

Reflections on 72 Years of Personal and Political History

By Tom Weisskopf

A presentation at the Residential College's 50th Year Anniversary Celebration
in the Keene Theater on Saturday, October 21, 2017

First, I want to thank the RC – students, staff and faculty – for providing me with such a congenial home for close to four decades. I never expected to have the honor of directing the College; as I explained at the time, the RC is the only institution I would ever have agreed to serve in a significant administrative role. It is a great pleasure to be invited to speak my mind at this 50th year celebration.

About a decade ago I taught a few RC first-year seminars on the topic: “Trending to the Right: the Evolution of American Politics since the 1960s.” I was disturbed by this trend and – without forcing my own opinions on others – I wanted to encourage students to think and write about the past half century of US political history. Here’s the course description:

“By worldwide standards the Left has never been very strong in the United States, but in the 1960s the political pendulum appeared to be shifting to the Left. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations pursued policies that sought to enhance the role of the state in improving the lot of the less fortunate and in protecting people from adverse effects of market forces. Moreover, a variety of non-governmental movements gained strength as they sought to combat evils perceived to characterize American capitalism – such as poverty, racism, sexism, militarism, and environmental deterioration. Since the 1960s, however, the trend in U.S. politics has been unmistakably to the Right. Both of the major parties have espoused policies that reduce the role of the state, that give more play to the free market, and that call upon individuals to take more responsibility for their own fate. Moreover, Left-wing social and political movements are weaker and less influential than in the past.”

Among other things, I showed – outside of class – a series of films designed to illustrate the temper of the times in each decade from the 1950s through the 20-aughts. You will probably recognize many of these films:

1950s: GOOD NIGHT, GOOD LUCK – Edward R. Murrow takes on Joseph McCarthy

1960s: THE GRADUATE – Dustin Hoffman is advised to go into...PLASTICS!

1970s: NETWORK – An angry televised rant provides a huge ratings boost for a network news anchor

1980s: WALL STREET – Gordon Gekko guides a disciple.

1990s: CRASH – Connected stories about race, class, family and gender in Los Angeles

2000s: WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE – The Rise of the Religious Right in America

My talk today is in a way a similar trip through the decades, but a more personal one. When the women’s movement gathered steam back in the 1960s, people used to say: “the personal is political”. For a long time I’ve found that “the political is personal”, in that my choices about what to do with my life have been highly responsive to political developments around me, as I perceived them. At my age – approaching 80 – you tend to look back at your life story. I’m hoping that you’ll allow me to indulge in interweaving my personal history with my reflections on political history.

My first encounter with current events in the larger world took place some 72 years ago. In early May 1945, when – along with other young children in Los Alamos, New Mexico (where my father was working on the Manhattan project) – I walked along the road banging trash can tops in celebration of the surrender of the Nazis to the Allied Forces. The next such memory still in my head is that, when my third-grade class was asked to vote for a presidential candidate in 1948, presumably following my parents' intentions, I cast the sole vote in the class for Henry Wallace.

My first true lesson in political history came from my father, who began to explain current events to me in the early 1950s, when he was on sabbatical and brought the family to Europe for a year. The Korean War was on, and General MacArthur had recently been fired by President Truman – a move my father applauded. I learned about the meaning of the term "Cold War," the possible presidential candidacy of General Eisenhower, and the hope that Adlai Stevenson could become a much more worthy successor to FDR than President Truman had been.

The most worrying development of that period, however, was the growing witch-hunt of alleged communists by Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy and his collaborators. Many of my parents' friends and acquaintances had been directly targeted by the witch hunt; not a few had lost their jobs, been forced into exile, or otherwise persecuted. It was a great relief when the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954 finally began to turn the tide and to restore some sanity to the U.S. political scene. It is particularly notable, in light of contemporary US politics, that seven Republican Senators finally stood up to condemn McCarthyism. They were led by Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, an early critic of McCarthy, who was a courageous and highly successful female politician in an era of unconstrained male supremacy.

