

The Thomas W. Lambeth Lecture

Where There Is No Vision

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September 16, 2008

The Thomas Willis Lambeth Lecture in
Public Policy is sponsored and published in
association with the Department of Public Policy,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
CB# 3435 Abernethy Hall
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-3435.

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Final version for publication,
December 11, 2008.

*Original sketches by Gordon M. Allen are gratefully acknowledged.
Lecture and publication costs are supported by the generous gift of an anonymous donor.*

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This is one of those times when candor requires a large dose of humility. For starters, this lecture was established to honor Tom Lambeth, but the truth is that Tom Lambeth in his life and works has honored his alma mater, his state and his nation in such remarkable ways and for so long that there is no adequate way to repay him. What I have to say tonight will be small potatoes by comparison.

Fortunately for me and for Tom, the first Lambeth lecture was given last year by his old and good friend, Joel Fleishman. Joel's affectionate tribute should be reprinted and passed out at each annual Lambeth lecture. It captures Tom in most of his multiple parts and pins down his place in the history of the last 50 or so years with precision, grace and humor.

Since I cannot top it, let me offer a few amens.

If you worked in the world of philanthropy, as I have in one way or another for 40 years, you knew that during his long stewardship of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Tom set the mark by which other foundation executives should be judged.

If, like me, you were a native white Southerner of a half century ago, determined that the region be liberated from its long bondage to economic and racial injustice, not in some hazy over-the-hill, around-the-corner time and place, but right here and right now where you were planted, Tom was your pointman.

And if you believed in politics and government as indispensable tools for constructive change but despaired of their ever being deployed to such purpose in the mid-20th Century South, Tom's role in the ascension of Terry Sanford was and is a matter of unmitigated envy.

There was Terry, and arrayed around him were those young Chapel Hill lions, Tom, Joel, Eli and company.

I recollect the time when our lives first intersected, Tom, even though we did not. In 1959, Mississippi elected Ross Barnett as governor, despite my

brilliant editorials demanding his defeat. He was a canny racist demagogue well-suited to his state's heritage. While Terry Sanford was breaking with history to support his party's Roman Catholic presidential nominee, Ross was running against Kennedy on an Unpledged Electors ticket. It carried Mississippi and part of Alabama, though it could not fulfill its purpose and deny Jack Kennedy's victory.

Being a bad loser as well as a mean-spirited man, Barnett decreed that Mississippi would boycott the inauguration, and so it did—almost. Four days before the inauguration, three of us—average age 26—came to a spontaneous joint decision in Greenville, Mississippi, my hometown: We were going to Washington, by God, to watch this great young leader become President.

And so we kissed our wives goodbye and drove straight through to the Washington office of Mississippi Sen. John Stennis. The senator was a family friend and was close to Jack Kennedy. Politically cautious, he wasn't going to the inauguration himself, but he held many of the state's tickets and was willing to let us have them.

Lights, camera, action! Through snow and bitter cold, we did it all from Gala to swearing in, and at the inaugural ball in the Mayflower Hotel we sat in the Mississippi box with Miss Mississippi and Miss Hospitality and danced our way through the night (a fact it took us weeks to tell our wives after we got back).

As a matter of supreme irony, the state box was next to the President's. Ecstasy! We were even more ecstatic when we realized that Terry Sanford had arrived to have his picture taken with Kennedy. So should we, we decided, and so we did, with no shove-back from a Secret Service not yet traumatized by the decade ahead.

With Kennedy, it was a new America, and with Terry Sanford, it was a new New South, and we would always have the pictures to prove it. At that moment all things seemed possible. So thanks, Tom, and thanks, Joel. It would be years before political life seemed so bright again.

One more aside. Please ignore the official speech title. I have. It was offered weeks ago, when I didn't have the slightest idea about what I intended to say. Some of our public policy students demanded a snappier title for campus distribution. What emerged was America the Separate: The Murder of Community. Crisp, over-the-top and not quite it.

