

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

"The End of Innocence"

by

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GENESIS, CHAPTER 3, VERSE 22 - AND THE LORD GOD SAID, BEHOLD, THE MAN IS BECOME ONE OF US, TO KNOW GOOD AND EVIL:

ADAM AND EVE HAD EATEN OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL AND FOR THIS, AND NOT FOR THE COMMISSION OF EVIL ACTS, WERE ADAM AND EVE EXPELLED FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN, THEY HAD LOST THEIR INNOCENCE.

SO IT HAS BECOME WITH US AMERICANS. WE HAVE ALSO LOST OUR INNOCENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF NATIONAL GOOD AND EVIL. THERE IS MUCH IN OUR HISTORY TO SUGGEST THAT EVIL HAS ACCOMPANIED EVEN OUR FINEST MOMENTS, BUT WE, LIKE ADAM AND EVE, DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT EVIL.

FOR EXAMPLE, SLAVERY REACHED OUR SHORES BEFORE THE MAYFLOWER, AND COEXISTED WITH THE RINGING PAEANS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND OF THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE BELIEFS OF JEFFERSON AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES THAT THERE WAS INDEED A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM BROUGHT FORTH ON THIS CONTINENT.

SLAUGHTER OF THE INDIANS ACCOMPANIED THE WESTWARD TREK THAT MADE THIS CONTINENT A NATION, AND THE MEN WHO LED THE MARCH FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA, TRULY BELIEVED THAT WHITE MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL, AND DID NOT THINK ABOUT THE INDIAN.

IMPERIALISM UNDERLAY THE FORAYS INTO MEXICAN TERRITORY THAT FORMED THE FINAL CONTOURS OF THIS COUNTRY, AND THE SAME IMPERIALIST THRUST FUELED OUR WAR WITH SPAIN, AND WERE WE NOT BETTER FOR CUBA AND FOR THE PHILIPPINES BECAUSE WE BELIEVED IN THE INALIENABLE RIGHT

TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS ON OUR ELEVATED TERMS?

EXPLOITATION OF THE WEAK AND THE POOR ACCOMPANIED THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY THAT RAISED THE U.S. STANDARD OF LIVING TO THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD, AND DIDN'T ANDREW CARNEGIE PROVE THAT THERE WERE NO ESTATES GUARANTEED OR DENIED BY BIRTH?

THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY JUSTLY ADMIRING THE CHANGE FROM THE PREORDAINED STATUS OF EUROPEAN SOCIETY TO THE FAST DEVELOPING MERITOCRACY OF THE NEW WORLD. MEN OF TALENT AND PERSEVERANCE COULD HACK THEIR WAY THROUGH THE FOREST, OVERFLOW THEIR WAY ACROSS THE PRAIRIE, AND EVEN IF THEY DID NOT BECOME RICH MEN, BECAME FREE MEN.

SLAVERY OF BLACK PEOPLE WAS JUSTIFIED AS GOD'S WILL, FOR A DIFFERENT AND THEREFORE INFERIOR RACE.

INDIANS WERE BLOODY HEATHENS TO BE CONVERTED OR KILLED (AND SOMETIMES BOTH BECAUSE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WAS SOUGHT FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS IF NOT FOR ONE'S SELF).

WE REMEMBERED THE ALAMO AND SIMILAR WRONGS AND JUSTIFIED OUR VIOLENT RESPONSES BY RECITATION OF THE EVIL OF OTHERS.

LIKE ADAM AND EVE, WE LIVED WITH THE EVIL, BUT WE DID NOT RECOGNIZE IT AS EVIL. WE WERE INNOCENT IN THE SENSE THAT WHATEVER WE DID, WE BELIEVED WE WERE PURE IN HEART.

