

DORIS “GRANNY D” HADDOCK

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Thank you,

We honor certain people in history not only for what they did during their turbulent lives, but also for what they inspire us to do today, and for the advice they can give us in their writings and in our imaginations.

It might be wise to bring back in these present difficult times such heroes. So let us bring Fighting Bob LaFollette in the room, here and now. While we are sending invitations, let us also ask Martin Luther King and Abe Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and maybe Sam Adams, if he will bring the beverages. Let Ben Franklin in, but watch out for him, ladies. Chief Joseph, Cesar Chavez -- let's invite them back, and let Fighting Bob LaFollette lead them in.

If they asked us to update them on our political situation, what a meeting we would have! Would they be angry with us for letting things go so far?

So far that we now have elections as crooked as any backcountry dictatorship.

So far that our Congress no longer represents the people, but instead represents the corporations and the wealthy elite who fund their reelection campaigns and hire their spouses and friends.

So far that the great middle class is dissolving, and the great divide between rich and poor once again widens and undermines all our progress and erodes the only soil democracy can ever grow in.

So far that the natural order of the very planet is damaged, and our coasts, our cities, our crops, our water, and the living systems that we rely upon are at grave risk.

So far that the scramble by corporations for resources, and the failure to develop sustainable systems, has set the people of the earth against each other in warfare in a time when weapons of mass killing may be obtained by anyone.

So far that our leaders have removed our very jobs and our livelihoods from our land, so that the wealthy may prosper further.

So far that our newspapers are now owned by the corporations, and so far that only millionaires have the ability to run for elections -- and, even then, the votes of the people are not fairly counted.

So far that our culture has embraced cruelty as entertainment in countless television shows where real people are humiliated, and so far that our country now tortures people and that this torture is orchestrated from the highest office in the land.

Would the esteemed heroes of our past not be a little surprised that we have let things go so far? That we have not made great progress in the years since their day? That we have not called upon them sooner before things got so out of hand?

“You should have called,” Tom Paine might grouse.

I can see Sam Adams squirming back there as we make our report. He really was the guiding spirit of the American Revolution, you know, and I think he would wonder what kind of cowards we must be.

He might offer to send us a copy of a document he thinks might be of interest to us. It was a declaration they drafted back in their day. “Yes, we say, we have it in a safe room in Washington. We know it well.”

“Really?” he might reply. “Have you read it lately? -- particularly the second paragraph, that claims the right of the people to change governments when the old governments no longer represent them and protect their interests.

Yes, Sam, we have read it. It goes on to say that such changes should not be made lightly, that there is much to say for maintaining a settled order and its peace. It says that changes should only be made in extreme instances, as when a long string of abuses makes clear that a change is unavoidable.

But then, perhaps we have arrived at that point.

My friends, look around. Think ahead. What are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? A healthy democracy? A strong and growing middle class? Peace and justice in the world that makes us all safer every day? A sustainable way of living that protects the earth upon which our grandchildren must depend for every breath, every drink of water, every bit of food? Can we rest comfortably that things are in order? Have we done our jobs? Have we engaged our courage and our intelligence to move America and the world in good directions?

Or has our comfortable cowardice doomed them to a world where they will suffer great catastrophes, and where the growing hunt for scapegoats launches endless witch hunts, witch hunts that torture the poor, those of certain religions, certain genders, certain sexual orientations? Will they curse us when their great cities, their Venice, their Amsterdam, their Manhattan, are taken by the deluge we allowed?

I have worked hard on some issues, most especially election reform – the removal of big money from campaigns. We have made some progress in a few states, and I will keep at it. But sometimes I see myself carving a useless canoe against the deluge. The forces

rise up against us now. So what will we do? There seems no time remaining for modest action.

I can see Sam Adams get up and tell us that it is simple enough to set things straight. Organize, educate, prepare to create a new order, based upon our higher principles. Someone among us informs him, however, that there may not be enough of us to do much, so many of the people are asleep, or caught up in angry lies sold to them, or too worried about surviving the month to think of the long future. We may not be many enough, we explain. There is an illness abroad in the people, someone might add.

Even if that were not so, how hard it would be for us to admit to ourselves that this great nation, this long experiment in human fairness and equality, had run its course, had come to its conclusion? Are we even capable of that hard thought?

I can see the heroes of our history standing to inquire: “Is there not something you can do to preserve the nation we worked so hard to improve? Can it not be changed in ways, here and there, that will change its course back to a government of its people?”

