

March 15, 2008 **Every Village Green**

My Friends:

We are here today to commemorate the five year anniversary of our own country's pre-emptive attack on Iraq and its subsequent brutal occupation. This anniversary is not cause to celebrate. It is cause to mourn. We mourn the triumph of lies, the triumph of violence, the triumph of imperialism, the triumph of political cowardice, the triumph of doublespeak. We mourn the triumph of our government to betray its own Constitution, its democracy, its people and to betray our own soldiers. Our soldiers were not called, as William Sloane Coffin said, to die for their country, but to kill for it. We mourn a country unworthy of the name of democracy because its free press, without which there can be no democracy, has found common cause with the instigators of duplicitous war for power and profit. We mourn the inability of ourselves as citizens to effect peace. We mourn the inability of ourselves to protect the killed, blasted and tortured victims of our own government. We mourn that our outrage and pain at so much injustice have been blown away like smoke. We mourn for the future of our children because we understand that a confluence of events --- war, resource depletion, species extinction, habitat

destruction, climate catastrophe, over population, planet toxification, wealth concentration, and debt --- is inviting natural, economic, and community chaos.

We mourn the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be governed by criminals. Without accountability we can have no Constitutional democracy. Our governing criminals have derived their unjust powers from fear and prevarication. They have mocked the people and usurped our power. They have stripped the people of their responsibility to govern themselves.

But, in a sense we are also grateful that in these past few years all the masks of denial, hypocrisy, and duplicity have been stripped away. The shiny hood has lifted from the infernal engine. We see the gears of domination gnashing and grinding and screeching and breaking down. So desperate they are for oil. They will do anything to get it. We have seen the vaunted Beacon of the World unmasked as the Beast of Arrogance, The Beast of Fear and Predatory capitalism. We have witnessed the country of hope, freedom and self-determination become the country of “with us or against us,” become the country that insists nature and people, including its own citizens, become collateral damage for its imperial policies. We have seen the country of the rule of law

transformed into the country of signing statements, warrantless spying, torture, rigged elections, corruption, and no accountability. But, what makes us grateful is that until you know the truth of what you are up against, you don't know how to resist for the good of yourselves, your communities, and the earth.

Christopher Fry says in his poem *The Sleep of Prisoners*:

Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to meet us everywhere
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul we ever took.

In Iraq the wrong that comes up to meet us everywhere manifests itself in the calculated destruction of culture, infrastructure and economy, the calculated dispersal of people, ethnic division, walling off of neighborhoods making Iraq into one vast Abu Ghraib, the shaking down of a people until they are so damaged and destitute, they have no hope and will submit to the occupation's order. All in the name of freedom & democracy.

But what is this really? It's a symptom of what people are willing to do when they determine that

their reality is economy. If economy is your reality, you derive your ethics and values from it. “We can be ethical only in relationship to something that we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.” the environmentalist Aldo Leopold said in his great book The Sand County Almanac. He was talking about nature. But we have been taught to see, feel, understand, love, and have faith in our economy. To think that it is an expression of our freedom and democracy. To cherish capitalism as though it were democracy. To think that human progress means economic expansion, markets, jobs, and profit. The economy’s ethic is that anything that feeds it is healthy --- whether it’s Big Macs, big boxes, or big bombs. The economy’s ethic is that profit at the expense of exploited people and exploited nature is good. The economy’s ethic is that all necessary resources must be under its control.

Anyone with a little sense has to know that our fundamental reality is nature. That either we choose to live in harmony with it or we choose not to live. Our reality, which is nature’s reality, is as simple as that.

Wendell Berry, at the close of the first Gulf War in 1991 said, “The most alarming sign of the state of our society now is that our leaders have the courage to sacrifice the lives of young people in war but have

not the courage to tell us to be less wasteful and less greedy.” The explanation for Wendell Berry’s statement is that if your reality and ethic are in economy, you *want* people to be wasteful and greedy and you don’t give a damn for the lives of your own young people. Collateral damage, resource wars, blowing up the Appalachian mountains in West Virginia and Kentucky for coal, the internalization of profit and the externalization of cost are all necessary parts of an economic insanity at odds with the reality of nature. Right here in Ellsworth we see that same ethic enjoying its apotheosis on High Street, the ugly strip whose only progress is in how efficiently it strips the wealth and health from our local community.

And for its imperialistic wars our country is further stripping 12 billion dollars a month --- that’s 3 billion dollars a week, nearly 500 million dollars a day of which Maine’s share is over 1 million a day. Maine’s share so far for this war has been 1.5 billion. Little wonder why we can’t balance our budget and take care of our own neighbors.

Utah Phillips once said, “The degree to which you resist injustice is the degree to which you are free.” Why else do we choose to live in community but to enhance justice for ourselves and our neighbors, local and global? Surely we don’t gather together to

better exploit each other. But that's what our economic values are asking us to do. If we want to be free, maintain our dignity, compassion, and fairness, and live sustainably with the community of other living species on this earth, we must accept our reality as nature's. Design an economy in harmony with nature. Come to terms with the Iraq War as a symptom of a much bigger problem and re-double our efforts to resist it. Just as the criminals who betrayed our trust and launched this illegal war should be impeached and jailed, we should not accept any new leaders who define our reality in terms of economy rather than harmony with nature. In our great desire to find salvation in a new leader, it should be noted that not one of them in the major parties promises to remove all our soldiers from Iraq. They *all* talk of keeping soldiers and contractors there for the National Interest. They *all* promise to *enlarge* our army and our military expenditures. They *all* maintain the doctrine of pre-emptive, unilateral war.

Forty-one years ago next month Martin Luther King, Jr. defined the United States as the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" and said that we have migrated to the wrong side of human history in its struggle for fairness and human rights,

to the wrong side in the fight against poverty, racism, materialism and militarism.

Just as we mourn today for the injustices that have been perpetrated in our name, we must re-dedicate ourselves to the struggle for justice. Doris, Granny D, Haddock says that when you lose control of your government, you lose your ability to dispense justice. Dispensing justice is our right and our responsibility. We must begin in our neighborhoods and communities, insisting on and building relationships with each other and nature that protect and advance the common good, refuse exploitation for the sake of profit, refuse the aesthetic, environmental and moral poisoning of our lives, refuse to allow our sense of security to be defined in pre-emptive war rather than in peace and justice. What is an unalienable right but an unavoidable responsibility to do the right thing for ourselves, our children, and the earth?

I ask you today, on this anniversary of mourning and shame, to embrace peace and justice, to embrace the earth and community, and foremost to embrace your own power to make the changes we must have to survive as a democratic, peaceful, caring people. Frederick Douglass said, "Find out what any people will quietly submit to, and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong that will be imposed on them." Don't submit to fear, don't submit

to lies, don't submit to the reality of a predatory economy

It's time for a new set of Founding Fathers. We, as citizens, must be our own community of Founding Mothers and Fathers, Founding Brothers and Sisters, Founding Aunts and Uncles who refuse for the welfare of the earth, our children and our democracy the compromises and betrayals of elites for the sake of profit and power. We must define our National Interest not as power and control but as peace and justice.

Look at our own hands. Look into our own hearts. Let's use our hands to build the world our hearts tell us we must.

Thank you.