

“A Time for Anger, A Call to Action”

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To
Occidental College
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I am grateful to you for this opportunity and to President Prager for the hospitality of this evening, to Diana Akiyama, Director of the Office for Religious and Spiritual Life, whose idea it was to invite me and with whom you can have an accounting after I've left. And to the Lilly Endowment for funding the Values and Vocations project to encourage students at Occidental to explore how their beliefs and values shape their choices in life, how to make choices for meaningful work and how to make a contribution to the common good. It's a recognition of a unique venture: to demonstrate that the life of the mind and the longing of the spirit are mirror images of the human organism. I'm grateful to be here under their auspices.

I have come across the continent to talk to you about two subjects close to my heart. I care about them as a journalist, a citizen and a grandfather who looks at the pictures next to my computer of my five young grandchildren who do not have a vote, a lobbyist in Washington, or the means to contribute to a presidential candidate. If I don't act in their behalf, who will?

One of my obsessions is democracy, and there is no campus in the country more attuned than Occidental to what it will take to save democracy. Because of your record of activism for social justice, I know we agree that democracy is more than what we were taught in high school civics – more than the two-party system, the checks-and-balances, the debate over whether the Electoral College is a good idea. Those are important matters that warrant our attention, but democracy involves something more fundamental. I want to talk about what democracy bestows on us—the revolutionary idea that democracy is not just about the means of governance but the means of dignifying people so they become fully free to claim their moral and political agency. “I believe in democracy because it releases the energies of every human being” – those are the words of our 28th president, Woodrow Wilson.

I've been spending time with Woodrow Wilson and others of his era because my colleagues and I are producing a documentary series on the momentous struggles that gripped America a century or so years ago at the birth of modern politics. Woodrow Wilson clearly understood the nature of power. In his now-forgotten political testament called *The New Freedom*, Wilson described his reformism in plain English no one could fail to understand: “The laws of this country do not prevent the strong from crushing the weak.” He wrote: “Don't deceive yourselves for a moment as to the power of great interests which now dominate our development... There are men in this country big enough to own the government of the United States. They are going to own it if they

can.” And he warned: “There is no salvation in the pitiful condescensions of industrial masters...prosperity guaranteed by trustees has no prospect of endurance.”

Now Wilson took his stand at the center of power – the presidency itself – and from his stand came progressive income taxation, the federal estate tax, tariff reform, the challenge to great monopolies and trusts, and, most important, a resolute spirit “to deal with the new and subtle tyrannies according to their deserts.”

How we need that spirit today! When Woodrow Wilson spoke of democracy releasing the energies of every human being, he was declaring that we cannot leave our destiny to politicians, elites, and experts; either we take democracy into our own hands, or others will take democracy from us.

We do not have much time. Our political system is melting down, right here where you live.

A recent poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found that only 20% of voters last November believe your state will be a better place to live in the year 2025; 51% say it will be worse. Another poll by the New American Foundation – summed up in an article by Steven Hill in the January 28th *San Francisco Chronicle* – found that for the first time in modern California history, a majority of adults are not registered with either of the two major parties. Furthermore, writes Hill, “There is a widening breach between most of the 39 million people residing in California and the fewer than 9 million who actually vote.” Here we are getting to the heart of the crisis today – the great divide that has opened in American life.

According to that New American Foundation study, frequent voters [in California] tend to be 45 and older, have household incomes of \$60,000 or more, are homeowners, and have college degrees. In contrast, the 12 million nonvoters (7 million of whom are eligible to vote but are not registered) tend to be younger than 45, rent instead of own, have not been to College, and have incomes less than \$60,000.

In other words, “Considering that California often has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the nation – in some elections only a little more than 1/3 of eligible voters participate – a small group of frequent voters, who are richer, whiter, and older than their nonvoting neighbors, form the majority that decides which candidates win and which ballot measures pass.” The author of that report (Mark Baldassare) concludes: “Only about 15% of adult people make the decisions and that 15% doesn’t look much like California overall.”

We should not be surprised by the consequences: “Two Californias have emerged. One that votes and one that does not. Both sides inhabit the same state and must share the same resources, but only one side is electing the political leaders who divide up the pie.”