WE AMERICANS IN OUR INNOCENCE CONVINCED OURSELVES THAT THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE PROVIDED BOTH BLUEPRINT AND TOOLS FOR CONSTRUCTING A NEARLY PERFECT SOCIETY. THE CONVICTION THAT THIS NATION HAD FOUND THE ANSWER TO INJUSTICE

WAS EXPRESSED BY JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS IN HIS EPIC OF AMERICA AS FOLLOWS:

"THE AMERICAN DREAM THAT LURED TENS OF MILLIONS OF ALL NATIONS TO OUR SHORES IN THE PAST CENTURY HAS NOT BEEN A DREAM OF MERE MATERIAL PLENTY, THOUGH THAT HAS DOUBTLESS COUNTED HEAVILY. IT HAS BEEN MUCH MORE THAN THAT. IT HAS BEEN A DREAM OF BEING ABLE TO GROW TO FULLEST DEVELOPMENT AS MAN AND WOMAN, UNHAMPERED BY THE BARRIERS WHICH HAD SLOWLY BEEN ERECTED IN EARLIER CIVILIZATIONS, UNREPPRESSED BY SOCIAL ORDERS WHICH HAD DEVELOPED FOR THE BENEFIT OF CLASSES RATHER THAN FOR THE SIMPLE HUMAN BEING OF ANY AND EVERY CLASS. AND THAT DREAM HAS BEEN REALIZED MORE FULLY IN ACTUAL LIFE HERE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, THOUGH IMPERFECTLY EVEN AMONG OURSELVES."

VERNON PARRINGTON, WRITING ABOUT AMERICAN MOTIVE FORCES, PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS WHICH SCARCELY DIFFERS IN CONCLUSION FROM THAT OF ADAMS':

"AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR NATIONAL EXISTENCE TWO RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES CONTENDED FOR SUPERIORITY IN AMERICA: THE HUMANITARIAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT, BASED ON THE CONCEPTION OF HUMAN PERFECTABILITY AND POSTULATING AS ITS OBJECTIVE AN EQUALITARIAN DEMOCRACY IN WHICH THE POLITICAL STATE

SHOULD FUNCTION AS THE SERVANT TO THE COMMON WELL-BEING; AND THE ENGLISH PHILOSOPHY OF Laissez-faire."

PARRINGTON WENT ON TO SAY:

"IT IS, PERHAPS, NOT EXTREME TO INTERPRET THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF AMERICA SINCE 1970 AS LARGELY A STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE SPIRIT OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE CONSTITUTION, THE ONE PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH THE RIGHTS OF MAN, THE OTHER MORE PRACTICALLY CONCERNED WITH THE RIGHTS OF PROPERTY. THE HUMANITARIAN IDEALISM OF THE DECLARATION HAS ALWAYS ECHOED AS A BATTLE CRY IN THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO DREAM OF AN AMERICA DEDICATED TO DEMOCRATIC ENDS. IT CANNOT BE LONG IGNORED OR REPUDIATED; FOR SOONER OR LATER IT RETURNS TO PLAGUE THE COUNCILS OF PRACTICAL POLITICS. IT IS CONSTANTLY BREAKING OUT IN FRESH REVOLT."

EVEN PARRINGTON'S ASSERTION THAT PROPERTY RIGHTS WERE ELEVATED BY THE CONSTITUTION ABOVE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS WAS TO BE PROVED UNTRUE AND THE IDEALS OF THE DECLARATION APPEARED TO WIN IN THE ROOSEVELT AND WARREN SUPREME COURTS WHICH DECLARED HUMAN VALUES OF GREATER IMPORTANCE THAN PROPERTY RIGHTS, AND FOUND EQUALITY PROTECTED BY THAT DOCUMENT.

SO STRONGLY CONVINCED WERE WE OF OUR POLITICAL NOBILITY THAT WHEN WE ENTERED WORLD WAR I, PRESIDENT WILSON WAS ABLE TO JUSTIFY INTERVENTION IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

"NEUTRALITY IS NO LONGER FEASIBLE OR DESIRABLE WHEN THE PEACE OF THE WORLD IS INVOLVED AND THE FREEDOM OF ITS PEOPLES, AND THE MENACE TO THAT PEACE AND FREEDOM LIES IN THE EXISTENCE OF AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS BACKED BY ORGANIZED FORCE WHICH IS CONTROLLED WHOLLY BY THEIR WILL . . . THE WORLD MUST BE MADE SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY."