After graduating from high school in 1957 I spent a year in Europe, studying German in Heidelberg and French in Geneva; and I became very interested in European politics. I became aware of how different it was from what I knew about the American scene. Entering Harvard the next year, I decided that I needed to major in economics in order to understand better the most pressing policy decisions facing political actors. In Quincy House my appetite for politics was whetted by periodic politically-oriented discussions led by – *I'm embarrassed to say* – Henry Kissinger, and a junior colleague of his named Paul Sigmund. During my college years the most memorable political events I can remember witnessing were, first, the victorious speech given by Fidel Castro to a capacity crowd in Harvard Stadium soon after the Cuban Revolution (*I should note that Fidel stunned his audience by referring time and again to the critical role that would be played in the coming years by "the Jews of America." Only after a while did it become evident that, in his poor English pronunciation, he meant "the youth of America"*); second, the first-ever TV presidential debates, between candidates John Kennedy and Richard Nixon, followed by JFK's narrow election victory in 1960; third, shortly afterwards, the launching of Tocsin, a Harvard student organization opposing nuclear weapons (*Tocsin means "alarm bell"*), led by Todd Gitlin, who later helped to shape SDS and wrote the definitive account of student-led movements of that decade in his book, "The Sixties;" and, finally, the extraordinary talk delivered by Malcolm X to an overflow crowd at a jammed Harvard lecture Hall in March 1961.

Given the prominence of the Cold War at the time, I was at first planning to go into Soviet Studies, and I took several courses to learn Russian. By my senior year, however, I had made a number of Indian friends and become fascinated by that country, not least because of its efforts – under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru – to steer India's economic development path toward a "socialistic patterns of society", midway between the models exemplified by the capitalist U.S. and the communist Soviet

Union. Having had the good fortune to become acquainted with some Western European societies, I also wanted to travel to and work in a much more distant and different country. So I applied to MIT's graduate school to study economics, knowing of the Department's ties to India through MIT's Center for International Studies.

With the aid of Economics Professor Rosenstein-Rodan, I found a way to get to India even before starting graduate studies. I received an offer to work for a year – at a very modest salary – at the Indian Statistical Institute just north of Calcutta. I was excited to go to the ISI, because its founder and director, P.C. Mahalanobis, was a strong advocate of government-led economic development and democratic socialism, and he had been the chief economic advisor to Prime Minister Nehru. Mahalanobis was a world-renowned statistician, who brought to the ISI statistical and economic experts from both sides of the Iron Curtain. At the ISI I taught basic economics to students only a few years younger than I, and I had an opportunity to travel around India and to learn a great deal about the Indian political and economic scene.

Returning to the U.S. and MIT in 1962, I focused my graduate studies on problems of economic development and, eventually, on mathematical economic techniques designed to improve government economic planning. I did a year of field work at the Indian Planning Commission in New Delhi in 1964-65, and then completed my Ph.D. thesis on Indian economic planning a year later. The political highlight of my years at MIT was joining the August 1963 March on Washington. My then-wife and I joined a large group of marchers taking the bus from Roxbury to Washington, with an overnight stay in a Baltimore church. Tellingly, it was the first time that I had ever experienced a predominantly African-American environment. The political lowlight of those years followed soon after: learning, while in a graduate seminar, of the assassination of JFK that November. *(At first I didn't believe the report, because it was delivered by a fellow student known as an inveterate joker.)*

As I approached the end of my student years, I was not interested in moving right into an academic teaching job. Instead, I wanted to work on applying economics to policy-making, and so I agreed in early 1966 to accept an offer to work as an economic researcher within the U.S. Agency for International Development mission in India. But in June 1966, as the Johnson Administration continued to escalate the War in Vietnam, and just after I had been cleared by the State Department, I withdrew from proceeding to the job because I did not think I could in good conscience represent the U.S. Government abroad. Fortunately, thanks to Indian friends, I was offered a two-year visiting teaching and research position at a branch of the ISI in New Delhi closely linked to the Indian Planning Commission.

During the two years I worked in New Delhi, I became increasingly disillusioned with the usefulness of an economic advisor role as a foreign economist, because I came to recognize the enormous extent to which politics – necessarily largely indigenous – impinges on and constrains economic policy-making. It became clear to me that India's ostensibly "socialistic pattern of society" was being undermined by powerful landed and business interests (domestic and foreign), with much more influence on economic policy than the left-leaning Planning Commission. I started reading widely in Marxist and other political-economic works, analyzing the connections between political, social, and economic development. And I became increasingly appalled (from a distance) at political developments in the U.S. – not just the continuing War in Vietnam, but in particular the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy.

