

## ***Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?***

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Many of you know me and know that I have been an activist from birth. Born into a family of two college Professors, one of whom was a minister, who believed that it was both an American and a Christian's moral responsibility to make the world a better place than you found it.

I am a native Southerner, born in Arkansas, whose struggles with desegregation began with the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. I first met a person of color when I was six in our living room. I heard Dr. King preach when I was age 9. And I summoned the courage to ask the school principal to lower the flag to half mass the day after Dr. King was murdered in 1968. I was active in anti Viet Nam war protests in the South. While living in Louisiana and North Carolina, now as a Professor in my own right, I volunteered during the first wave of the AIDS epidemic. And I worked on rights for the LGBT community. We still have not achieved full equality in the U.S. You can be fired for being gay in many states. Women still do not have equal pay, or job opportunities.

What I would tell you about the South is that it is not homogenous. All Southern states are not identical. Progress is happening there, though, slower than other parts of the country. African Americans have often modeled for us how to have faith and carry on in the wake of prejudice, discrimination, and tragedy. The families of the victims of Mother Emmanuel Church forgave their loved ones murderers immediately after his apprehension. Joy Ann Reid an attorney, author and anchor of a MSNBC show, upon hearing some particularly distressing news from the Trump camp wrote on Twitter, "Jesus, take the wheel." Apart from asking for Jesus' help ---

### ***Where do we go from here?***

We've heard today about courageous individuals who were martyred after becoming involved in the struggle for voting rights, leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, in 1965. It feels as this Friday, on inauguration day, we will take a step backwards. The outcome of 2016 Presidential election shocked and surprised many. Some of us are still suffering from fear, stress and grief in the wake of the unexpected outcome: International business mogul and reality television star, Donald J. Trump, whose never done a lick of public/governmental service, will be inaugurated this Friday, January 20<sup>th</sup> as America's 45<sup>th</sup> President. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the best qualified person in modern history to seek the office of President, won the popular vote by almost 3 million vote while losing the Electoral College. People are sick because of this. Calls to suicide hotlines have increased; counselors, trauma chaplains have reported that the national response to this election is comparable to that of the response in the aftermath of 9/11.

Upon winning, Trump immediately began naming unqualified nominees to cabinet offices who would, if given the chance, turn back the clock to the 1950s by

dismantling the purpose and achievements of those agencies. More often than not, these individuals had connections to what has become known as the “**Alt Right**,” a movement aimed at mainstreaming the extreme right wing/Fundamentalist Christian agenda. One highly secretive group, reported by “Hate Watch” of the Southern Poverty Law Center, is the *Council for National Policy*, is explicitly anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant, anti-science, focused on instituting a fundamentalist agenda in the economic and education realms, consists of many who are neo Nazis, White supremacists, White nationalists and NeoConfederates.

Among the members are two of Trumps chief advisors, Stephan Bannon, formerly of Breitbart News, and Kelleyanne Conway, Trumps’ spokesperson. Robert Mercer, who is the founder of the group, was also a high dollar contributor to the Trump campaign. Another member, Betty DeVos’, Trump’s nominee for Secretary of Education (who has never taught a class in her life), is heir to the Amway fortune. She will advocate for private charter schools where traditional fundamentalist values can be taught. Soon after the election, this group met in Washington, D.C., and were taped saluting Trump as Hitler had been, with the words “Heil Trump.” Speaking as a native Southerner, seeing something like that makes me feel as if the Civil War had been fought over again and the South had won.

The shock we feel at seeing Trump elected is due in part that we underestimated the scope of his Russian connection. His fondness for Vladamir Putin is shared by members of his campaign, including Stephan Bannon (a self-described Leninist) who adopted the techniques of propaganda that include planting lies about Secretary Clinton in targeted precincts within days of the election. Everyday we are learning more about this, which may well have involved the activity of FBI Director Comey. It’s deeply troubling, and may well meet the standard of treason against our own government. So profound are these charges that Congressman John Lewis has described Trump’s Presidency as *illegitimate* and will not be attending Trump’s inauguration.

### **Where do we go from here?**

Opinions differ among our liberal leaders. In the immediate future, there is no single way to respond. Representative Lewis (and many members of the Black Caucus) are calling for boycotting the inauguration, and will devote much time in Congress blocking the Trump nominees and agenda. Others stress that the peaceful transfer of power is a cornerstone of our government and our constitution is stronger than any one person. And, we’ve rid ourselves of leaders who have acted in violation of our constitution before. For this reason, Hillary and Bill Clinton will be attending the inauguration. And Barack and Michelle Obama, who live by the standard of “**when they go low, we go high**,” will attend. But let there be no mistake. The Clintons, the Obamas, stand with Senator Sanders and Congressman Lewis and most Americans. For, ***we are now one movement united against a common threat.***

Take careful note of those who are not joining hands to work against the Trump agenda. Do you see Jill Stein in line? Do you see Gary Davis? You may learn as much about those who are not participating as those we are.

