

## **RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE and RESTORATION: TRUTH IS POWER**

by *William Durland*

*"Give me your tired poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these the homeless tempest-tossed to me,"* Emma Lazarus

### INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Friends and thank you for having me. First I'd like to tell you a little bit about myself and how I happen to be here today. I see the teleprompters have not been installed and so I will have to follow our new President's lead and give it to you from the gut, in the form of a gigantic twitter.

I was a slow learner. It took me 27 years to realize that the practice of democracy required more than the brilliant structure given it by James Madison. For it to work he said that the voters must be educated politically and our representatives be possessed of a virtuous character. Jefferson reminded us "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." My childhood was spent in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. My evolution towards understanding all of this began when I was 10. My parents told me that a Jewish friend of theirs could only live in our neighborhood if he kept his ethnicity a secret by changing his name. The neighbors were republicans then and they said Franklin Roosevelt was either a crook or a communist. But 27 years later in 1958, after service in the army as a closet pacifist and a law school graduate specializing in constitutional and international law, I became an advocate of human rights and liberties. President Eisenhower's Virginia candidate for congress, where I lived twelve miles from the White House, was a segregationist republican, Broyhill of the millionaire furniture family. His democratic opponent, Freehill, was against segregation. Jews, Blacks, Italians, Irish and women were victims of racism and sexism. I was told that we fought World War II to do away with such things. So I worked for Freehill's democratic party. Through the *resistance* of the Civil Rights movement and the *resilience* of its participants, we were able to *restore* and move ahead on the original hopes and needs of our founding citizens. I began in the law courts and seven years later I was elected a state legislator and served on national campaign staffs and finally graduated to direct action on the streets at the March on Washington in 1963. Subsequent successes included the end to racial marriage prohibitions and voter restrictions, the beginning of healthcare reform and the election of intelligent presidents and vice presidents – Kennedy and Humphrey.

From 1955 to 1957 I was stationed in Germany with the military, giving me an opportunity to examine how an unpopular politician, Hitler, was able to take over a democratic nation with less than a majority vote because he was empowered by the negative values of a minority over the positive concerns of the majority. He did this by first attacking the media, then the intelligencia, and finally the downtrodden. He did not do it alone but received the support of reluctant powerful factions of the conservative culture primarily business corporations and military veterans. He said he would make Germany great again by providing jobs for White Aryans through a military build-up and confiscation

of the savings and public services of the remaining population. He became rich on his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, and required it as mandatory reading. Once he was entrenched by showing that Germany could win again, his conservative government remained in power for twelve years before its end came and democracy was restored after 1945.

Some of us whose lives take us back to that time see a somewhat similar but not identical process playing out before our eyes. It calls us to resist and restore our democracy once again, and with the resilience needed for the long haul. Re-education of the majority is essential for the realization of these hopes.

In passing, I would call your attention to Philip Roth's novel *The Plot Against America*. Written thirteen years ago, it is about a fictitious conservative president elected in 1940 instead of Roosevelt, who supported the Hitlerian dictatorship and railed against Jews and Blacks. I knew Philip Roth when we both attended Bucknell University where I suffered minor prejudice and discrimination because I had friends at the Jewish fraternity house and as a Catholic. One interesting similarity with the Trump administration in Roth's book was the establishment of "the Office of American Absorption" to benefit White Supremacists so that they could regain control of their country. The stock market rose, profits were up, business boomed. Roth's dictator called his policy "America first." His opponents called him unfit. He was finally removed under Article 2, §1 of the U.S. Constitution as unable to perform his duties according to the Constitution after being blackmailed by a foreign power. Interestingly, presidential senior assistant Jared Kushner has been appointed by President Trump to head the newly created "Office of American Innovation." In addition Trump propagandist Steve Bannon has called for the "destruction of the administrative state," referring to the national government and its regulatory protections of the middle class and poor. A summary of the threatened services and institutions recommended for destruction by this administration in its proposed budget will be discussed later. But for now we will move on to how we can react to what we know to be our loss over these first 100 days. (Would anyone like to express some thoughts on the first 100 days?)

I began attending Quaker meetings at Langley Park, a few miles from the CIA in 1970. We, as Quakers, are called to be who we are. Our responses will be grounded on our own experience and practices as members of the Religious Society of Friends. Our response is a religious and spiritual one.