Having decided that the role of foreign economic advisor was unhelpful, and that it was much more important to engage actively with political movements in one's own country, I decided to return to the

U.S. in 1968 to take up a junior faculty position offered by Harvard's Economics Department. At that time my own thinking was fully in synch with the burgeoning radical campus movements opposing the War in Vietnam, and with the efforts of many of my friends and acquaintances to develop radical alternatives to mainstream academic analysis and teaching in the social sciences.

During four years at Harvard I joined many others among graduate students and junior faculty in economics in founding the Union for Radical political Economics (whose two major centers of activity were at Harvard and the University of Michigan). We considered Democratic politicians little better than their Republican opponents, and we advocated democratic socialism as an alternative to capitalism. Few of us even voted in the 1968 election, except to support Black Panther Party candidate Eldridge Cleaver. We were active both in protesting the continuation of the War (under President Nixon) and in developing new courses, from a radical political-economic perspective, to explain the prevalence of such shameful attributes of the U.S. capitalist system as gross inequality, alienation, racism, sexism, imperialism, and environmental destruction.

In 1972 I was again on the job market, and I accepted an offer – spurred by many enthusiastic graduate students – to join the U of M Economics Department. Just after moving to Ann Arbor that summer, I took part in the “First Friendship Delegation of Radical Political Economists to the People's Republic of China” on a 3-week trip to Mao's China, where we were impressed by the friendliness of our hosts, the communist regime's commitment to greater economic and social equality, and the lack of overt poverty – for me a great contrast to India. We were oblivious at the time, however, to the enormous sinister side of the Maoist experiment. *(I should add that our visit came shortly after Nixon's famous visit to China; and the fact that our every meeting with Chinese hosts began with a tribute to the President for having normalized relations left as quite uncomfortable!)* That summer and fall the presidential campaign of George McGovern offered some hope for a progressive turn in U.S. politics, if not the transformation of U.S. capitalism. Some of us campaigned enthusiastically for McGovern, but we were hugely disappointed by his crushing loss to Richard Nixon; and the future of the country seemed dark indeed.

In my first year at the U of M I learned about the Residential College from Marilyn Young *(a wonderful RC colleague in the 1970s, and for decades a most insightful analyst of contemporary world history)*. The next year I joined with other LS&A faculty and graduate students to teach a huge introductory course in Political Economy at the RC. Soon afterwards I was able to shift part of my faculty appointment from Economics to the RC, and I continued to teach a more modest version of the Political Economy course in the RC for many subsequent years.

During these initial years at the U of M, the emergence of the Watergate scandal provided both entertainment and the satisfaction of seeing President Nixon and his buddies thoroughly humiliated. Notably, not just Democrats but – as in the McCarthy era – a significant number of Republican members of Congress, as well as a few members of the Nixon Administration itself, played an important role in bringing the Nixon cabal down. Just a few months after Nixon's resignation (under threat of impeachment), the mid-term elections of 1974 led naturally to a huge Democratic sweep – once again offering some hope that U.S. politics would take a significant turn to the Left.

What many of us radicals didn't realize at the time, but what was to become sharply evident by the end of the decade, is that the late 1960s would prove to be the peak of Left-wing influence on US politics, and that the lasting effects of the youth movements of the 1960s would be not on American political life, but on American cultural life. In the 1970s there developed a huge Right-wing backlash against the

Leftward movement in politics that had generated Great Society programs under President Lyndon B. Johnson, as well as against progressive legislation on environmental, occupational and consumer protection under President Nixon, when the U.S. Congress was controlled by Democrats and backed up by a liberal Supreme Court. Big business interests and their allies began to systematically and successfully organize their own movement to shift U.S. politics back to the Right. They built Right-leaning think tanks, promoted Right-wing media, bundled financial resources to support Right-wing candidates, and worked in tandem with evangelical religious leaders to push both political parties to the Right. Lewis Powell's infamous 1971 memorandum – accurately labeled “A Call-to-Arms for Corporations” – was identified in retrospect as the touchstone for a Rightward political and policy resurgence. There was little reason to expect that the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, by a narrow margin over Gerald Ford, would make much difference – and it didn't.