This is it ... with thanks to Ecclesiastes:

Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish

In his inaugural Lambeth Lecture, Joel gave an elegant exegesis on North Carolina's 300-year-old record of public probity. He detailed, sadly but clearly, the ethical erosions of recent times.

Then, rallying toward his conclusion, he took note of the contributions of Sir Walter Raleigh, Tom Lambeth and Frank Porter Graham, then threw in a host of other Carolina leaders, unnamed but valiant, who had recently been elected to do Right instead of Wrong.

In his penultimate moment, he demanded that every officeholder in North Carolina take a prompt public stand against official corruption.

In some states — New Jersey comes to mind — that might have seemed a ludicrously naive suggestion. But Joel could make it with a straight face because he is a North Carolinian. He had history on his side, though perhaps not quite as emphatically as he suggested. Things really were better here than in the rest of the South. (That said, I expect Joel noticed there was no immediate rush in Raleigh to take the pledge,)

There is no such canvas where I come from. I was born in Louisiana and spent half my life in Greenville. Many things have been said and written about both states. Rarely if ever has the word “ethical” been applied to public life in Louisiana. Even more rarely has Mississippi's white leadership been accused of looking forward rather than back — Ray Mabus and especially William Winter

being notable exceptions toward the close of the 20th Century.

Thus I cannot mourn a lost halcyon era in the states I have always called home. There never was one, unless you believe in the “Lost Cause” and John C. Calhoun’s fever swamp mirage of the slave South as Athens.

No matter. Like Joel, I can insist that the past has lessons to offer about the direction in which the nation urgently must go. I can invoke the myths, promises and accomplishments that went into what was known for so long and to such wonderful effect as the American Creed. And I can unreservedly predict that without its healthy presence, or the substitution of an even broader umbrella under which this nation of disparate folk and cultures can shelter, our great experiment in a government of majority rule and minority rights will wither away or implode.

Politicians find it irresistible these days to inflict the public with a bundle of heartening, instructive tales from their “storyline arcs.” I am not above such self-indulgence, but you can relax. I am not running for anything.

My run for the vice presidency took place 36 years ago at the Miami Beach Democratic Convention. Don’t ask. It was an absurd moment in which I was put forward as the favorite son of Virginia and Mississippi. For the record, I was 37, lived in a small town in an under-populated state and was a swim-meet Dad. If only I had been 43. If only I liked to skin moose. (I redeemed myself the next night by putting the name of Terry Sanford in nomination for president. If you want a lost cause, there could not have been a better one.)

What follows is barely six weeks old. Patt and I went to New York City for the 80th birthday of my onetime Greenville neighbor and enduring good friend, Clarke Reed.

Clarke is an ardent right-winger; on most of the big issues we could not be more opposed. Over 46 years he has spent tons of his own money and far more of his time to build the new, hard-edged Republican Party which bestrides the South today. He ranks with Strom Thurmond as the chief architects of the Southern



GOP's historic reversal of political fortune.

But the Reeds, like the Carters, also believed in the centrality of community and each individual's responsibility to community. That meant we worked toward shared goals in Greenville even while laboring mightily in different political directions.

Clarke is also a deep-dyed believer in late night conviviality and the redeeming virtues of strong drink — and here, I must confess, there is not and never has been a millimeter of difference between us. We are, in short, good old boy buddies.

So Patt and I walked into his party, embraced the honoree and his family, and proceeded into the room. Where I promptly ran into Karl Rove, with whom I have had a passing acquaintance for about 35 years.

We smiled amiably, neither one showing his horns, traded a line or two, and drifted away. That was our last exchange of what turned out to be a very, very long night.

But not our last exchange of the week. A few days later, along came a handwritten note. Good to have been with you, Karl wrote. It's easy to see why you and Clarke are such friends. But how did either of you survive those decades of hard-living in the Delta?

A pleasant epistle, changing not one iota of our political differences. Just a human touch across party lines, as was our presence at Clarke's birthday.

When I tell that story to friends, a substantial majority tend to screw up their mouths and blink their eyes in repulsed astonishment. How many more of *them* were at that party? How could I bear to be in the same room?