## RESISTANCE: WHAT TO DO (Doing)

As we discuss what to do, rather than how to be (resilience) coming next, let's contemplate the choices before us apart from resistance. We can be passive, acquiescent, adjustable, and oblivious to what's happening to our representative government or simply conclude that it's not our kingdom, as dropouts of old did, and it can go its own way. Then there's conflict avoidance stemming from a fear or dislike of conflict and a rationale that if left alone it will resolve itself. But since the inauguration, many Quakers have decided that we need once again to consider active resistance as a community. We've had our share of conscientious objectors and the civilly disobedient, so resistance is nothing new to us when human lives are threatened. Even those of us who, for many years, were of the view that we were called to be outward activists and others of us inward spiritualists, have joined the

new movement because of the consequences of what this particular threat could mean. And if it is not us, then who will it be? At our birth in 1652, Fox and others recognized that we were called to resist the kings, nobles, bishops and lords. They were the one percent then and many of us today are the ninety-nine percent. As it was then so it is now, a political, religious, economic and military challenge all mixed together.

Rather than passivity or conflict avoidance, resistance requires activism, and that is of two sorts – violent revolution or nonviolent direct action. Our heritage is the latter. Nevertheless, Quakers have been well known for coming to America to do good and ending up doing well. They were captains of slave ships and whalers; they have been part of the elite millionaires of corporate, privileged power and profit. But more than that, Quakers have been middle class Americans, concerned about their neighbors, particularly the less well off, the vulnerable, the victims, the morally conscientious. Quakers have sought a balance in life through testimonies of living simply, honoring community, and speaking plainly towards the ends of peace, justice and equality on earth. In doing so, they have remained sensitive to the needs of all, not only their friends but also strangers and enemies, and as so, they have often been reluctant to take sides in conflict situations. We who have been life long adult activists have been faced with that reluctance many times. It is usually couched in the context of refusing to oppose persons, organizations, factions or nations. There is an unwillingness to offend anyone underlying this hesitancy. Why? Resistance requires taking sides. But it has been misconstrued as taking sides against persons rather than in support of the spiritual values of justice, dignity and human rights that are threatened. Early Quakers had no problem. George Fox's witness to the kingly powers and William Penn's Holy Experiment were original, distinctive and forceful acts of resistance for justice and peace. Whereas Fox and the early Quakers were successful, William Penn and the American movement went down for Quakers as a failure. The secular militarists won out and the Quakers, by that time known as a peculiar people, became a quietist community. Then came the Revolutionary War. Quakers were faced with a choice between violent revolutionary resistance and violent imperial loyalty. They followed their original testimony of peace and saw that as calling them to not take sides between these two extremes. Quakers were branded passive loyalists by the revolutionaries and traitors by the royalists for not supporting their king. Nonviolent resistance for conscience's sake was seldom considered a third choice between the time of John Woolman in the 1750s and Lucretia Mott and the abolitionist movement a hundred years later.

As Quakers entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of Rufus Jones and the Brintons, educational institutions and reform efforts through national committees were the norm, with conscientious objectors and civil disobedients offering selective resistance. Nevertheless, deep in our origins and history and in our current times, Quakers have practiced nonviolent activism. I recall years of Quaker witness in front of the White House during the Vietnam War. So resistance through nonviolent direct action is a choice now that seems clear.

Many ways to resist nonviolently come to mind. What say you? What comes to mind? (discussion with participants) These include 1) direct action of various types including vigils, witnesses, protests, demonstrations, accompaniment, many augmented through conscientious objection and civil disobedience. 2) Education, both of ourselves and for others on how to practice nonviolent direct action through nonviolence training and how

to persevere through arrest, trial, jail and other serious consequences. 3) Boycotts, giving up benefits and pleasures of corporate advantage, living under the taxable level as war tax resisters and other actions of simplicity. 4) The use of the media through oral and written statements, some of which could be as plain as the writings of the Quakers of old. 5) Court litigation and legislative work. 6) For Quakers, our own established national and international organizations – AFSC, FCNL, QUNO, FWCC – are instruments for persuasive pressure. 7) Learning and practicing conflict resolution with people of varying political viewpoints.

