

Misc

Remarks for MacPherson Square (12-15 min)

Thank you,

On days like today, many Americans are beginning to identify with the pro-democracy activists whose courage opened much of the world to freedom fifteen years ago. When people stand united, they get their way. That is an axiom in the geometry of world history.

To say we in America are oppressed sounds like the whining of spoiled children. We live privileged lives of luxury, and it is hard to imagine that one might not be free, that our freedom might be a fraud.

Was the hoop-skirted, ante-bellum Southern Belle, living her life in the plantation mansion amid her luxuries, a free human being--or was she as constrained from

independent action as the slaves who served her luxury? Our homes are now filled with the cheap products of slave societies, and our streets are safe because those who dare move against the system are locked away by the millions, so that their forced labor can serve us, too.

But we are free and happy, we think. We are Americans. We need no Velvet Revolution, for our lives are sufficient; they are velvet couches, made in China, affordable to us because the best part of the price is paid by others, by the young worker in China, by the unemployed fellow in our own town, and by his children who pay in a thousand ways.

So, we have it made. Yes, it is a problem that we can only get the cheap resources we desire by destroying democracies around the world and installing compliant dictators; and it is a problem that all this sowing of bitterness is a harvest now of terrorism, but

we can at least live for today in our freedom and our happiness. We, empire's debutantes, need not look out our plantation house window to the slave quarters in the distance, when the same window will give us our beautiful reflection. But the small, everyday injustices of a population must flow somewhere; indeed, they gather into great rivers that flow through capitols and pentagons, where next they become the bombs and machine-gun roar and rattle of our bloody agents in the world. Our vote every four years is a weak ceremony of little importance compared to how we live our personal lives, which empowers either good or evil in the world.

No man or woman is free whose life is built upon the suffering of others. Slavery enslaves the master more than the slave, for the master is enslaved in mind as well as body.

You are free to decide between this credit card or that, a plastic bag or a paper bag. But can you decide to live the life of a poet, or a farmer, or a vagabond, or a philosopher? Can you afford it--can you afford true freedom? Are you free to make big changes in your life, or do you have too many obligations to others? Financial entanglements have come to define human relationships, so that the elite may prosper.

Was it not ever so? Yes, though the old oppressions have somehow now become organized and incorporated in monstrous and aggressive forms. The destruction of the middle class; election frauds; the dismantling of great social programs; the creation of permanent warfare so that power be extended over us forever in ways small and grave: our shoes are to come off at the airport, our children are to be shot and blown up, and our debt is to be the great

burden that keeps the bales upon our backs and all of us in our places. The boot of greedy oppression is now always at our necks, it seems. And, like medical companies who own Congress or oil companies who own White Houses, it seem to have become the nature of the beast, widely understood and grudgingly accepted.

But the pursuit of happiness? There it is, a phrase central to the world's idea of America. If some people in this country could erase those words from our Declaration, they would do so--and replace them with something more authoritarian, less free, less nurturing of our human potential. But the words remain there on that parchment in a building a short distance from here, and indelibly upon our hearts and imaginations. That is why there is a velvet revolution brewing, and it is not the whining of spoiled children, but the song of freedom

of brave men and women who are prepared to let the bales upon their backs fall and mix with the old tea in the harbor.

The pursuit of happiness is the red magma at the core of our political souls, the energy source of all our revolutions including this one. The Pursuit calls not for our selfish enjoyment of other people's labors, but for the freedom to live meaningful lives in a land of justice, where our democracy is OUR tool (OUR tool!) to better the earth as a happy human outpost in the cold universe; a warm reprieve from the heartless and fatal logic of time and space, and a reflection here and now of God's love, or, absent that according to your beliefs, our best make-do substitute. For brotherhood is enough, and democracy is our belief in brotherhood and our commitment to it.

I have long admired the Europeans for the fact that they discuss politics constantly. The

sidewalk café conversation is superior for the maintenance of democracy, when compared to our sitting in front of endlessly dumbed-down news broadcasts and newspaper accounts.

The sharing of email and our occasional standing together in protests is the best we Americans can do to create the community of democracy and raise the barricades of its defense. Or is it?

We tend to fall into the politics of victimization and anger. We are defensive, when in fact our only real success must come from another way: from the promotion and spreading of a lifestyle that we model with lives of joy and justice and sustainable common sense.

War breeds consumer materialism. The Civil War brought the Gilded Age; the First World War brought the Roaring Twenties;

The Second World War brought on the material binge we now maintain with ad-hoc wars as necessary. Wars destroy all other values, leaving only materialism. Can the process work backward? Can we bring peace by living in more sensible and beautiful ways? Yes, for the future is always being forged in the present. Lives of peace and joy, if we create them, will bear joyous fruit.

It does us no good to rise up every four years and comb through housing projects and poor neighborhoods, begging for votes, when we were needed there all along--needed to bring joy and education to the children, resources to parents, tools for self-representation and community progress. ~~In the current push in the Democratic Party for a new national chairman, the debate centers on how to better reach more people with our political message, when our elections are but~~

report cards for how we have served our communities all along. The work of a successful party or movement depends on how well it organizes people every day for the improvement of free and joyful living, for the power to shape their futures and care for their children, for the power to extend their higher values into the world and thus serve their dreams of brotherhood, justice and the peace that comes.

The poor of this country are so deprived of options that they now flock to churches, where the government money now comes, so that people can be turned away from the idea that government--democracy--is our common tool for serving each other's needs.

If a party or a movement is to be successful, it must become that place where people go for personal help and for validation as human beings of value. We need union halls and party offices in every neighborhood that

needs help, filled with volunteers who have learned that the joy of life comes only through service.

My advice to the activist is to look at the work of groups like City Repair of Portland, and of ACORN, and the unions, and other groups that work to make everyday life more joyful for our people. Get involved with them. There are simply not enough of us to effect dramatic political change as things stand today, so we must labor happily in these vineyards until we are enough.

Let us string lights in the trees and bring out tables of food! Let us buy the things we need from the workers here who need the work. Let us invite the musicians and the artists and the academics to do their part. Let us do, in short, what we would do if the present order fell to feathers with all its mortgages and credit cards. It will do just that if we so elect, and this is the election that matters.

The things we dislike in the present order are sustained only by our fear.

Look at me: I am still alive, and I am looking at you, and you are alive. This is our world as much as anyone else's. We who are old enough or wise enough to see the edges of life can understand that we have a choice between fear and joy, and between victimization and service. All elections and other indications to the contrary, happy days are here again when we but say they are. We do not turn our hearts away from injustice or suffering, indeed we mend them as best we can with our joyful engagement and our courageous non-cooperation with the forces of fear and death. And no one can take away our joy, for even our suffering for justice and brotherhood is joyful.

This is our Velvet Revolution, American style. We resist what we must and what we can, but our victory is not in defense, but in

a cultural offensive made irresistible by the power of love and courage, pulling our people together, and our own lives together over time, over days like this day, among friends like these friends, whom I invite you to meet, as I would now like to come meet you.

Thank you.