled to authority, cowering
> under it, lose sight of their own lives. They will venerate above all else
> the symbol of the yet unruined potential of life: the curled-up unborn. The
> authority clan will have the image of a fetus as its flag, and they will
> claim to honor and defend life, but that will be a great lie to themselves.
> For they will not be the ones to demand DNA testing of all prisoners on
> death row; they will not be the ones to demand health insurance for all
> children, or better nutrition in all schools, or peaceful alternatives to
> international conflicts. They will be the ones to rail against these things,
> for the authority clan is a cult of death. Having died themselves, strangled
> by authority and fear, they cannot wish happy lives for others<they cling
> only to that magic symbol of what might have been. They relate to the fetus
> selfishly, but because it is themselves: unborn, unlived, still hoping for a
> life.
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> I am not talking about political conservatives. People who follow leaders
> like Goldwater, Forbes, and Buckley do believe, in the great mainstream of
> American thought, that government is the council fire of community. They
> just want it to not be all-consuming. The people we are dealing with today,
> who are so far to the right of traditional conservatives that it is unfair
> to call them that at all, do not believe that our government is our campfire
> of community. They would replace it with a church, a strict family, and, as
> they have shown us so many times in history, even with a dictatorship that
> derives from imagined divine powers, and with a reign of brutal authority
> that sanctions criminal aggressions on other nations, torture, and the
> suspension of civil liberties. How many times have we seen this happen
> abroad, and how many times have we wondered if we would have the courage and
> the character to act up if it happened here?
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> I think every man and woman of us wants to be a patriot to this great
> nation. How sad to miss your cue when the alarm bell rings for us! How
> horrible to be enslaved to the wrong way of thinking at such a time of
> national crisis! We owe it to our friends and neighbors to free them if we
> can so they can stand with us.
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> I will propose a mental experiment to see if we can find a string or two
> that can help us lead our friends out of this dangerous maze.
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> Imagine that your friend is very much pro-life and pro-war and doesn't see
> the illness of her mental conflict.
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> I think you might notice that this friend of yours lives a
> slipcover-protected life and has not even allowed herself the freedoms of a
> good fantasy life. Let's fix that.
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> Let me suggest that you take her to a good arts district, rent her a studio
> apartment full of art supplies above a good sidewalk café, find her a lover
> and come back in ninety days to see if her politics have changed. As she
> lives a real life, as she explores her own potential, she will learn to let
> others live and enjoy their lives, too. She will want to help the young
> woman artist next door who gets herself into trouble. She will even begin to
> be amused and impressed instead of angered and depressed by the Clintons and
> other lively, joyful, free-living people.

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> When people begin to really live their lives, the black and white
> certainties do not turn to shades of gray, but to the million-colored hews
> of morning dew. That sparkle and pain is life, and life is about helping
> real people get through this world with a minimum of pain and a maximum of
> human dignity, and we simply can't do that with authoritarian politics and
> its deadly abstractions. We can only do that with our love and our freedom
> to think for ourselves and act individually and as a community. And that was
> the example of Jesus, wasn't it? Did he not challenge the church, challenge
> authority, and overturn rules that had become cruel so that we might act
> from love and charity?

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> Our founders respected human freedom and the urge toward greater equality.
> Over the centuries, we have tried to make this nation a better expression of
> their intent, so that there would be no second-class citizens, no arbitrary
> authority that limited our life, liberty or pursuit of happiness. And the
> better angels of that Revolution stand yet upon our shoulders as we oppose
> the clan of authority, the cult of death, whose cloak of human oppression
> has cast its shadow over our children's future.

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> What must we do? We must bring the light of consciousness to people who are
> enslaved by the darkness. We must show them<make them see<the clear links
> between the Taliban and the American fundamentalists. It is about power,
> male power, and subservience. Why can't a young girl in trouble get an
> abortion in the preferred world of the fundamentalists? It isn't because of
> the sanctity of life, or the fundamentalists would be acting to preserve
> life by getting medicine to Africa instead of impeding it. They would be
> halting executions and building up our institutions of peace.

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> The desperate attitude of the far right toward not only the fetus but even
> brain-dead people on life support reveals something about their true
> religion: they have little. There is nothing in their actions that reveals a
> belief that life is eternal, that there is no death except as a doorway to
> something better. Their Christianity simply does not relate to the teachings
> of Christ. The worst of the hate-mongers who misuse the Bible to make
> million-dollar church incomes and push a political agenda of male domination
> and hate are easy to spot, for they cherry-pick Bible passages to suit their
> purposes. They disregard any turning of cheeks, they disregard the fact that
> Jesus never mentioned the homosexuality that they so fear. They seem not to
> fear that, as very rich men, they might have a hard time driving their
> Hummers through the eye of the needle into heaven. They claim that every
> word of the Bible must be followed, but if they really believed that they
> would have stoned themselves to death years ago, as they are as sexually
> frisky and full of covetous looks as anybody else. They forgive themselves
> freely, of course, even of promoting murder.