You’ve got a big problem here. But don’t feel alone. Across the country our 18th political system is failing to deal with basic realities. Despite Thomas Jefferson’s counsel

that we would need a revolution every 25 years to enable our governance to serve new generations, our structure – practically deified for 225 years – has essentially stayed the same while science and technology have raced ahead. A young writer I know, named Jan Frel, one of the most thoughtful practitioners of the emerging world of Web journalism, wrote me the other day to say: “We’ve gone way past ourselves. I see the unfathomable numbers in the national debt and deficit, and the way that the Federal government was physically unable to respond to Hurricane Katrina. I look at Iraq; where 50% of the question is how to get out, and the other 50% is how did so few people have the power to start the invasion in the first place. If the Republic were functioning, they would have never had that power.”

Yet the inertia of the political process seems virtually unstoppable. Frel reminds me that the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee can shepherd a \$2.8 trillion dollar budget through the Senate and then admit: “It’s hard to understand what a trillion is. I don’t know what it is.” Is it fair to expect anyone to understand what a trillion is, my young friend asks, or how to behave with it in any democratic fashion?” He goes on: “But the political system and culture are forcing 535 members of Congress and a President who are often thousands of miles away from their 300 million constituents to do so. It is frightening to watch the American media culture from progressive to hard right being totally sold on the idea of one President for 300 million people, as though the Presidency is still fit to human scale. I’m at a point where the idea of a political savior in the guise of a Presidential candidate or congressional majority sounds downright scary, and at the same time, with very few exceptions, the writers and journalists across the slate are completely sold on it.”

Our political system is promiscuous as well as primitive. The first modern fundraiser in American politics – Mark Hanna, who shook down the corporations to make William McKinley President of the United States in 1896 – once said there are two important things in politics. “One is money, and I can’t remember the other one.” Because our system feeds on campaign contributions, the powerful and the privileged shape it to their will. Only 12% of American households had incomes over \$100,000 in 2000, but they made up 95% of the substantial donors to campaigns and have been the big winners in Washington ever since.

I saw early on the consequences of political and social inequality. I got my first job in journalism at the age of 16. I quickly had one of those strokes of luck that can determine a career. Some of the old timers were on vacation or out sick and I was assigned to cover what came to be known as the ‘Housewives Rebellion.’ Fifteen women in my home town decided not to pay the social security withholding tax for their domestic workers. They argued that social security was unconstitutional, that imposing it was taxation without representation, and that – here’s my favorite part – “requiring us to collect (the tax) is no different from requiring us to collect the garbage.”

They hired themselves a lawyer – none other than Martin Dies, the former Congressman best known, or worst known, for his work as head of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 30s and 40s. He was no more effective at defending rebellious

women than he had been protecting against Communist subversives, and eventually the women wound up holding their noses and paying the tax. The stories I wrote for my local paper were picked up and moved on by the Associated Press wire to Newspapers all over the country. One day, the managing editor called me over and pointed to the AP ticker beside his desk. Moving across the wire was a notice citing one “Bill Moyers” and the News Messenger for the reporting we had done on the rebellion.

That hooked me. In one way or another – after a detour through seminary and then into politics and government for a spell – I’ve been covering politics ever since.

By “politics” I mean when people get together to influence government, change their own lives, and change society. Sometimes those people are powerful corporate lobby groups like the drug companies and the oil industry, and sometimes they are ordinary people fighting to protect their communities from toxic chemicals, workers fighting for a living wage, or college students organizing to put an end to sweatshops.

Those women in Marshall, Texas – who didn’t want to pay Social Security taxes for their maids – were not bad people. They were regulars at church, their children were my friends, many of them were active in community affairs, and their husbands were pillars of the business and professional class in town. They were respectable and upstanding citizens all.

So it took me awhile to figure out what had brought on that spasm of reactionary rebellion. It came to me one day, much later. They simply couldn’t see beyond their own prerogatives. Fiercely loyal to their families, to their clubs, charities, and congregations – fiercely loyal, in other words, to their own kind – they narrowly defined membership in democracy to include only people like them. The women who washed and ironed their laundry, wiped their children’s bottoms, made their husbands’ beds, and cooked their families meals – these women, too, would grow old and frail, sick and decrepit, lose their husbands and face the ravages of time alone, with nothing to show from their years of labor but the creases in their brow and the knots on their knuckles.

In one way or another, this is the oldest story in America: the struggle to determine whether “We, the People” is a spiritual idea embedded in a political reality – one nation, indivisible – or merely a charade masquerading as piety and manipulated by the powerful and privileged to sustain their own way of life at the expense of others.