During the past three months, there has been a huge renewal of energy, much greater than expected, with the women’s march on Washington, climate change demonstrations on Earth Day through April 29, numerous sanctuary cities established from coast to coast, many large and noisy town hall meetings about immigration and health care, and massive Tax Day demonstrations. An early article in *The Nation*, called Americans to “Mourn, Resist, Organize.” Written a few days after the election, a stunned Editorial Board stated that “a man who campaigned on a platform of hostility to immigrants, contempt for women and disregard for civil and religious liberty has been elected President of the United States.” “The same republican Party,” it goes on “that for eight years obstructed President Obama at every turn, now controls the Senate, the House and soon the Supreme Court.” Later articles blamed the Democratic Party for not being vigilant enough as the historical party of the vulnerable, the poor, the victimized and the protector of the environment. As the months unfolded, Trump attempted to make true his predatory promises to protect the profit-makers, the privileged and the powerful. *The Nation* wrote about “How to Fight Back.” It said: “Resistance must balance the monitoring of his reckless acts through the work of challenging the savage policies put forward.”

*The Nation* listed a guide, available on Google, composed by a handful of current and former congressional staffers that outlined the most effective ways for ordinary people to lobby their representatives. The website crashed under the weight of the traffic it was drawing – 1.8 eight million people, 5,387 different groups in March. Some of the projects were entitled 1) Town hall meetings, 2) The Pussy Hat Project, 3) Knock on every door, 4) Swing Left, 5) Adopt a State, 6) Flipable, 7) Run for something, 8) Grab your wallet, 9) Movement 2017, and 10) Operation 45, consisting of Freedom of Information Act requests. (Article available.)

We no longer have the luxury of a slow but sure movement “to a more perfect union.” Our efforts have been sidetracked into stopping the racist, misogynist and kleptocratic practices of dismantling the public services we were able to protect and slowly move forward in the past. George Orwell’s *1984* is flying off the shelves of bookstores as “alternative facts and fake news” become commonplace, and its content is described as “Trump think.”

In joining in the resistance movement, Quakers will find that there will be a tension between a more militant resistance and a more spiritual one. We should not be taken up with the need to be effective. Rather we should be truthful about what we pursue. For if our consequences become more important than our principles we will find, as has been the case in every predominately secular movement, we will become more like that which we are trying to resist and less like what we are called to be. The call to spiritual resistance for Quakers can no longer be selective, as some have said in the past “politics is not my thing,”

or espoused a false dichotomy between Quaker spirituality and Quaker activism. The power of Truth is found in our testimonies of community, integrity, simplicity, peace, equality and earth care. So let us resist together and combine it with the resilience needed in order to make it holistic.

#### RESILIENCE: TO BE (being)

The long haul includes a resistance with resilience that will restore what has been lost and restart our 250-year movement forward again. What is resilience? It's defined as "the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change; the capability of withstanding shock without permanent deformation or rupture; elastic, flexible." It is a state of being rather than doing. Probably the greatest American experience of resilience was the manner in which Americans, during World War II reacted to the Pearl Harbor attack and the necessities required of them over four years until victory. I was cheered up by the words of that beautiful song, which told me "there will be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover, tomorrow just you wait and see." As a child, I knew nothing of the detention of Japanese-Americans and their resilience to wait until release and vindication many years later by constitutional lawyers protecting the rule of law. My participation in the Civil Rights Movement began with Jews, Blacks and women and moved to include anti-war resisters, undocumented refugees and mistreated prisoners and poor.

Today, as then, first comes the shock, then the sadness, then the outrage, and then the will to gather in community and commit to a unified resistance. Laurence O'Donnell of MSNBC, after the shock and sadness wore off, expressed his concern that the progressives would revert to type and exhibit too much adjustment and acquiescence to what had happened. He said outrage is good. After all what we are facing then and now, as he said early on, was the collapse of civilization and the destruction of constitutional democracy as we know it. One should be very angry and that anger may then be captured in a will to overcome what had happened. That energy would be transformed into hope, fortitude and action. For spiritual folks, we may describe that as faith in the power of truth, hope in the future of democracy, and love for all those involved on both sides of the conflict.

Our own experiences, Genie's and mine, have marveled on the need to sustain our resilience with humor as well as faith. Here are a few examples. (Bill mentions them)

Quakers have been sustained not only by their testimonies but by the manner in which they peaceably but forcefully protect their Quaker process, are fortified by contemplation in silent worship and the will to witness to what is right indefinitely without promise of success. For in those peculiar processes and practices, truth is power and once activated will not be taken away until the end is reached.