SIMILAR JUSTIFICATION WAS GIVEN, AND WE BELIEVED IT, AS WE ENTERED WORLD WAR II, THE KOREAN WAR, AND THE INDO-CHINA WAR.

WE BELIEVED, WE AMERICANS, AND I DO NOT THINK WE WERE AT ALL CYNICAL, THAT WE HAD FOUND THE ANSWER TO MANKIND'S YEARNING FOR EQUALITY AND THE GOOD LIFE.

IN OUR INNOCENCE, WE WERE SHOCKED WHEN WE LEARNED THAT OUR BEHAVIOR HURT OTHERS. GUNNAR MYNDAL, IN HIS STUDY OF THIRTY YEARS AGO, THE AMERICAN DILEMMA, REPORTED THE CONFUSION OF SOUTHERN WHITES WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PROFESSIONS OF LEGAL EQUALITY FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS AND THE REALITY OF RACIAL SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION, AND JUST TEN YEARS AGO, THE ENTIRE NATION REELED IN HORROR AT THE BOMBING OF LITTLE GIRLS IN A BIRMINGHAM CHURCH, AND AT THE USE OF FIREHOSES AND DOGS ON UNITED STATES CITIZENS.

WHEN WE ENACTED LAWS ELIMINATING LEGAL SUPPORT FOR THE MISTREATMENT OF BLACK PEOPLE, WE WERE SHOCKED TO DISCOVER THAT THE EVILS CREATED BY OUR PAST BEHAVIOR DID NOT DISAPPEAR OVERNIGHT.

EQUALITY PROMISED BY THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE SEEMED TO BECOME A REALITY AS UNEMPLOYMENT DECREASED, MORE PEOPLE WENT TO COLLEGE THAN DIDN'T, AND OUR WORLD SEEMED TO BE "SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY."

BUT THE AMERICAN DREAM DID NOT WORK FOR EVERYBODY. BLACK PEOPLE, RED PEOPLE, BROWN PEOPLE, POOR WHITE PEOPLE, WOMEN, SAID THAT EQUALITY IS A MEANINGLESS WORD FOR THEM BECAUSE THEIR EQUALITY IS AN EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD THE UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS, THE HEALTH NEED STATISTICS AND TO BE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STATUS TOTEM POLE.

THE QUESTION IS RAISED OF THE REALITY OF EQUALITY IN OUR TIME WHEN WE KNOW OF LACK OF JOB SATISFACTION IN MANY PEOPLE, THE ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE POLITICAL POWER, AND THE INADEQUACY OF THE INCOMES OF MANY OF THE WORKING POOR.

U.S. ACTIVITY ABROAD, INSTEAD OF BEING SEEN AS ACTIVITY TO "MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY" WAS ATTACKED AS SUPPORTING REPRESSIVE REGIMES SUCH AS THOSE IN GREECE, CAMBODIA, VIETNAM, SOUTH AFRICA AND PORTUGAL.

EVEN THOUGH THESE QUESTIONS WERE RAISED AND DEBATED, SOMETIMES IN THE STREETS WITH POLICEMEN'S TRUNCHEONS AND THE RIOTER'S MOLOTOV COCKTAIL, THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY HAVE

REFUSED TO FACE UP TO THE REALITY OF THE QUESTION OF WHETHER INDEED WE DO OR CAN OR WANT TO HAVE EQUALITY IN THIS COUNTRY AND WHAT THAT EQUALITY SHOULD BE. SIMILARLY, THE MAJORITY OF THIS COUNTRY HAS REFUSED TO FACE UP TO THE ISSUE OF WHETHER WE ARE TO BE A MORAL FORCE IN WORLD AFFAIRS, AND IF WE ARE TO BE, WHAT THE FORCE SHALL BE.

INSTEAD, WE HAVE LEADERSHIP THAT HAS SAID THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE LIKE CHILDREN. INSTEAD OF INSISTING UPON A DEBATE ON THE SUBJECT OF WHO AND WHAT WE ARE AS A NATION AFTER TWO WORLD WARS AND TWO ASIAN WARS, WE HAVE LEFT OUR WORLD ROLE IN THE HANDS OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOT EVEN REPORT TO OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES.