We seem to be holding our breath today, trying to decide what kind of country we want to be. But in this state of suspension, powerful interests are making off with the booty. They remind me of the card shark in Texas who said to his competitor in the poker game: “Now play the cards fairly Reuben. I know what I dealt you.”

For years now a small fraction of American households have been garnering a larger and larger concentration of wealth and income, while large corporations and financial institutions have obtained unprecedented power over who wins and who loses. Inequality

in America is greater than it's been in 50 years. In 1960 the gap in terms of wealth between the top 20% and the bottom 20% was 30 fold. Today it's more than 75 fold.

Such concentrations of wealth would be far less of an issue if the rest of society were benefiting proportionally. But that is not the case. Throughout our industrial history incomes grew at 30% to 50% or more every quarter, and in the quarter century after WWII, gains reached more than 100% for all income categories. Since the late 1970s, only the top 1% of households increased their income by 100%.

Once upon a time, according to Isabel Sawhill and Sara McLanahan in *The Future of Children*, the American ideal of classless society was 'one in which all children have roughly equal chance of success regardless of the economic status of the family into which they were born. That's changing fast. The economist Jeffrey Madrick writes that just a couple of decades ago, only 20% of one's future income was determined by the income of one's father. New research suggests that today 60% of a son's income is determined by the level of his father's income. In other words, children no longer have a roughly equal chance of success regardless of the economic status of the family into which they are born. Their chances of success are greatly improved if they are born on third base and their father has been tipping the umpire.

As all of you know, a college education today is practically a necessity if you are to hold your own, much less climb the next rung. More than 40% of all new jobs now require a college degree. There are real world consequences to this, and Madrick drives them home. Since the 1970s, median wages of men with college degrees have risen about 14%. But median wages for high school graduates have fallen about 15%. Not surprisingly, nearly 24% of American workers with only a high school diploma have no health insurance, compared with less than 10% of those with college degrees.

Such statistics can bring glaze to the eyes, but Oscar Wilde once said that it is the mark of truly educated people to be deeply moved by statistics. All of you are educated, and I know you can envision the stress these economic realities are putting on working people and on family life. As incomes have stagnated, higher education, health care, public transportation, drugs, housing and cars have risen faster in price than typical family incomes, so that life, says Jeffrey Madrick, "has grown neither calm nor secure for most Americans, by any means."

Let me tell you about the Stanleys and the Neumanns, two families who live in Milwaukee. One is black, the other white. The breadwinners in both were laid off in the first wave of downsizing in 1991 as corporations began moving jobs out of the city and then out of the country. In a documentary series my colleagues and I chronicled their efforts over the next decade to cope with the wrenching changes in their lives and to find a place for themselves in the new global economy. They're the kind of Americans my mother would have called "the salt of the earth". They love their kids, care about their communities, go to church every Sunday, and work hard all week.

To make ends meet after the layoffs, both mothers took full-time jobs. Both fathers became seriously ill. When one father had to stay in the hospital two months the family went \$30,000 in debt because they didn't have adequate health care. We were there with our cameras when the bank started to foreclose on the modest home of one family that couldn't make mortgage payments. Like millions of Americans, the Stanleys and the Neumanns were playing by the rules and still getting stiffed. By the end of the decade they were running harder but slipping further behind, and the gap between them and prosperous America was widening.

What turns their personal tragedy into a political travesty is that while they are indeed patriotic, they no longer believe they matter to the people who run the country. They simply do not think their concerns will ever be addressed by the political, corporate, and media elites who make up our dominant class. They are not cynical, because they are deeply religious people with no capacity for cynicism, but they know the system is rigged against them.

"Things have reached such a state of affairs," the journalist George Orwell once wrote, "that the first duty of every intelligent person is to pay attention to the obvious." The editors of *The Economist* have done just that. The pro-business magazine considered by many to be the most influential defender of capitalism on the newsstand, produced a sobering analysis of what is happening to the old notion that any American child can get to the top. A growing body of evidence – some of it I have already cited – led the editors to conclude that with "income inequality growing to levels not seen since the Gilded Age and social mobility falling behind, the United States risks calcifying into a European-style class-based society." The editors point to an "education system increasingly stratified by social class" in which poor children "attend schools with fewer resources than those of their richer contemporaries" and great universities that are "increasingly reinforcing rather than reducing these educational inequalities." They conclude that America's great companies have made it harder than ever "for people to start at the bottom and rise up the company hierarchies by dint of hard work and self-improvement."