The answer: It was easy. That's what a healthy public square in this nation is supposed to encompass and encourage.

Not the harmonious choirs and liturgical monologues of the like-minded, but debate and fierce disagreement and grudging accommodation and live-and-let-live within the national room we all inhabit.



Should be, but isn't. What threatens to tear the United States apart is each ideological faction's unshakeable certainty that those on the other side are knaves, fools, fascists, Communists, atheists, lunatics, subversives. What was once the monopoly of totalitarian true believers and holy war ayatollahs is now creedal text for ideological plug-uglies of the right and left.

It has been coming on for some time. As noted, I knew something of closed societies when I went to Washington to work for Lyndon Johnson's reelection in 1964 Mississippi: the Closed Society is how Jim Silver — a Carolina grad — titled his definitive study of the state's massive resistance to desegregation.

By comparison, I looked forward to Washington as the Promised Land — until I encountered what I came to think of as the Georgetown Syndrome. There was The Club, the permanent Washington, and there was everyone else. Jack Kennedy was the martyred God. Lyndon Johnson was an intellectually unwashed Pretender. Higher education began and ended with the Ivy League. White Southerners who chose to stay in the South, rather than emigrating to New York or Washington, were by definition ignorant redneck racists.

I was briefly shocked, offended. These were supposed to be the best and the brightest. Instead, what I encountered was provincial snobbery.

As it happened, the America in which I lived was more complicated than that. Greenville was a complex, contradictory place.

There were plenty of my fellow whites who wanted nothing to do with someone named Hodding Carter, father or son — a known Communist, a known liberal, a known racist epithet-lover. A few openly hoped that someone would shoot us, blow us up, and run us out of town. Some threatened to do just that. I had a pistol in my pocket, in my car, in my office, and in several rooms of my home for the first five years I was back home after the Marines.

A lot of that was youthful paranoia and machismo; a lot of it was based on growing up with a father who had felt it necessary to do the same for two decades.

But that was only part of the story. I had friends like Clarke Reed, with

whom I could argue politics till the cows came home. I had hunting friends and tennis friends and civic club friends and church friends and newsroom friends and high school classmates and business partners with whom I shared some beliefs and split on others. As I became deeply involved in efforts to open the state's Democratic Part to all, I had black friends and associates of every description. Not surprisingly, there were also others in the civil rights movement who thought I was too moderate to be trusted.

I wrote maybe six thousand editorials in the 17 years I was in Greenville, and quite a few of them took issue with private citizens as well as public officials. More times than not I had to face the recipients of my wise advice at the post office or the coffee shop or at dinner or the movies.

It was a community, not a set of isolation wards. We worked out our differences as best we could. And so we discovered that your enemy of Issue X today could be your ally on Issue Y tomorrow. You couldn't avoid learning that easy labels made for sloppy analysis when it came to other human beings. In my case, writing all those editorials also meant you couldn't avoid knowing that being wrong went with the territory that is life, that certainty about your own infallibility is as fatuous as it is absurd.

I was not and am not Pollyanna. Aside from the guns and the threats, the boycotts and direct insults, there was the overwhelming reality that was segregation and white supremacy.

Nonsensical invocations of the "warm personal relations" that existed between black and white in the good old days are just that, nonsensical. De jure segregation rested squarely on the proposition that African Americans could be treated like serfs because they were inherently inferior.

Sounds peculiarly Southern, but it wasn't. White supremacy was the nation's original sin, and it touched every section of the country.

So did other issues that have evolved so dramatically in America over the past 50 years. Women, the handmaidens, were obviously not entitled to the same



privileges as men. Gays and lesbians were not even a matter for public discussion, let alone inclusion. There was no question about separation of church and state. Where I came from, the church dictated whether you could buy or consume alcohol in public, when or if you could go to the movies, whether you could work on Sundays, what prayers you would use in public school. But then again, movies and books “Banned in Boston” were the unabashed products of Catholic censorship, not Baptist.