AFTER THREE CENTURIES OF BURYING OUR HEADS IN THE SAND ON THE QUESTION OF THE INCONSISTENCY OF OUR AMERICAN DREAM AND THE TREATMENT OF OUR MINORITY CITIZENS, WE SEEK TO AVOID A RATIONAL AND HUMANE DEBATE ABOUT HOW WE CORRECT THE FACT OF PAST INJUSTICE, AND PROVIDE ONLY OPPOSITION TO CHANGE.

IN EVERY PERIOD OF OUR HISTORY THERE HAVE BEEN CONFLICTS BETWEEN OUR PROFESSED GOALS OF HUMAN EQUALITY AND OUR SELFISH INDIVIDUAL NEEDS. IN EVERY PERIOD DURING THE LAST 197 YEARS WE HAVE CONDUCTED OUR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ON THE BASIS OF PERCEIVED SELF-INTEREST EVEN AS WE PROFESSED NOBLE GOALS.

IN ALL OF OUR HISTORY, RACE HAS BEEN A DIVISIVE FACT IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TODAY AND MOST OF OUR PRIOR HISTORY, IS THAT TODAY WE ARE WITHOUT INNOCENCE AND WE SEE STARKLY THE

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR GOALS OF EQUALITY AND THE GOOD LIFE ON ONE HAND, AND THE REALITY OF CONTINUING INEQUALITY AND INSECURITY ON THE OTHER.

WE KNOW.

WE KNOW THAT THE WORLD SEES US AS A FORCE FOR WAR, AND NOT AS A FORCE FOR PEACE. WE KNOW THAT WORKERS FEEL TRAPPED, AND BLACKS, BROWNS, REDS AND POOR WHITES FEEL UNEQUAL AND, AS THE UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES SHOW, ARE UNEQUAL. OUR GRANDPARENTS BELIEVED WILSON WHEN HE SAID THAT WE WOULD MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY, BUT WE CAN NEVER BELIEVE THAT PAPADOPOULIS AND THIEU PRESIDE OVER DEMOCRACIES: WE KNOW WE SUPPORT REPRESSIVE REGIMES.

AND AT HOME, WE KNOW THAT OUR LEADERS HAVE LIED TO US, HAVE PUT TAPS ON OUR TELEPHONE, HAVE BROKEN INTO OUR OFFICES, AND HAVE IGNORED THE LAW.

AND BECAUSE WE KNOW, WE ARE NO LONGER INNOCENT. WE SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTS DONE IN OUR NAME AND WE THE PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE.

SO LONG AS WE ACCEPT THE CONTINUATION OF CONDITIONS THAT RUN COUNTER TO OUR PROFESSED GOALS AS A POLITICAL COMMUNITY, WE BEAR THE GUILT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE VALUES THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS AGREED UNDERGIRDING OUR SYSTEM.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE STOPPED THE BOMBING IN CAMBODIA. WE MUST DECIDE, AS A PEOPLE, WHAT OUR ROLE IN THE WORLD SHOULD BE.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO STOP LYNCHING BLACK PEOPLE, OR IGNORING RED PEOPLE. WE MUST, AS A PEOPLE, DECIDE WHETHER WE WISH

TO PAY THE COST OF ELIMINATING IN THIS GENERATION, THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS IN MISTREATING NEGROES, INDIANS AND CHICANOS.

AND WE MUST ACT FIRMLY NOW THAT WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN LIED TO BY OUR POLITICAL LEADERS.

THAT KNOWLEDGE, PLACED CLEARLY BEFORE US BY PRESENT AND FORMER HIGH OFFICIALS OF OUR GOVERNMENT, DEPRIVES US ALL OF ANY RESORT TO A CLAIM OF INNOCENCE FOR OURSELVES. WHEN A FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT AS THE FORMER CHIEF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER FOR THIS NATION HE WAS PREPARED TO IGNORE THE LAW, HE HAS BY HIS ADMISSION DEPRIVED US OF ANY CLAIM FOR OURSELVES OF INNOCENCE ABOUT THE CORRUPTION OF AT LEAST SOME OF OUR LEADERSHIP.