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> They refuse a young girl an abortion for the same reason they would refuse
> her birth control: because in either case she would be exercising power and
> control over her own future, and that power and control is reserved for the
> authorities<male authorities--below whom she is to cower and serve and
> reproduce. It is all about that, and we have to start saying so, so that the
> far right will no longer have the women marching in its toxic ranks<at least
> the smarter women.

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> If I ran the Democratic Party, I would lay it all out in expensive
> advertising campaigns. I would have the sociologists and the psychologists
> talking about the tricks of mental slavery that are being used to trick
> decent Christians and other people into following un-Christian leaders and
> policies. As with any kind of mental counseling, progress depends on the
> spread of consciousness of self-awareness. I would let more and more
> people, especially the women, come to understand the nature of the lies that
> surround them and defraud them. I believe they really are for life and for
> liberty, but they must be given better information, better moral and
> emotional support.
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> There is another string leading out of this dark maze. Better leaders can
> make great differences in the life of a society, but we cannot elect them if
> we do not change from electoral organizing to social organizing.
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> When I went on a 23,000-mile voter registration journey before the last
> election, I walked through many housing projects and low-income
> neighborhoods where the people had seen nobody dropping by to talk politics
> since the last election. The Democrats only come around, I was told, every
> few years to ask for their votes, but they weren't there to listen to their
> problems, help them craft political solutions, to stand behind them and
> amplify their voices. These people were of the opinion that, if the
> Democrats won or lost, their own lives wouldn't really change much.
> It is simply exploitive politics to come around begging for votes without
> giving so much as a crouton in return. We have to be involved all year long,
> every year, and in every neighborhood that needs political help. That is
> movement building--not just stumping for candidates.
> The residents of Cabrini Green in Chicago, and the people of the slums of
> Ft. Myers, Miami, St. Louis and New Orleans told me they needed our
> organizing help and our voices added to theirs--for they love their children
> too and want decent lives. Many of the streets I walked in New Orleans were
> later strewn with the drowned poor, as if America had progressed no further
> than the days of the Titanic, when those traveling life in steerage are
> never offered the lifeboats. So much criticism has fallen on the president
> for the flooding disaster in New Orleans, but the Democrats have had a long
> century to make life better and they have not done so. The New Deal and
> other programs, offered from a distance, are helpful but no match for a
> party meetinghouse in every neighborhood to raise the political competency
> and expectations of the area.
> Politics is not just about raising money for candidates. Politics is about
> creatively serving the needs of your people, and the election is just the
> report card for how you are doing and how many people you have helped and
> how many people are following your leadership because you were there for
> them. We do get the government we deserve. The crowd standing behind us in
> critical times is the crowd we have served through the years. People will
> not speak up about global warming, I assure you, until they first have a
> warm house for their own children.
> So here are my two thoughts. We must help people see the mental traps that
> they are victim to, and we must do this by telling it like we see it, by
> asking them to see that the pro-life, pro-war movement is really a cult of
> death, that fundamental Christianity represents the opposite of Christ's
> teachings, that authoritarian control and elite profiteering are the strings
> of the far right's puppet show.
> Let us indeed believe that all people are equal, but let us not assume that
> all political opinions are equal, for some are toxic and sociopathic and
> require our loving intervention. Let us intervene. Let us stand up in church
> gatherings, let us confront our friends. Let us use the tools of mass
> communication to wake people to the lies that bind them.
> And let us return to real politics in the neighborhoods especially those
> neighborhoods where we are most needed. As it stands now, people who do not

> receive the support they need from an ever-receding community are turning to
> the very churches that have been politically killing those needed government
> services. This is a dangerous tailspin that we can only arrest with a
> political return to the neighborhoods. Let us demand of our party leaders
> that we move from electoral to social organizing, so that there is more rock
> and less hot air under our candidates as we move into the future.
> These are big projects. Do we have enough energy remaining for any of this
> sort of thing?
> What is it to our souls when we have to just keep slugging through dark
> places? Why, after all that has happened in America, from stolen elections
> to the destruction of our necessary institutions of mutual help, are you,
> personally, still at it? Why, after seeing our country become the
> international symbol of irresponsible conduct, of torture, of political
> imprisonment, of destruction to the global ecosystem, are your spirits not
> smeared across the plaza under the treads of these tanks?
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> Are your hearts perhaps stronger and your souls deeper than you imagined?
> Yes, this is what you came here to do. There is no greater gift than to be
> given a life of meaning. There is no greater heroism than to bravely
> represent love in a dark time of fear and danger.
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> We are resolved to help each other. We are resolved to represent love in the
> world and to follow our national dream.
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> So look at the situation wisely and know that a happy ending is not to be
> found under the paper moon of child's brief play. Accept and celebrate the
> fact that we are deeply engaged in a long, hard drama of global meaning. We
> welcome the fight. We welcome it, and, by George, we are up to it.
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> Thank you.

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