In other words, an accurate picture of the history of my town and nation could not be captured in Norman Rockwell’s stirring renditions of the Four Freedoms.

But yet: At the nadir of white supremacy and sexism and ethnic intolerance, of the politics of never-never and McCarthyism, most Americans understood, dimly or clearly, that we were not living up to standards our founding documents required.

There were always those indelible American propositions floating above us, inescapable no matter how hard we tried to ignore them. There was the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and all the other amendments that kept expanding the parameters of what America was all about. There was regression aplenty—think of the 100-year history of Redemption in the South—but there were those glorious words in the Declaration of Independence forever sitting there to sustain one more charge into the breach.

And we Americans responded. We engaged across party lines, across regions, across the limiting markers of our past. Perhaps it was always too much to say we were the last, best hope for mankind. But our long, grudging slog toward a more open, democratic and just society is one of the wonders of human history.

Our system has often been corrupt, bigoted, bloody-minded and regressive—but it has rarely been static. Here today, gone tomorrow or in a thousand tomorrows: that is the history of this nation.

And the fundamental reason is that there has been a common creed commonly understood, that kept demanding: Do Better!

It is precisely this notion of the Commonwealth that is under sustained assault. It has been a long time building. Sadly enough, significant public and private institutions have taken leading roles in the destructive deconstruction of the American creed and its implications.

How did we get here? By evolution.

In my day, white segregationists painted their opponents not merely as wrong, but as un-American aliens. The labels were despicable, but they worked. Conformity behind white supremacy was demanded and enforced.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, the New Leftists took their certainties on some of the most important issues of the day and fashioned them into ideological clubs with which to beat the “SYSTEM” into the ground. Having been weaned on bad history that proclaimed America’s inherent goodness and infallibility, they fell into the equally mistaken belief that America was irredeemably rotten. Spelling America with a K was more than a symbolic gesture. It was a sharp reminder that good intentions yoked to foul means can produce defective ends and unintended consequences.

Adults who knew better applauded, and then aped their juniors. The search for political purity led to absurd rigidities, secular ex cathedra pronouncements, and dense polemics. Angels danced in ever greater profusion on the heads of the left’s political pins. Millions of hitherto uninterested Americans looked up and decided my side had gone crazy. Who do they think they are? Where are they trying to take us?

New Moses arose in Lynchburg and Norfolk and Colorado Springs to show the way out of the wilderness, offering texts of unshakeable dogma. Non-negotiable demands ran headlong into non-negotiable demands.

But isn’t that exactly what America is supposed to be all about — a process that channels our wants and needs and hopes and fears and rage into the political process? Absolutely.

But simultaneous other developments minimized if not negated the

ameliorative effects of democratic politics. Building consensus having fallen out of fashion, polarization took its place.

In no particular order or depth, here are some of the culprits:

The news media, given range and license and liberty in ways unknown in other societies, is my home of homes. I love what it has meant to this democracy; love what my 30 years in its vineyards meant to me above all other undertakings in my vocational life.

I sincerely believe that the Republic's health depends on the adequacy of the news and opinion that media provide to the people. But broadcast and internet political media today — not to mention print commentary — are dominated by a style of discourse that is best compared to the Gong Show or Kabuki Theater. Issues are cast as the clash of extremes. "Let you and him fight" is the setup. "Gotcha" is the journalistic equivalent of "Bingo!" — the shouted point of the game.

The very premise of the Blue State-Red State divide — a conceit arising from colors on a television map in one presidential election — is that there are intractable, permanent divisions that define all aspects of political life. But we all know that right here in the Triangle, blue and red, right and left, are intermixed within counties, communities and families. No matter. Every media tendency, from technological to economic, is to slice and dice the public into ever more narrowly defined segments and "markets," then encourage them to come out fighting.

Some profess to be deeply disturbed by possible political bias in the media. That is not the problem or even a problem. That horse left the American barn about 300 years ago. Except for a very brief period for a special subset of elite news organizations in roughly the second half of the 20th Century, newspapers were ever the proud spear carriers for faction and party and ethnicity and section. Fox News is, by my standards, a piece of unmitigated ideological trash, but so what? Others believe that The New York Times is. Thus it has always been.