#### RESTORATION and RESURGENCE

Restoration is defined as "to put or bring back into existence or use to a former position or condition; to reestablish, renew, revive." What will have to be restored through this resistance and resilience? (Any comments?) Many of you are aware of Trump's campaign promises and now, in the past 100 days of what he has successfully or unsuccessfully done in that regard. His failures so far have been his attempts to destroy the

Affordable Healthcare Act and his failure to eliminate the American tradition of welcoming immigrants. His so-called successes can be found in numerous Executive Orders such as ending our movement to challenge global warming by deregulating carbon emissions and pollution prohibitions and many more. He appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court his own candidate in spite of the fact that republicans violated the Constitution's requirement that Obama's nominee receive a hearing by the Congress. (Art.2 §2) The new member of the Supreme Court takes his seat in complicity with that violation, while at the same time he swears to uphold the Constitution. Finally, the President now feels confident from the accolades and approval he has received for rejecting diplomacy in favor of missile attacks and the use of the Mother of All Bombs.

What lies ahead? His tax reform and a budget to transfer funds from public services to private profit and military spending are on the agenda as well as further attempts to repeal Obamacare. Some of us may not be familiar with what this proposed budget entails. It will be the next major event calling for our resistance. (Anyone familiar with it?) I will paraphrase a recent summary in opposition to it from *The Nation* magazine. There is an additional 54 billion dollars to be added to military expenditures and that sum will be subtracted from domestic programs even though the Pentagon accounts for over 40 percent of the world's current military spending. The budget is a blow to science, medical research, renewable energy and education and training. The National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities are abolished. They constitute only 0.02 % of the Obama budget and their elimination seriously jeopardizes public radio and television. Education and training programs – preschool and after school, work study and grant support to help low income families pay for college, job training for workers, teacher training and more – are all savaged. Spending on sorely needed infrastructure is cut as well with a thirteen percent reduction in the Department of Transportation and the elimination of the Department of Agriculture's water and waste disposal loan and grant program.

Other programs decimated are infant nutrition, daycare for lower income families, public housing and rent support, meals on wheels, home heating aid for the impoverished and disabled to prevent freezing in winter. Rural economic development programs – the Appalachian Regional Council, the Delta Regional Authority, and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – are ended, as well as support for rural airports and radio stations. Job training and legal aid are eliminated. Programs to help middle and high school students prepare for college and after school and summer enrichment programs are cut out. The assault on public education is escalated with money going rather to subsidize charter and private school vouchers. Support for enforcing health and safety regulations in factories and mines, minimum wage and workers' rights programs are eviscerated. Food stamps and Pell grants are cut.

In order to compensate for some of the excessive discretionary spending on the wall, the budget and trips to Florida, mandatory programs like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and interest on the national debt will be cut and privatized. More tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations are featured.

Few of us know that the republican administration has recently passed legislation so that adjudicated mentally ill patients may obtain firearms without background checks. This will further escalate the gun violence domestically, while at the same time military

action will only increase the violence internationally and diminish our reliance on nonviolent alternatives. Violence begets violence.

If that list is not enough to cause wholesale resistance, I don't know what else would do it. It's a huge task to restore and then restart where we left off before Trump. Priorities for resistance must be set. How would you do it? (Any discussion?) After the tremendous task of restoration, we may again begin a resurgence of what we were pursuing before Trump, even though there has been continued conservative Christian corporate, confederate, and militaristic opposition to it. Fortunately, there is already in progress the passage of legislation in eleven states, constituting 165 electoral votes, requiring state electors to cast their votes for the candidate who won the popular vote.

## CONCLUSION

Western history has been identified as a slow evolutionary progress in the elimination of violent discrimination, prejudice and bias and the progression of democratic freedom, security, human rights, equality and neighborliness. This great movement began long before there were American political parties. The terror of tyrants has been with us from the beginning and Trump is only the latest version, but uniquely the first to gain such power in America. Unfortunately, an acceptable pragmatic American culture justifies as ethical whatever "works" as long as you don't get caught breaking the law.

We are gathered here today to make a difference based on a principled morality that proceeds from rightness and not mightiness. We *can* make a contribution in the effort to resist, empowered by our resilience, restoring human dignity for all and restarting the resurgence of the continuing movement towards a more perfect union. Thank you all.

## QUERIES

- On Resistance: Does a spiritual resistance to political power differ from a secular one? How? What are its characteristics?
- On Resilience: How may we best sustain a resistance and be resilient?
- On Restoration: What are the priorities for restoration of foundational political benefits lost during the current times?
- What does it take to thereafter begin to form "a more perfect union?"

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