Like many of my fellow radical political economists (and not a few mainstream economists), I turned my attention in the mid-to-late-1970s to the growing macroeconomic problems of the US economy associated with “stagflation” – the heretofore unlikely simultaneous development of slow economic growth, high unemployment and high inflation. (*If you would like to learn more about what “stagflation” means, I recommend the song of that title recorded by “Red Shadow” – the (radical) economics rock & roll band – on their album, “Live at the Panacea Hilton”.*) Without a calamitous war to continue protesting, we focused our attention on developing economic analyses of the tendency of capitalist economies in general – and the U.S. economy in particular – to lurch periodically into a condition of crisis, from which only fundamental economic restructuring could offer hope of revival. We foresaw accurately that the growing economic problems of the 1970s would lead to major economic restructuring in the 1980s. But we failed to see that this restructuring, far from reversing the ongoing trend to the Right, would instead see its consolidation and acceleration by the Ronald Reagan Administration in the wake of his crushing electoral victory in 1980 (which also brought Republican control of the Senate). The market-privileging neoliberalism ushered in by Reagan (and by Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain) only continued to gain strength, even under their political adversaries and successors – Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.

Looking back at this period, thoughtful observers of the American political scene have come to recognize that the late 1970s marked a significant turning point in American political and economic life. I particularly recommend George Packer's article, “The Broken Contract: Inequality and American Decline”, published in *Foreign Affairs* in late 2011, as a cogent and highly persuasive account of how 1978 was a benchmark turning point in which “the deeper structures, the institutions that underpin a healthy democratic society [began to] fall into a state of decadence”. That this is the case has been reflected in irrefutable evidence that, since then, the US economy has generated greatly increasing economic inequality and greatly increasing political power for the wealthy. The upper classes (especially the top 1%) have become so much richer, and the shrinking middle classes and growing lower classes have gained little or nothing from U.S. economic growth. *For me, this critical turning point was vividly illustrated by a visit to a local hang-out. As at least the older among you are well aware, Dominick's in the 1960s and the 1970s was the place where lefties of all stripes would get together to eat, drink, and plan political activities. Sometime in fall 1978, I turned up at Dominick's one evening to discover that the place had been occupied by a boisterous group of fancily dressed young men and women who, it turned out, were Greeks celebrating some social occasion. There wasn't a single shabbily dressed student, much less a hint of political discussion.*

Once the extent of the Reagan Republican victory in 1980, and its implications for political life and economic policy in the U.S. had become clear, two close friends and I focused our work on an effort to

educate the general public about a realistic alternative to neoliberal Reaganomics. Though still characterized by some as “Young Turks,” we were actually well into middle age, and that too probably inclined us to see a transformation to socialism as too much of a stretch, and instead to promote a form of American social democracy as a realistic desirable goal. This was the theme of Sam Bowles’, David Gordon’s and my two “Beyond the Waste Land” books; the original in 1983 was subtitled “A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline”, and the sequel a decade later was subtitled “A Democratic Economics for the Year 2000.”

In spite of the increasingly disturbing trends manifested in the 1980s, I still retained some degree of optimism about the political-economic future of our country. Indeed, writing an alum report in 1986, on the 25th anniversary of my college graduation, I wrote about the likelihood that the pendulum of American politics would swing in the 1990s from the Right back to the Left— as it had swung in roughly 30-year intervals at least as far back as the early 20th century. Though the Democrats did succeed in winning the presidency in 1992 and holding it for two terms, it soon became apparent that Right-wing forces remained very strong, and that they would sharply limit the potential for more progressive economic policies even under Democratic presidents.

As the prospects for progressive change in the U.S. dimmed in the 1990s, I took heart and great interest in the world-changing events taking place in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The stifling form of authoritarian rule and bureaucratic socialist economics that had characterized the so-called “Second World” crumbled, and there appeared to be a real possibility that a new progressive “Third Way” could arise — one that would combine the best elements of capitalism and socialism. Having learned Russian in college, I began to travel frequently to Russia and the Ukraine while doing research and teaching about the political and economic transformation of the former Soviet Union. I also joined a group of American and Russian colleagues collaborating to prepare a textbook on “Economics in Context” for use in formerly communist-led countries. (*Since then some of my co-authors, under the leadership of Neva Goodwin, have published several editions of an American version of the text.*) By the mid-1990s, however, my hopes began to be dashed in this part of the world too — as it became increasingly evident that the same kinds of forces pulling politics and economics to the Right in the U.S. were also at work in the former Second World, where past history had left far fewer barriers to outright political authoritarianism — not to mention rampant corruption.