It is eerie to read assessments like that and then read the anthropologist Jared Diamond's book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail*. He describes an America society in which elites cocoon themselves "in gated communities, guarded by private security guards, and filled with people who drink bottled water, depend on private pensions, and send their children to private schools." Gradually, they lose the motivation "to support the police force, the municipal water supply, Social Security, and public schools." Any society contains a built-in blueprint for failure, warns Jared Diamond, if elites insulate themselves from the consequences of their own actions.

So it is that in a study of its own, The American Political Science Association found that "increasing inequalities threaten the American ideal of equal citizenship and that progress toward real democracy may have stalled in this country and even reversed."

This is a marked turn of events for a country whose mythology embraces "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as part of our creed. America was not supposed to be a

country of “winner take all.” Through our system of checks and balances we were going to maintain a healthy equilibrium in how power works – and for whom. Because equitable access to public resources is the lifeblood of any democracy, we made primary schooling free to all. Because everyone deserves a second chance, debtors, especially the relatively poor, were protected by state laws against their rich creditors. Government encouraged Americans to own their own piece of land, and even supported squatters’ rights. In my time, the hope of equal opportunity became reality for millions of us. Although my parents were knocked down and almost out by the Great Depression, and were poor all their lives, my brother and I went to good public schools. The GI Bill made it possible for him to go to college. When I bought my first car with a loan of \$450 I drove to a public school on a public highway and stopped to rest in a public park. America as a shared project was becoming the engine of our national experience.

Not now. Beginning a quarter of a century ago a movement of corporate, political, and religious fundamentalists gained ascendancy over politics and made inequality their goal. They launched a crusade to dismantle the political institutions, the legal and statutory canons, and the intellectual and cultural frameworks that have held private power. And they had the money to back up their ambition.

Let me read you something:

When powerful interests shower Washington with millions in campaign contributions, they often get what they want. But it is ordinary citizens and firms that pay the price and most of them never see it coming. This is what happens if you don’t contribute to their campaigns or spend generously on lobbying. You pick up a disproportionate share of America’s tax bill. You pay higher prices for a broad range of products from peanuts to prescriptions. You pay taxes that others in a similar situation have been excused from paying. You’re compelled to abide by laws while others are granted immunity from them. You must pay debts that you incur while others do not. You’re barred from writing off on your tax returns some of the money spent on necessities while others deduct the cost of their entertainment. You must run your business by one set of rules, while the government creates another set for your competitors. In contrast, the fortunate few who contribute to the right politicians and hire the right lobbyists enjoy all the benefits of their special status. Make a bad business deal; the government bails them out. If they want to hire workers at below market wages, the government provides the means to do so. If they want more time to pay their debts, the government gives them an extension. If they want immunity from certain laws, the government gives it. If they want to ignore rules their competition must comply with, the government gives its approval. If they want to kill legislation that is intended for the public, it gets killed.

I’m not quoting from Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* or Mao’s *Little Red Book*. I’m quoting *Time Magazine*. From the heart of America’s media establishment comes the judgment that America now has “government for the few at the expense of the many.”

We are talking about nothing less than a class war declared a generation ago, in a powerful polemic by the wealthy right-winger, William Simon, who had been Richard Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury. In it he declared that "funds generated by business...must rush by the multimillions" to conservative causes. The trumpet was sounded for the financial and business class to take back the power and privileges they had lost as a result of the Great Depression and the New Deal. They got the message and were soon waging a well-orchestrated, lavishly-financed movement. *Business Week* put it bluntly: "Some people will obviously have to do with less....It will be a bitter pill for many Americans to swallow the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more." The long-range strategy was to cut workforces and their wages, scour the globe in search of cheap labor, trash the social contract and the safety net that was supposed to protect people from hardships beyond their control, deny ordinary citizens the power to sue rich corporations for malfeasance and malpractice, and eliminate the ability of government to restrain what editorialists for the *Wall Street Journal* admiringly call "the animal spirits of business."

Looking backwards, it all seems so clear that we wonder how we could have ignored the warning signs at the time. What has been happening to working people is not the result of Adam Smith's invisible hand but the direct consequence of corporate activism, intellectual propaganda, the rise of a religious literalism opposed to any civil and human right that threaten its paternalism, and a string of political decisions favoring the interests of wealthy elites who bought the political system right out from under us.

To create the intellectual framework for this revolution in public policy, they funded conservative think tanks that churned out study after study advocating their agenda.

