

Lincoln's Gettysburg (and 2nd Inaugural) Address Reimagined

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Four score and seven years ago our fathers and mothers brought forth on this continent the completion of the first full year of what came to be known as the Great Depression.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, - an economic civil war characterized by total dominance and control - testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

Yet our civil war no longer pivots on a battlefield in small farming town in south central Pennsylvania; no, the tendrils of our new civil war spread from there southward towards Charlotte, Atlanta, Miami and beyond; northward to New York, Boston, Bangor and beyond; eastward to Philadelphia, Atlantic City, Baltimore and beyond; westward to Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles and beyond.

We may dedicate this battlefield to the foundering labor movement, to Wisconsin state employees who can no longer engage in collective bargaining, to strikers at the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago, to the railroad workers of the 1894 Pullman Strike, to Cesar Chavez' farmworkers, to our young adults who face a daunting uphill climb out college debt to higher ground.

Why are there so few of us, so few of us who have come to dedicate this field, a final resting place for a once thriving middle class; a middle class who made America great – a middle class who took America upon its back in its now shuttered and buried railyards, shipyards, coal mines, steel mills and textile factories. We have come to dedicate this field as a final resting place for those of all colors, ethnicities, religions and countries of origin – all those who gave their sweat and muscle that this nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we do this.

At this second “dedication,” a dedication, an oath we must take for the survival of this American experiment, there is still the occasion to address the dire circumstance we find ourselves and detail a course to be pursued.

Now, over the last thirty years we have heard countless public declarations regarding the injustice of escalating income inequality; every point, phase and nuance of the fight has been made verbally and theoretically amongst ourselves yet the progress of our fight, and the mass participation of those in our movement, upon which all else chiefly depend, has been most unsatisfactory and discouraging to all.

The judicial rulings of Citizens United, as well as others, have solidified the status corporate personhood. Citizens United, along with the proposed changes to US tax code, tell us again and again, and in no uncertain terms that Corporate Lives Matter.

At times there appears to be little hope for the future of the American experiment, yet, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

In this war, ninety nine percent of the whole population were becoming effectively enslaved, slave victims of income inequality and economic apartheid,....yet they constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war.

To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war – war by breaking labor unions and collective bargaining, by refusing at every turn to raise the minimum wage, by denying the poorest of the poor access to basic health care, by refusing to pay their fair share of taxes by locating their corporate post office boxes in paradises like Bermuda and the Canary Islands, by driving pension plans into bankruptcy and forcing the government to pick up the tab at reduced levels, by moving good paying jobs offshore.

All so that this new slavery can be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. The insurgents sadly refuse to pay any heed of, or have any even knowledge of, what? The common good.

Both [sides] read the same Bible and pray to the same God. One side reads the Word as a Prosperity Gospel of self-gratification, self-glorification, self-adulation while the other reads it as a Gospel of Communal Liberation...and each invokes [God's] aid against the other.

It may seem strange that any should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces (Genesis, 3-19), but let us judge not, that we be not judged (Matthew, 7:1). The prayers of both cannot be answered.

The Almighty has Her own purposes.

Matthew chapter 18 tells us "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh (Matthew 18:7)"

Perhaps this new American, this new worldwide slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through Her appointed time, She now wills to remove, and that She gives to both, the haves and the have nots, the 1% and the 99%, this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came.

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge, a new slavery of income inequality and economic apartheid - this war of Corporate Lives Matter vs the Common Good, this economic warfare of total dominance and control, may speedily pass away.

Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the hedge fund managers, venture capitalists and hardworking everyday people shall be sunk, and until the price paid by every family that drops below the poverty line shall be paid by the those who watch their paper fortunes evaporate on the floor of the Wall Street casino, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Again, we have come together to dedicate a portion of this battlefield. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men and women, living and dead - men like George Meany – first president of the AFL-CIO, Robert Wood Johnson - a businessman who said his customers come first and his employees (*not profits*) come second; women like Mary Anderson – pioneer of women's rights in the workplace; Rev. Addie Wyatt – an ordained minister who co-founded the Coalition of Labor Union Women and worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr. and who later mentored Barack Obama – these brave men and women have consecrated this battlefield, far above our poor power to add or detract.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who toiled here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the abolition of the economic apartheid of total domination and control—that from these honored souls we take increased devotion to that cause—that we here highly resolve that those who have gone before us have not fought in vain. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in - that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that a just economy of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

[End]

Litany of Income Inequality

Let us have the candor to acknowledge that what we call "the economy" or "the free market" is less and less distinguishable from warfare....We are witnessing world conquest of international capitalism....Its tendency is...toward total dominance and control. – Wendell Barry (Paul Rasor, *Faith Without Certainty*, p75)

The wealthiest twenty US billionaires....now have as much wealth as the bottom half of the US population. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p132)

In the three decades after World War II, between 1947 and 1977, social mobility increased [due to the GI Bill and mortgage assistance programs, perhaps the largest government subsidies in US history; yet this mobility]...imprinted a national self-identity as a mobile and meritocratic society, especially juxtaposed with the old "caste societies" of Europe, with their static class systems and relatively calcified social mobility. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p92)