UNLESS WE INSIST UPON KNOWING FULLY OF THE MISUSE OF POWER BY OUR LEADERS, WE WILL HAVE RATIFIED THE MISUSE, AND WE WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE.

AND LEST I BE ACCUSED OF PARTISANSHIP, LET ME SAY THAT IF, INDEED, THE RUMORS OF SIMILAR UNEXPOSED BEHAVIOR IN PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS ARE TRUE, LET THE TRUTH BE KNOWN, AND LET US MAKE A JUDGMENT ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED. IF CLAIMS THAT OTHER PRESIDENTS ALSO TAPPED THE WIRES OF NEWSPAPER MEN CAN BE SUBSTANTIATED, WE SHOULD HAVE THAT INFORMATION.

WE MUST HAVE THAT INFORMATION IN ORDER TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT WHETHER WE CONDONE SUCH BEHAVIOR, AND MORE IMPORTANT, WHETHER WE WILL PERMIT IT TO CONTINUE. IT MATTERS NOT TO ME, AND IT SHOULD NOT MATTER TO YOU, WHETHER EVIL IS COMMITTED BY DEMOCRATS OR REPUBLICANS. WHAT IS IMPORTANT, IS WHETHER WE THE PEOPLE APPROVE THE EVIL, EITHER BY ACTIVE ESPOUSAL OF IT, OR BY PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE.

WIRETAPPING, DIRTY TRICKS, DECEPTION, BRIBERY, AND MANIPULATION OF THE BODY POLITIC ARE REPREHENSIBLE ACTS REGARDLESS OF WHO COMMITS THEM.

BUT NOW THAT WE KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED, WE CAN NO LONGER BEHAVE LIKE INNOCENT CHILDREN. WE MUST ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ADULTHOOD AND MOVE TO EXAMINE CRITICALLY WHAT THERE IS WITHIN OUR SYSTEM AND WITHIN OURSELVES THAT HAS LED TO THE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST. INNOCENCE WAS CHARMING AND REFRESHING IN A YOUNG NATION, BUT NOW WE ARE A MATURE PEOPLE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF MATURITY, OF WHICH CORRUPTION IS BUT ONE.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY THAT THE CORRUPTION OF OUR LEADERSHIP IS NOW OVER AND THAT WE CAN MOVE FORWARD TO MORE IMPORTANT THINGS. IT IS NOT ENOUGH BECAUSE OUR VERY ABILITY TO REALIZE THE HOPES OF OUR NATIONAL YOUTH ARE IMPAIRED BY CYNICAL, CORRUPT LEADERSHIP THAT APPEARS TO BELIEVE NEITHER IN US NOR IN OUR DREAMS OF HONOUR AND EQUALITY.

IF THOSE WHO CLAIM THE DREAM A CHIMERA, AND THOSE WHO CLAIM OUR HONOR NON-EXISTENT, AND THOSE WHO SAY EQUALITY AND FREEDOM CANNOT EXIST TOGETHER ARE TO BE PROVEN WRONG, WE MUST END OUR CHILDLIKE RELIANCE UPON A FEW TO DETERMINE WHO AND WHAT WE ARE.

EACH OF US MUST DETERMINE WHETHER WE WISH TO HAVE AN EFFICIENT NATION RUN BY KNAVES AND LIARS, OR WHETHER INSTEAD WE WILL ACCEPT SOME INEFFICENCY IF NECESSARY TO SECURE A HONEST AND HONORABLE GOVERNMENT, AND WE MUST COMMUNICATE OUR DECISION TO OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES.

WE NOW KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US AS A NATION. WE
WILL BE FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED, NO MATTER HOW EVIL,
IF AFTER WE KNOW, WE ALLOW IT TO CONTINUE.

LIKE ADAM AND EVE, OUR DAYS IN THE EDEN OF A YOUNG AND
INNOCENT AMERICA HAVE BEEN ENDED.

BUT WITH THE END OF INNOCENCE, PERHAPS WE CAN TURN OUR
ATTENTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WISDOM.