Can we see Mr. Lincoln, sad, but thinking hard for us? His Civil War, a struggle between those who would be free to exploit and those who would be free of exploitation, never quite ended, and he sees that now. He sees that the rise of the corporations, which grew as his war organized the industrial muscle of the nation, became the monsters he worried they might.

Restore the Republic; is it possible? Restore it not as it ever was for it has always been motion itself, improvement itself, and imperfection itself. But, restore the vision, the dream of the Republic – of how people might wisely govern themselves and provide for future generations. How might we do that? How might we buy time for the awakened generation now rising in this nation and the world?

How do we avoid wrong steps that might make things worse, for example by moving with violence and anger instead of intelligence and love? I am happy to see that Martin Luther King, Jr. has brought his good friend with him to this room. Mr. Gandhi. They seem quite serene, compared to the others, who are understandably upset.

I dare not put words in their mouths, but just seeing them here reminds us of what they did and how they did it. Mr. Gandhi taught Reverend King that there are five steps to follow if we would change the order of things for the better.

First, he said we must know the truth of a situation. Study it. Bring in the experts. Understand the problem. Well, we have done that. We know how Congress has turned against the people. We know what is being done to the planet. We know what is happening with our elections and our once-vigilant press. We have the facts.

Second, he said we must make our reasonable demands to those who have the power to correct the problems. We have done that. I have walked many miles myself in that work.

Third, we must engage the consciousness of the entire community, so that the struggle becomes a wide social discussion and concern, touching itself against the higher values of civilization. Have we done that? We are trying. God knows we send out enough e-mail – though most of it is to each other, and we have much to do to continue the awakening of the people.

Fourth, we must demonstrate the moral importance of the issue by sacrificing our own comfort, safety, and reputations. Gandhi suffered baton blows. King did, as well. They put themselves physically in the way of injustice, so that the moral bankruptcy of the diseased order would be plain for all to see. King and Gandhi understood the fact that, if sufficient sacrifice is applied, defeat is impossible.

That is why the fifth step is to accept victory graciously, allowing everyone to save face and continue as brothers and sisters.

We are in the time of the fourth step. We are in a time when the Republic must be restored – not the past condition of the Republic, as I have said, but the path of the Republic, the common dream of the Republic that is the essence of America.

We must restore honestly-counted elections, and do whatever in love and peace we can do for that.

We must drag the moneychangers out of our election campaigns by instituting free advertising and public funding of our elections in every state and at the federal level.

We must morally indict, quite publicly, all public officials who represent not those who elect them, but those who pay for their votes. This massive conflict of interest must cause us now to interrupt their slick speeches and slimy hearings with the dollar and cent facts of their conflicts. Call them out and take the consequences.

We must, with love, with non-violence and courage, stop the great polluters of our air and water so that solar and other sustainable sources of energy can become the least painful option for those who would operate and invest in power facilities. We must stand in the way of this abuse of our children's future with our bodies.

We must look at our own ways of living and understand that the larger problems of our age are but the concentrated effects of what we do individually. We must change. We must change. We need not move into a life of harsh simplicity, for the natural world and the local community and its economy can be a grander banquet than any provided ready-made by the corporations that now sell our lives to us ready-made, at a cost to the future we must no longer pay.

Finally, we will need leadership. The heroes of our past we thank. They fade now from the room and here we are, you and I, and among us we must find leaders, make leaders, follow leaders into this new and beautiful time. Don't look to the e-mail generals and

bloggers. Don't look to the ego-driven political candidates; look to the real leaders: labor leaders, organizers of the poor, student movement leaders. In your work, in your organizing, help them help the poor to survive, to be respected, and the poor will help you to move the nation.

What is our alternative? Are we fruit flies on the Titanic, powerless and doomed, but happy in the ship's scraps? Or are we Americans? Is Mr. Lincoln yet standing outside, not quite willing to go until he knows his Union is back on track, that it has found people of courage?

It is time to restore the Republic – the dream – the future. We must set it back in motion for our children's children, as our legacy to them.

Are you brave enough for it? Are you ready to make your meaningful contribution? Your sacrifice? Are you thrilled to think that we are no less than the heroes whom we have summoned here for advice and courage, and that our adventure will require as much from us as theirs did from them?

Move your concerns to action now. The time has come. Do it with love, with intelligence, with careful and, above all, wise leadership. But do not delay.

Thank you.