In 1953, under the presidency of Republican Dwight Eisenhower, the top income tax rate on the wealthy was 92 percent on income over \$400,000, roughly \$3.5 million in today's dollars. Today, the top tax rate is 39.6 percent. In 1953, the corporate income tax rate was 52 percent, compared with a 35 percent rate today (and , for Fortune 500 companies, an average effective rate under 20%, thanks to loopholes. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p69)

[Tax rules and subsidies can give] one business or segment of society preferences over another....FedEx pays an effective corporate tax rate of 4.2 percent while UPS pays 27.5 percent. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p134)

Last year, the Boeing Corporation paid no federal taxes....We taxpayers gave Boeing over \$20 billion in contracts, 4.4 percent of all federal contracts. They reported \$5.9 billion in profits. For years, Boeing has paid their CEO more than they pay in annual taxes. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p28)

We have some rather odd scenes in the United States. We have corporate chieftains who deduct their corporate perks and pocket our corporate tax subsidies, with no strings attached, all the while downsizing their payroll, and then pointing their fingers at the unemployed or single parents for being "on the dole."

Farmers and ranchers whose businesses are floated with \$20 billion in annual taxpayer subsidies lean on their tractors and lecture others about the virtues of hard work and small government. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p73)

In our increasingly plutocratic political system, however, the very wealthy have less a stake in societal opportunity-building mechanisms, as their own children and grandchildren advance through privatized systems. These same affluent and wealthy families maintain disproportionate influence in shaping our national priorities, such as whether to cut taxes on the wealthy or maintain investments in public education.

According to surveys, the 1 percent is more politically engaged as donors and advocates than the rest of the population, use their leverage with elected officials, and support deregulation, market-based magical solutions, and private philanthropy over government investment. Combined with Supreme Court rulings like Citizens United, the influence of wealthy and "dark money" donors has warped our national priorities. We are snagged in a cycle of declining opportunity driven by the new politics of inherited advantage. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p91)

Since 1994, median income rose about 2 percent while public college costs increased 45 percent, faster than private college costs, which increased almost 38 percent.

(Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p38)

If you want to live the American Dream, and you're not born into a wealthy family, you are better off being born into Canada.... [as] Canada now has three times the social mobility of the United States. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p92)

Total overall giving (including individuals and corporations) to charitable organizations in 2014 was \$538 billion....[yet] only a very small percent - estimated at 3 to 5 percent - goes to organizations serving the most needy and disenfranchised. And very little money goes to "change not charity" efforts to address the structural roots of some of our biggest social challenges: growing inequality, collapsing wages, ecological destruction and youth at risk. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p106)

Often the line between self-interest and charity is blurred....For example, the donor network created by the Koch brothers advances their political objectives with tax-exempt donations to research institutes and think tanks and 501c4 advocacy groups, in coordination with outright contributions to political action committees and electoral candidates...[again, all tax exempt.] (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p109)

Gifts to land conservancies, which receive the lion's share of environmental funding, protect beautiful places where donors live, including, in some cases, their personal

property....Wealthy families will donate the land surrounding their homes to a conservancy, taking huge tax deductions for its appreciated value and removing the properties from the tax rolls. Often these holdings have no public access, so they are effectively create a taxpayer-subsidized buffer zone [around their estates.] (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p110)

If I donate \$100,000 to a conservation land trust so the nonprofit can purchase the open space next to my house - and my income is over \$450,000 - then my donation will reduce my taxes by almost \$40,000 [making my effective donation only \$60,000. Yet with the government losing \$40,000 in revenue, taxpayers are essentially kicking in] \$2 for every \$3 I contribute. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p120)

In all these transactions...there is no one sitting at the table saying, "What about the taxpayer?" There is no one representing the children of the elementary school that is a few blocks away, asking, "Is this really the best use of taxpayer money?" (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p110)

Do we really want the next generation growing up in a rigid caste or apartheid-like society? (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p91)

Community wealth building begins with loyalty to geographic place. If globalization is the hallmark of today's mainstream economy, re-localization is the hallmark of the alternative. Globalization works well for capital, which can move across borders with a

computer keystroke. But the real economy of jobs and families and the land always lives someplace real. (Marjorie Kelly and Sarah McKinley; Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p169)

We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously. (Grace Lee Boggs; Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p159)

[People can participate in the] Divest-Invest movement, where people shift their wealth out of investments in fossil fuel and into clean energy and ventures that support strong local economies. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p139)

Spend locally.... For every \$100 spent at a locally owned business, \$48 will continue to circulate in the local economy. If you spend \$100 at a multinational chain store, such as Walmart, Whole Foods or Target, only \$14 remains in the local economy. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p163)

[Show] up with your needs and vulnerabilities. When you ask and receive, you break down the illusion of self-sufficiency, the cruel notion that there are makers and takers. You dismantle the stigma of need...and replace it with a culture of reciprocity, gift exchange, and the open hand of authentic generosity. (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p158)

I'm not against capitalism...[merely] extractive capitalism. Generative capitalism [focuses on] broad worker and community ownership. (Deborah Frieze; Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p177)

The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. - Terry Tempest Williams (Chuck Collins, *Born on Third Base*, p129)