My work in and on Russia was curtailed in 1996 by the offer to succeed Herb Eagle as RC Director— an offer that I gladly accepted, having already increased the fraction of my U of M appointment in the RC to 50%, and having grown over the roughly 25 years since I joined the RC faculty to appreciate the many wonderful things going on at the College — across a wide variety of fields from the natural sciences to the arts. This time it was local rather than national or world political events that reoriented my teaching and research — namely, the suit against the U of M for its policies of affirmative action in admissions, which reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003. Such policies had become increasingly controversial nation-wide, and they were particularly contentious on the U of M campus.

As you well know, our colleague Carl Cohen has been for a long time a dedicated critic of race-based affirmative action, and he was involved with the suit against the University. I had always believed in the desirability of affirmative action, and it wasn’t long before Carl and I were forcefully, but respectfully, debating the issue publicly—a debate that continued in various settings for almost a decade. With a sabbatical year coming up in 2001, between my two terms as RC Director, I decided to renew my links to India and to conduct research on India’s affirmative action policies, which go back roughly 100 years and are considerably stronger than ours. This enabled me to travel frequently to India and make many new

friendships there, and it led to my only sole-authored book, which compared affirmative action in India and the U.S.

It was actually in India in December 2000 that I learned of the Supreme Court decision that granted the presidency to G.W. Bush – a peculiar ruling at best, and a thoroughly disheartening development. It was again in India in September 2001 that I learned of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 – a stunning blow which, compounded by the Bush regime’s follow-up invasion of Iraq a year and a half later, did so much to poison the American political environment and upset the world order. Though far fewer American lives have been lost in the Middle East than were lost in Vietnam decades earlier, millions of people have been killed by Americans and our allies in both parts of Asia, and George Bush’s aggressive foreign policy has arguably had much worse long-term consequences for the world.

In 2002 and 2003 I taught a couple of first-year seminars on affirmative action, and it was in the intervening June that the Supreme Court – thanks to a decisive vote by Justice Sandra O’Connor – ruled in favor of a relatively modest form of affirmative action: taking race-based disadvantage into account as part of a holistic admissions process. In 2006, however, a ballot proposition succeeded in ruling out even this form of affirmative action in Michigan public institutions. Yet again, just last year, the Supreme Court – thanks to Anthony Kennedy’s vote – ruled in favor of an even more modest form of affirmative action being applied by the University of Texas. The controversy and the rulings continue, and my own thinking about the subject has been evolving as well.

Let me step back for a moment here and consider my vantage point. You might well wonder why I have put so much weight on political rather than economic developments over the years. Given my background in Marxism, and also my training in economics, shouldn’t I be looking to fundamental economic trends -- such as technological change and globalization -- as prime movers in the long-term pattern of U.S. political history that I have described and deplored? I think not. Technological change and globalization may be inevitable and important long-term currents of world history; and they have surely played a role in generating votes for Brexit, Donald Trump, and other nativist politicians. However, it is how nations and their governments react – or fail to react – to these developments that determines what impact they will have on people’s lives. Since retiring I have been able to spend several months a year in Europe, and it is enlightening to see up close how differently societies can react to the same long-term global forces, and how much better some other capitalist nations treat their citizens – and their immigrants – than we do here in the U.S.

Returning to my chronological account: in refreshing response to the War in Iraq and the second-term travails of the Bush Administration, in 2008 we elected Barack (and Michelle) Obama. Like so many others here, I am sure, I felt euphoric, truly proud to be an American! (*And I no longer needed to pretend to be Canadian abroad.*) As I confessed to my students in the “Rightward Trend” class, I found it hard to believe that – after so many decades – we had a president whose cautious temperament, academic background, and way of thinking felt so close to my own. Alas, the euphoria did not last long. After a promising start to his presidency, Obama fell victim to constraints imposed by many members of his own party and – more importantly – to an unprecedentedly furious assault on the part of the so-called “Tea Party” movement, aided and abetted by leading Republican politicians, whose primary goal was to limit Obama’s time in office and – failing that – to obstruct his ability to govern.