What does concern me are the underlying themes that unify vast swatches of



media today. Our job is to entertain, to leer, to frighten and to pander, they seem to say. Public officeholders are by definition not to be trusted except when they cultivate us. The story of stories is that failure is endemic in the public sphere.

Or, perhaps even worse, there is the tendency to go with the “story-line arc” instead of issue coverage — coverage of politics degenerating into a rough approximation of Britney Spears coverage.

For the love of heaven, what someone does on an ice rink or on the basketball court is almost totally irrelevant. What they plan to do about the economy or health care or the Iraq quagmire is of lasting moment. But not for much of the media, terrified of boring their audience, losing their market share.

Then here we are — we, the people. We have separated out at a rapid clip. Race is no longer the sole motivator, though it is a critical component. Money, class, religious preferences, lifestyle choices, the search for security, political intolerance — all are driving us apart geographically. There was never a melting pot, but the dissimilar nonetheless lived in considerable proximity. Now there is a flight to sameness.

In a remarkable book titled The Big Sort, the journalist/sociologist Bill Bishop concludes his assessment with chilling clarity:

“Beginning thirty years ago, the people of this country unwittingly began a social experiment. Finding cultural comfort in ‘people like us’ we have migrated into ever-narrower communities and churches and political groups.

“We have created and are creating new institutions distinguished by their isolation and single-mindedness. We have replaced a belief in a nation with a trust in ourselves and our carefully chosen surroundings.



“And we have worked quietly and hard to remove any trace of the ‘constant clashing of opinions’ from daily life...Now more isolated than ever in our private lives, cocooned with our fellows, we approach public life with the sensibility of customers who are always right...Tailor-made has worked so well for industry and social networking sites, for subdivisions and churches; we expect it from our government, too. But democracy does not seem to work that way.”

Seismic economic forces reinforce our stampede to self-segregation. There is not enough time tonight to follow this thread to its end, so let’s try an assertion: Virtually everything that goes into what is termed globalization is a threat to the very idea of national community and national autonomy. Much of the drive to increase market share depends on segmentation. To follow the market’s logic is to minimize the needs of community.

Globalization prizes creativity, mobility and adaptation. It is neutral on democracy, opposes by definition governmental regulation of economic activity on behalf of national interests and cares not a whit about the nature or health of a nation’s political dispensation.

What it requires is a clear field for its much vaunted efficiencies, not the messy interaction of contending values. It values consumers, not citizens. It does quite well in China and in Brazil, the United States and Singapore. Authoritarian, totalitarian, democratic: globalism cares not a whit.

Which takes us to politics. More about the presidential election will come later. For now, I would suggest that it offers at least a glimmering promise of change in the premises and practices of national politics. With great luck and iron restraint by the candidates, both of which have slipped mightily in recent days, it just might restore a larger vision to the process. I said I was not Pollyanna, and neither am I Candide. We shall see.

But for the moment, what the record shows is that for the past 40 years, American politics has worked to repel public participation and undermine belief in underlying constitutional principles.

Again, I have no romantic view of the past. Politics was raw, the rhetoric was heated and issues were frequently served up with a heavy sauce of demagoguery. But in our time, whatever the rhetoric or ideology, candidates have been instructed by their expert handlers to polarize, polarize, polarize.

The point is not to expand your own base; it is to shrink your opponent's. Reputations are made by small bore assassination.

Bill Bishop's phrase to describe political encounter today is "ideological road rage." No longer small-d democrats engaged in a search for solutions for common problems, each side seeks to convince its followers that they are meeting at Armageddon to do battle for the Lord.

Staying on text is more important than getting to the point. Closed ranks and closed minds are prized. Compromise, the very essence of a democratic system based on the understanding that there can be no final victories, is held up to scorn.

Empathy seems to be a dirty word. And the Lord forbid that you employ "fancy rhetoric" to try to bring the people together.