## **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Remember that the Right has been working for years planning and plotting the kind of coup that the 1%, the alt-right, pulled off with the help of the angry white working class and the Russian government. There was internal support from the U.S. Government., quite likely Director Comey of the FBI. Just as the Alt Right created a singular movement, so, too, must we, act as one, and begin now to protect the legacies of the Presidents – from Lincoln to Obama - who have fought for equality and justice for all.

### ***Where Do We Go From Here?***

1. We must recommit ourselves to the values of the first Civil Rights movement. These include the values of inclusion, compassion, nonviolence, tenacity and patience. During her campaign for the Presidency, Secretary Hillary Clinton's slogan, "Stronger Together," echoed these values. At every campaign stop, she called for love and kindness among America's citizens, in a way that recalled Dr. King's emphasis on agape love from the New Testament. She encouraged us to understand the anger of the opposition, to walk in their shoes. The slogan "Love Trumps Hate" was commonly used on social media. As a lifetime activist I can tell you that we will endure set backs, backlash, and defeats, but in the end, *Love Will Win*. Dr. King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that."
2. Secondly, we must educate ourselves about how change happens in a representative Democracy such as ours. Politics is about *power* and it always will be. Power is not a dirty word. Power is as necessary to do good as to do harm. Power is negotiated through compromise and we can influence those negotiations by making our voices heard. Working with our congressional delegation, writing, calling, faxing them. When they don't hear from us, they may assume that we don't care.

Most of all, they need our stories. Stories put a human face on legislation. Stories of those who had endured life-threatening illnesses like cancer with no money, only to not receive treatment because they'd gone bankrupt, helped pass the Affordable Care Act. Our own Senator Patty Murray spoke eloquently on the floor of the Senate and read the stories of our fellow Washingtonians that she had received. One little boy who had written to her on behalf of his mom was present at the signing of the Affordable Care Act. Recently, Larsen, Murray and Cantwell have asked us for more stories about what the Affordable Care Act has meant to people. It is important to know who our representatives are and not just come at them

when we want something. Send them handwritten cards and introduce yourself. Thank them for their service.

3. Moreover, remember that all politics is local. Practice those values – compassion, inclusivity, tenacity, at a local level. It takes practice, especially if you, like me, have a short fuse for ignorance and criticism. I don't like to lose. Study issues and get engaged. One way to do that was highlighted by our County Commissioner Helen Price Johnson who has encouraged people to apply for advisory boards at the local level. We can also help sponsor community forums where people who understand the issues can educate others. A good example of this locally is the work some have done to educate others about the Growlers and harm done by noise pollution. My Mother's work with desegregation began in 1960 in our living room when she took a chance and called together leaders from the African American Community to support four students who were desegregating the local state college.

C) We have local organizations for the Democratic Party, Republican Party, Progressives. Several churches collaborate for Greening Committees, for Peace Fellowships. If there is not a group that addresses a concern you have, call it together. Chances are you are not the only one.

D) Blog or Use Social Media to help inform about the issues and events that are happening locally and nationally.

4. Learn more about how change happens in our society at the government level. We are very fortunate in having two booklets created by a group called, Indivisible. This is a group made up of Congressional Staffers. You should commit both books to memory ***Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda***. These Congressional Staffers have written up best practices for getting Congress to listen (and your member of Congress in particular). Nobody is in a better position to see how Congress works and passes legislation than a staffer. Those are the people actually doing the work. There is a 2<sup>nd</sup> book ***Indivisible : A Group Leader's Toolkit***. I don't know if you want to be the leader or not, but everybody should know what the leader is suppose to do.
5. Knowledge is power; that is why people like to manipulate it so much. Stephan Bannon has made his living making up lies about people and publishing them through Breitbart news. Know how to spot false news and do not propagate it.. Within days before the election there was a purported news story that Hillary Clinton was part of a child pornography ring and that's why they sought to look on Anthony Weiner's computer. Seriously? Most Americans haven't known Hillary since they were 20 like I have so lies like this could make a difference in the election. Do not repeat a lie in writing or on social media or in the grocery store. Somebody's going to see it and repeat it as the truth. Look for multiple sources; trace a statement to its original source and look at its context.
6. *Know the difference between fact and opinion.* Donald Trump discussed the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 in Dallas. A fact can be

verified: JFK was assassinated in Dallas, TX on November 22, 1963. Trump went on to allege that Ted Cruz's father was part of the conspiracy to kill Kennedy. That's an opinion. Another example: 2016 was the warmest year in recorded history; that's a fact. An opinion would be, global warming can't be happening we've had a terrible, harsh winter this year.

7. Finally, working for change will change you. Look inside and learn more about yourself. Find your sources of strength whatever they maybe. And know that it is not about you. Check your ego at the door. I have worked for change for about 55 years. It took me a lot of growing to learn that it's about something so much bigger than one person.
8. Where do we go from here? If all of the goodness in this room rises to an even higher level of goodness, love and determination and organizes smartly in a manner shown to have made a succeeded, we can stop the misguided hatred in its tracks. As an activist, I have seen defeats and victories and deaths, and I still believe that someday we will get to the Promise Land that Dr. King spoke of. Dr. King said, "Nothing can stop the power of a determined people committed to make a difference."

Note: Dr. King published a book with the title, *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community* in 1967.