Looking back in time, I cannot help but conclude that each successive elected Republican president since Nixon has been worse for the country than the previous one – with the sole exception of one-term president George H.W. Bush. The optimism inspired initially by Democratic presidents Carter, Clinton,

and Obama proved to be short-lived, as they – willingly or unwillingly – bent toward the strengthening Right-wing forces that they confronted. Since their takeover of Congress in 1994 under the aggressive leadership of Newt Gingrich, the Republican Party has clearly shifted ever further to the Right. *(By the way, I find it ludicrous to routinely apply the label “conservative” to Republican politicians today; there is nothing that most of them seek to conserve other than their own positions and the flow of money from their donors.)*

Let’s face it: the election of Donald Trump represents the worst disaster in U.S. history political history – a true American tragedy (as David Remnick characterized it in a long New Yorker editorial just after the results were in). The extent of the disaster is magnified by the fact that so many Republican politicians, scared of Trump’s fanatical base of voters, line up behind him and enable him to indulge his worst instincts. Gone are the days when more than a few maverick Republicans of integrity joined with many more Democrats to oppose and ultimately overcome national disasters such as McCarthyism, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal.

Trump’s success in gaining the Republican presidential nomination, and then the presidency, may be due in some part to the destabilizing economic effects of technological change and globalization on so many American voters. But the broad success of the ever-more Rightist Republican Party has surely had more to do with the ever-increasing ability of corporate and individual moneyed interests to dominate U.S. elections at the state and local level and to influence policy-makers in Washington, D.C. Most major Republican funders would no doubt have preferred a more conventional Right-wing politician, but they have proven to be perfectly willing to work with Trump and his white supremacist friends. And some of these funders are happy to foster a media environment that celebrates the outrageous and mocks the truth, so long as this helps to elect Republican politicians.

Runaway economic inequality, combined with diminishing constraints on the role of money in American politics, is undermining the capacity of the American people to shape government policy in the public interest. The only question now is whether these developments have gone so far that the erosion of American democracy is irreversible.

The good news is that popular and judicial resistance to Trump and his cronies this year has been inspiring, and it has so far been successful in limiting some of the worst possible outcomes. Indeed, one reason to believe that our national nightmare can be brought to an end is that Trump is exposing the Republican Party for what it has become – a Party willing to tolerate, if not promote, a vicious strain of nativism, racism and misogyny in American society in order to further its political interests. It seems possible that enough voters will now recognize this to bring about a huge democratic – both small and large D – response. Indeed, we may even hope that the backlash against Trump and his enablers will be so strong as to reverse the decades-long-run trend to the Right in U.S. politics and policy.

Some of you will remember how bad things were in this country during the Vietnam War, and many of you who weren’t around to experience that era will get a good understanding of it from Ken Burns’ current series on PBS. I think it is fair to say that, despite all of the conflict, destruction and lives lost in that war, the threat posed right now to our nation and the world is far greater. That is not because of what has already happened since Trump was elected, which is bad enough; it is because of what might well happen in the years to come. Not just our democracy, but the survival of the earth in livable condition, depend crucially on limiting the damage caused by Trump and the Republican Party during the next few years, and on reversing the policies they are implementing no later than 2021.

Congressional elections in 2018 offer a good opportunity to reduce the damage being done every day, though the terrain greatly favors continued Republican control. But it will take a huge election victory for progressive Democrats in 2020 to ensure that the nation (and the world) will survive in recognizable form. A positive Supreme Court ruling in 2018 against political gerrymandering would be a good first step toward greater democracy in the U.S.; it depends (again !) on Anthony Kennedy's vote. And I want to mention here too that a signature petition initiative currently underway in Michigan, organized by the group "Voters, not Politicians", holds out hope of getting on the ballot in November 2018 a proposition to end gerrymandering in our state.

In conclusion, I urge all of you to participate in the ongoing resistance to the Trump Administration and the Republican-controlled Congress, and to play an active role in the American election process in the coming years. There is no other way in which we can expect to bring about the change we so badly need!

N.B.: I have put into italics some of the comments I added to the original written text when reading it for the presentation on October 21.