Fareed Zakaria caught the essence of the problem in a June 16th column in Newsweek:

"Some of this (extreme partisanship) is because of the narrowcasting of American politics, a process in which the extreme ends of the spectrum have been magnified and the center gets lost...Compromise is hard. No one gets all or even most of what they want. But in a vast, continental land of 300 million, people are going to disagree. No compromise means nothing will get done. And America will slowly drift down in the roll of nations."

Not just the media, not just politics, but also the academy. A broad road to success in the social sciences became marked by narrow specialization and sweeping rejection of virtually everything constructed by “dead white males.” Nothing new about that, about Young Turks taking on the Old Fogies — except for one thing.

At its core, much of the new scholarship aped the fading Marxist-Leninists in being scornful not only of the practices but also of the premises of the American system.

That was new, the rejection of the very system that made sweeping change, and open intellectual inquiry, possible, that provided elbow room for very sharp elbows.

The learned smirk became the substitute for debate. We are right. They are wrong. Some people have more right to be heard than other people. Case closed. The Georgetown Syndrome.

A conservative critique was titled The Closing of the American Mind. I once rejected its premise, seeing it as little more than another club with which the right could beat the left. Today, I am not so sure. Intellectual lockstep is lockstep, no matter how worthy the cause. As the academy should know better than any, closing off discussion and inquiry because of ideological certainty is a straight road to intellectual aridity.

Dissent and vigorous debate lie at the heart of the Republic. The problem today is that there are too few countervailing voices. The old Gods may be wrong or they may be dead — or both — but to bury them by acclamation is not enough.

The American Creed has produced great value over its long regenerative history. What is offered in its place? What works to give it new emphasis or relevance or shape?

In much of secondary education in the United States today, the answer is: Not much.



The old civics classes were, far too frequently, tools for rote learning and indoctrination. But they at least provided a frame against which you could react, rebel, and push out. Today, what we have for the most part is a vacuum, only partially filled by inadequate American history courses that try to cram all of post-World War II history into the final week. This leaves colleges and universities with the daunting task of teaching the basics of the American system in a curriculum chock-full of unavoidable and more advanced requirements.

So here we are, strangers in a strange land, and if that were the end of the story, the future of the American experiment would be bleak.

Fortunately, it is not.

My optimism is based on that most conservative of instincts, faith in the past as a guide to the future.

The Founders were not cockeyed optimists. To the contrary, by today's standards they were ideologically and philosophically conservative, with a small as well as a large c. They understood human nature to be flawed, power to be inevitably corrupting, perfection to be a mirage.

To which they said, in effect, "So what," and devised political instruments to advance the common good and contain the common instinct to abuse power. They believed in the pursuit of happiness, with all it was understood to encompass, private property rights most notably.

But they also understood the tragedy of the commons, the perils of unchecked pursuit of private aims and ambition. They built in elaborate checks and balances, but also left a legacy of soaring aspiration and the constitutional framework for open-ended reform and renewal.

They ducked on the hard question of race, our enduring stain, but left open a system that could and would come to grips with it, and a view of mankind that demanded that we do.

I find defeatism about the possibility of renewal more than a little strange. A nation which led the world's successful struggle against the two most productively

murderous regimes (and ideas) in world history, has also repeatedly mastered the hard business of repairing social fabric.

A nation which, failing and falling short repeatedly, has never stopped trekking toward the shimmering goal of a just society, should not be consumed with self-doubt, cynicism and, in some quarters, near-despair about the new variations on old problems that face it.

Some claim to believe we are trapped by forces we cannot affect or control. Theirs are constructs that have nothing to do with either present responsibilities or future possibilities.

Determinism, sporadically fashionable in one guise or another, has been repeatedly offered as scientific certainty and repeatedly proved wrong.

Change is stirring all around us. The Big Sort is a snapshot of a moment in time, a station stop, a confirmation of the way society has been moving for 30 years. But as an old journalist, I know that snapshots in time are just that. Straight line projections are frequently dead wrong. You could have predicted that slavery's permanence was all but guaranteed by the Dred Scott decision in 1857. Six years later history's oldest stain was eliminated in this country. At the height of the Great Depression, demographers looked at contemporary birth rates and predicted the US would suffer net population loss for years to come. It didn't happen.