To put muscle behind these ideas, they created a formidable political machine. One of the few journalists to cover the issues of class, Thomas Edsall of the *Washington Post*, reported that "During the 1970s, business refined its ability to act as a class, submerging competitive instincts in favor of joint, cooperate action in the legislative area." Big business political action committees flooded the political arena with a deluge of dollars. And they built alliances with the religious right – Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition – who gleefully contrived a cultural holy war that became a smokescreen behind which the economic assault on the middle and working classes would occur.

From land, water, and other resources, to media and the broadcast and digital spectrums, to scientific discovery and medial breakthroughs, a broad range of America's public resources have been undergoing a powerful shift toward elite control, contributing substantially to those economic pressures on ordinary Americans that "deeply affect household stability, family dynamics, social mobility, political participation and civic life."

What's to be done?

The only answer to organized money is organized people.

Again:

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And again:

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I came to Occidental because your campus has a reputation for believing in a political system where ordinary people have a voice in making the decisions that shape their lives, not just at the ballot box every two or four years in November, but in their workplaces, their neighborhoods and communities, and on their college campuses. In a real democracy, ordinary people at every level hold their elected officials accountable for the big decisions, about whether or not to go to war and put young men and women in harm's way, about the pollution of the environment, global warming, and the health and safety of our workplaces, our communities, our food and our air and our water, the quality of our public schools, and the distribution of economic resources. It's the spirit of fighting back throughout American history that brought an end to sweatshops, won the eight-hour working day and a minimum wage, delivered suffrage to women and blacks from slavery, inspired the Gay Rights movement, the consumer and environmental movements, and more recently stopped Congress from enacting repressive legislation against immigrants.

I believe a new wave of social reform is about to break across America. We see it in the struggle for a 'living wage' for America's working people. Last November, voters in six states approved ballot measures to raise their states' minimum wage above the federal level; 28 states now have such laws. Since 1994, more than 100 cities have passed local living wage laws that require employers who do business with the government – who get taxpayer subsidies, in other words – to pay workers enough to lift their families out of poverty.

Los Angeles has led the way, passing one of the nation's strongest 'living wage' laws in 1997. And just the other day the LA City Council voted to extend that "living wage" law to the thirty-five hundred hotel workers around the Los Angeles Airport – the first living wage law in the country to target a specific industry and a specific geographic area. But it took last fall's march down Century Boulevard – organized people! – to finally bring it about and it took the arrest of hundreds of college students, including several dozen from Occidental.

The great abolitionist Frederick Douglass said that "if there is no struggle, there is no progress." Those who profess freedom, yet fail to act – they are "men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning, they want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters...power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them."

What America needs is a broad bi-partisan movement for democracy. It's happened before: In 1800, with the Jeffersonian Democrats; in 1860, with Radical Republicans; in 1892, with the Populists; in 1912, with Bull Moose Progressives; in 1932, with the New Deal; in 1964, with Civil Rights activists – each moment a breaking point after long, hard struggles, each with small beginnings in transcendent faith.

Faith! That's the other subject close to my heart that I have come talk about. Almost every great social movement in America has contained a flame of faith at its core – the belief that all human beings bear traces of the divine spark, however defined. I myself believe that within the religious quest – in the deeper realm of spirituality that may well be the primal origin of all religion – lies what Gregg Easterbrook calls “an essential aspect of the human prospect.” It is here we wrestle with questions of life and purpose, with the meaning of loss, yearning and hope, above all of love.

I am grateful to have first been exposed to those qualities in my own Christian tradition. T.S. Eliot believed that “no man [or woman] has ever climbed to the higher stages of the spiritual life who has not been a believer in a particular religion, or at least a particular philosophy.” As we dig deeper into our own religion, we are likely to break through to someone else digging deeper toward us from their own tradition, and on some metaphysical level, we converge, like the images inside a kaleidoscope, into new patterns of meaning that illuminate our own journey.