Where is the 1,000-year Reich? Segregation yesterday, segregation today, segregation forever, George Wallace exulted. Both dead. Where are the iron certainties of dialectic materialism?

The reality is that Americans by the millions are again coming to grips with the American Creed. They are not doing it according to a footnoted script or ideological manifesto, but in response to the conditions they see around them. They are reasserting by deed what the Creed has always evoked.

I speak now as a former foundation executive who spent eight years spending other peoples' money to support work by men and women who were trying to make good on the national promise. They soldiered on. They failed. They



succeeded. They tried again. They continue to try. It is called the independent sector, the civil society, and it is America's bulwark against all storms.

I speak as someone who has had the good fortune to be among and teach young Americans at this great University and at four others over the past 28 years. As previously noted, in the 1960s I didn't believe that young activists could be our Pied Pipers to redemption, or even that they were always right. I don't believe it now.

But I did and do believe that there is no hope for the nation if those who will inherit it do not understand they have a responsibility to make it better. Considerably more than a saving remnant of this generation believes just that. They are volunteering in record numbers. They are organizing as well as talking. They are putting life back into the old slogans. They echo Gandhi's admonition, unfortunately now almost a cliché, that "You must be the change you seek in the world," and then they go to work.

Millions of young Americans have volunteered to stand proxy for us in defending the nation. They are in a great and honorable American tradition, without which the United States could never have survived.

Walk across this campus. Read the Daily Tar Heel. Look at the scheduled events. There is an awakening going on out there, one which has convinced even this old pessimist that big things are happening.

And not just among the young and not just at Chapel Hill. America is full of those who have proved they understand that responsibilities go with rights.

Some 500,000 of us have served in Americorps. There are 200,000 Peace Corps alums, including three in my family; 200,000 were in VISTA. A Civic Enterprises report estimated a "civic core" of more than 36 million who regularly volunteer.

Service Nation, working to build a system of universal voluntary service, is aiming for 1 million by 2020 in full or part-time national service outside the military and 100 million Americans in volunteer service each and every year. In a



notable gathering, both presidential candidates joined with other American leaders this September 11 to endorse the idea of a nation in which all will offer public service at some point in their lives.

A bright younger Mississippian, Donna Ladd, is editor in chief of an independent weekly down in Jackson, Mississippi, called the Free Press. Three weeks ago she wrote:

“But America is changing, Americans are changing. Especially younger ones. Part of it is simple demographics. People with old ideas are being replaced with younger people who understand that government plays an important role in a strong country...It may be hard for the old guard to swallow, but most Millennials, as people in their teens and 20s today are called, are into government. They want a good, compassionate, responsive government—and unlike the two cynical generations before them, they believe the mess they’ve inherited can be repaired...

“We must all make a choice. Do we live life, and work hard, only for ourselves and the stuff we can by? Or do we become the passionate caretakers of the great American experiment, working with a diverse younger generation that is ready to make up for past transgressions and greed?”

That is the language of the American Creed. Never of one tongue, one ethnicity, one race, one religion, one national origin, we have been bound by a shared understanding about the proper relationship between the individual and the state, between self-realization and national purpose. Jimmy Carter once encapsulated part of it in a phrase: “America did not invent human rights,” he said. “Human rights invented America.”

And so, here we are on this Sept. 16, 2008. It is not possible to think about



national purpose and the nation's future without paying attention to what has happened over the past 18 months.

Look at where we are. Each party has nominated the presidential candidate most outside its conventional political mainstream. Each has broken taboos or shattered a ceiling or two with its nominations. Black, white; young, old; male, female.

I will not strain my credibility or your credulity by going any further down this road. The proof ultimately will be in the pudding, not in the ingredients.

But let us at least agree that the pot has been stirred mightily, that we have heard a call to renewed national purpose that echoes the greatest themes in American political history. The twin scourges of segmentation and polarization are still very much with us, but they are no longer alone on the stage. The contest between our better and lesser selves has been rejoined.

The trumpet summons us anew, Jack Kennedy said two generations ago." Not as a call to bear arms...but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle against the common enemies of man—tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself."

Humility about our past, and awareness of its sins of omission and commission, these we need, because there are times when we are eaten up with exceptionalism, stuffed with triumphalism and lathered in infantile self-regard.

But we also need self-conscious commitment to the great words that lie at the core of the nation's soul. The American Creed needs constant reaffirmation by deed as well as word. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Seventy two years ago, Franklin Roosevelt stood before 100,000 roaring Americans in Soldiers Field, Philadelphia, and spoke of his generation's "rendezvous with destiny."

It was only rhetoric, of course, deliberately soaring rhetoric that inspired a nation at a time of its greatest peril since the Civil War.

"We are fighting," he said," to save a great and precious form of government—for ourselves and for the world."

And so they were. And so are we.



Biography

Hodding Carter III is University Professor of Public Policy and Leadership at UNC-Chapel Hill. Born in New Orleans, he graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University and later served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. He spent his formative years in Mississippi, where he began his journalism career as a reporter with his family-owned Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Miss. His father was a publisher and editor whose courageous editorials on racial tolerance won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1946. Hodding Carter III later became editor and associate publisher. In 1965, he attended Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow and later worked on two successful presidential campaigns: Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and Jimmy Carter in 1976.

For four years, he served as State Department spokesman for President Carter — notably during the Iran hostage crisis — and went on to become a nationally known television commentator. In the 1980s, he won four Emmy Awards and the Edward R. Murrow Award for documentaries for “Inside Story,” a media criticism series. A decade later, he was a chief correspondent for “Frontline” on PBS. Carter also was a panelist on “This Week with David Brinkley,” and appeared frequently on many other major networks, cable programs and the BBC. He was a Washington opinion columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* and has been a frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among other publications. He has authored two books, [The Reagan Years](#) and [The South Strikes Back](#).

Carter held the Knight Chair in the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland from 1995 to 1997, focusing on public affairs reporting. Most recently he served as president and chief executive officer of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in Miami, a position he assumed in 1998.



W. Hodding Carter III

*The Thomas
Willis Lambeth
Distinguished
Lecture in
Public Policy*

The Lambeth Lecture was established in 2006 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the generous gift of an anonymous donor. Presented annually, its purpose is to bring to the UNC campus distinguished speakers who are practitioners or scholars of public policy, particularly those whose work touches on the fields of education, ethics, democratic institutions, and civic engagement. The lecture is administered by the Lambeth Lectureship Committee composed of faculty members, students, and distinguished individuals engaged in public policy in collaboration with the Department of Public Policy.

Thomas Willis Lambeth



The Lambeth Lecture honors Thomas Willis Lambeth, who led the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation as its executive director for more than two decades until his retirement in 2000. Born in Clayton, North Carolina, Lambeth graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in history, and served as Administrative Assistant to Governor Terry Sanford and to U.S. Representative Richardson Preyer before being named to lead the Foundation in 1978. Described by one journalist as “the

state's do-gooder-in-chief,” Lambeth throughout his career has exemplified the qualities of personal integrity, a passionate devotion to education, democracy, and civic engagement, and wholehearted pursuit of the ideals of the public good and of progressive and innovative ways of achieving it.

During his tenure, the Reynolds Foundation awarded grants totaling more than \$260 million to address many of North Carolina's most pressing public policy issues, particularly social justice and equity, governance and civic engagement, community-building and economic development, education, and protection of the state's natural environment. Tom Lambeth also has made a strong personal impact on many key public policy issues in North Carolina and nationally, including leadership of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, Leadership North Carolina, the North Carolina Rural Center, and a task force of the national Institute of Medicine on the problems of people who lack medical insurance. He also has been a national leader in improving the management and effectiveness of family philanthropic foundations themselves.

*The Thomas William
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