For most of our history this country's religious discourse was dominated by white male Protestants of a culturally conservative European heritage – people like me. Dissenting voices of America, alternative visions of faith, or race, of women, rarely reached the mainstream. The cartoonist Jeff McNally summed it up with two weirdoes talking in a California diner. One weirdo says to the other. “Have you ever delved into the mysteries of Eastern Religion?” And the second weirdo answers: “Yes, I was once a Methodist in Philadelphia.” Once upon a time that was about the extent of our exposure to the varieties of Religious experience. No longer. Our nation is being re-created right before our eyes, with mosques and Hindu Temples, Sikh communities and Buddhist retreat centers. And we all have so much to teach each other. Buddhists can teach us about the delight of contemplation and ‘the infinite within.’ From Muslims we can learn about the nature of surrender; from Jews, the power of the prophetic conscience; from Hindus, the “realms of gold” hidden in the depths of our hearts,” from Confucians the empathy necessary to sustain the fragile web of civilization. Nothing I take from these traditions has come at the expense of the Christian story. I respect that story – my story –even more for having come to see that all the great religious grapple with things that matter, although each may come out at a different place; that each arises from within and experiences a lived human experience; and each and every one of them offers a unique insight into human nature. I reject the notion that faith is acquired in the same way one chooses a meal in a cafeteria, but I confess there is something liberating about no longer being quite so deaf to what others have to report from their experience.

So let me share with you what I treasure most about the faith that has informed my journey. You will find it in the New Testament, in the gospel of Matthew, where the

story of Jesus of Nazareth unfolds chapter by chapter: The birth at Bethlehem. The baptism in the River Jordan. The temptation in the wilderness. The Sermon on the Mount. The healing of the sick and the feeding of the hungry. The Parables. The calling of the Disciples. The journey to Jerusalem. And always, embedded like pearls throughout the story, the teachings of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation:

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

Whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also...and whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer our gift.

Judge not, lest ye be judged.

In these pages we are in the presence of one who clearly understands the power of love, mercy, and kindness – the ‘gentle Jesus’ so familiar in art, song, and Sunday School.

But then the tale turns. Jesus’ demeanor changes; the tone and temper of the narrative shift, and the Prince of Peace becomes a disturber of the peace:

Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers...and he said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves.’”

His message grew more threatening, amid growing crowds right on the Temple grounds. In his parable of the wicked tenants, he predicted the imminent destruction of the Jerusalem elites, setting in motion the events that led to his crucifixion a short time later.

No cheek turned there. No second mile traveled. On the contrary, Jesus grows angry. He passes judgment. His message becomes more threatening. And he takes action.

Over the past few years as we witnessed the growing concentration of wealth and privilege in our country, prophetic religion lost its voice, drowned out by the corporate, political, and religious right who hijacked Jesus.

That’s right: They hijacked Jesus. The very Jesus who stood in Nazareth and proclaimed, “The Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor” – this Jesus, hijacked by a philosophy of greed. The very Jesus who fed 5000 hungry people – and not just those in the skyboxes; the very Jesus who offered kindness to the prostitute and hospitality to the outcast; who raised the status of women and treated even the hated tax collector as a citizen of the Kingdom. The indignant Jesus who drove the money changers from the temple – this Jesus was

hijacked and turned from a friend of the dispossessed into a guardian of privilege, the ally of oil barons, banking tycoons, media moguls and weapons builders.

Yet it was this same Jesus who inspired a Methodist ship-caulker named Edward Rogers to crusade across New England for an eight hour work day; called Frances William to rise up against the sweatshop; sent Dorothy Day to march alongside striking auto workers in Michigan, fishermen and textile workers in Massachusetts, brewery workers in New York, and marble cutters in Vermont; who roused E.B. McKinney and Owen Whitfield to stand against a Mississippi oligarchy that held sharecroppers in servitude, challenged a young priest named John Ryan to champion child labor laws a decade before the New Deal, and summoned Martin Luther King to Memphis to join sanitation workers in their struggle for a decent wage.

This Jesus was there on Century Boulevard last September, speaking Spanish. And it is this resurrected Jesus, in the company of the morally indignant of every faith, who will be there wherever Americans are angry enough to rise up and drive the money changers from the temples of democracy.

To you students at Occidental, let me say: I have been a journalist too long to look at the world through rose-colored glasses. I believe the only way to be in the world is to see it as it really is and then to take it on despite the frightening things you see. The Italian philosopher Gramsci spoke of the “the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will.” With this philosophy your generation can bring about the Third American Revolution. The first won independence from the Crown. The second won equal rights for women and for the sons and daughters of slavery. This third – the revolution of the 21st Century – will bring about a democracy that leaves no one out. The simple truth is we cannot build a political society or a nation across the vast divides that mark our country today. We must bridge that divide and make society whole, sharing the fruits of freedom and prosperity with the least among us. I have crossed the continent to tell you the Dream is not done, the work is not over, and your time has come to take it on.