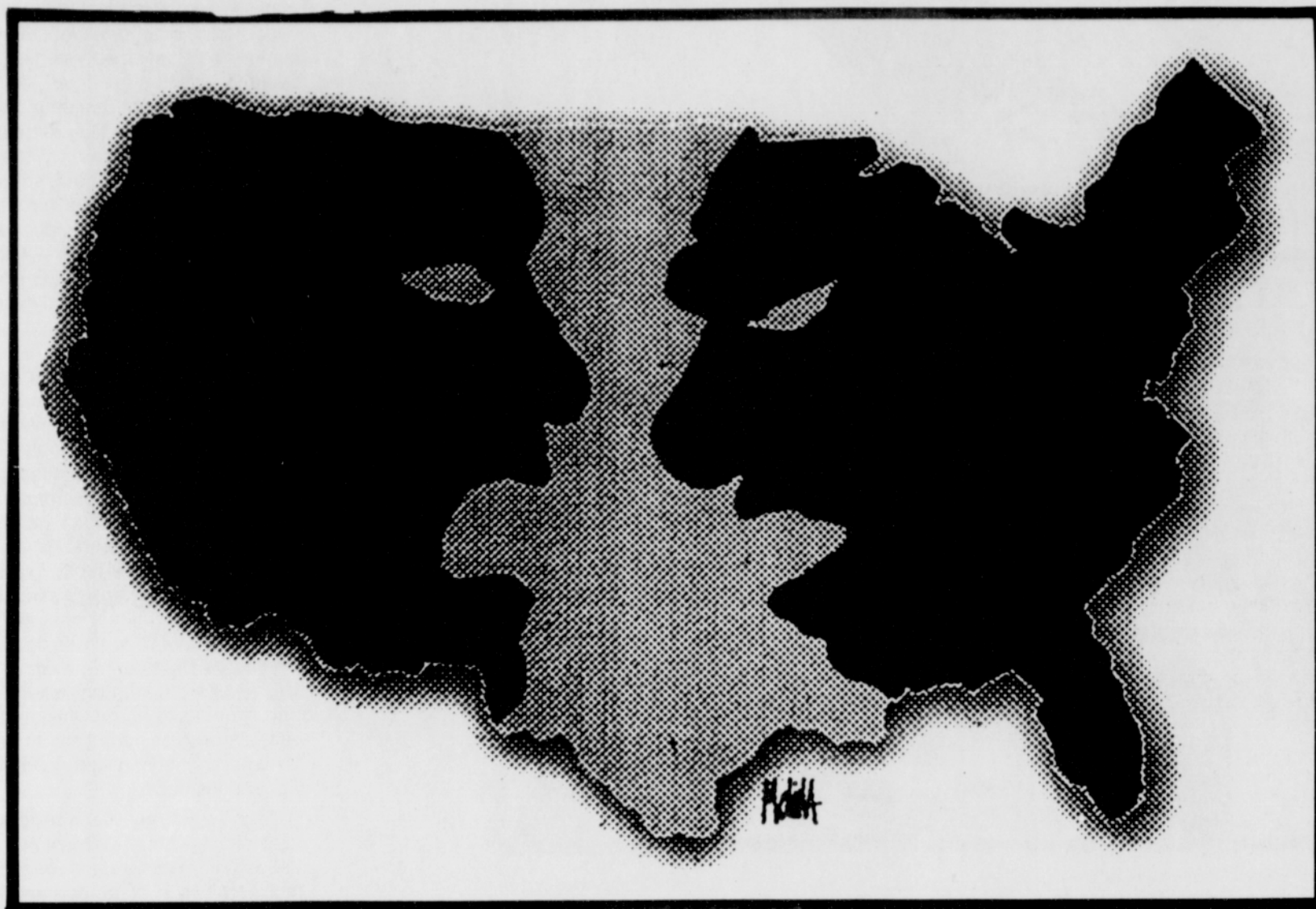


FOLLOW OUR NATIONAL DREAM



PEDRO MOLINA

BY DORIS HADDOCK (AKA 'GRANNY D')

The following speech was made at Orchard House, home of the Alcotts, in Concord, Massachusetts on October 6, 2005.

On my walk across the nation several years ago, I had the honor of speaking from a pulpit where Dr. King once preached. How I felt the power of his words and his love somehow still echoing in that great room! More recently, on the anniversary of his death in Memphis, I had the honor of speaking from the balcony where he took his last breath.

You understand how his politics of nonviolence were informed by the sacrifices of Gandhi, and how Gandhi's non-violence was informed by Tolstoy and Ruskin, who in turn, were inspired by the American Quakers working for the abolition of slavery. The great Quaker voice was William Lloyd Garrison, who spoke to this very group so many years ago — as did Emerson and William James and Julia Ward Howe and other voices for justice who spoke to you in dark times. And so, in the long shadow of these people, I humbly raise my voice today.

We meet in a time when two great and growing divisions are separating us as Americans: rich versus poor, and left versus right. I would like to speak to the second of these, as its resolution would help solve the other.

The political issues that divide the American people are great issues, with severe consequences for the moral life of the nation and the fate of the planet. These are issues equal to the issues that divided us in 1860, and we should fear the historical similarities.

In some ways the conflict of the Civil War was not resolved, but rather accommodated in the same way that smoldering under ashes are but a fire asked to bide its time. Do not the sparks now swirl up fresh? Is the heat and danger we feel not the old conflict between those who believe that authority comes from above: from an Old Testament God, delivered through husbands, presidents, preachers, ayatollahs and plantation overseers to people arranged in layers according to their worth — is it not a conflict between those authoritarians and those others who instead believe that all men are created equal, and that the authority to govern issues forth from them, upward to their government — their common vessel of community — and not downward? Is this not the divide of 1860 and also of our own time?

We have an advantage that our countrymen did not have in 1860, for, despite our tendency to assign colors to states, our differences are not locked into the different economies of different regions. Our differences are with our neighbors, our friends, our family members. We can argue this out peaceably across fences and dinner tables instead of across a bloodied continent as before.

But again it is the work of ending slavery. This time it is slavery of the mind, which is the hardest kind to deal with, as it is usually characterized by the unwillingness of the victims to be

emancipated. But it must happen if the suffering of this nation and of the world is to end.

Let us consider the self-repression of the political right. And in this argument, I am talking to some of my own friends and hoping they will open their minds to a new thought from me, for I offer it in good faith and friendship.

Where authority and power flow down from above, from heaven to the White House to husbands and ayatollahs, the free and joyful living of people can be quite the enemy. If you will remember the free spirit of those flower children who grew up in the 1960s, for example, you will also remember the harsh attitude that attended to their joys from the more traditional, often more rural, elements of our society. Those political leaders who rose from this time, who lived in this more open and free way — less constrained by the rules of authority — were especially vilified by the authority clan. You need only to think of the special treatment given to the Clintons, who were of this generation and climate, to know the truth of this. And it fits the international pattern, of course, that the woman, Mrs. Clinton, would be singled out for the cruelest stones.

What attracted such hatred? It was their freedom, their sense of equality, and their joys.

Here it is: those in the clan of authority are not given the privilege — the natural right — of living their own lives. They do as they are told, say and think what they are told. Smothered is their curiosity and their healthy skepticism, and also their imagination, joy, freedom, and lust for life itself. When they see others actually living their lives, they react with anger, as if someone had cut to the front of a line that, for them, never moves.

What is the proof of this theory? Those in thrall to authority, cowering under it, lose sight of their own lives. They will venerate above all else the symbol of the yet unruined potential of life: the curled-up unborn. The authority clan will have the image of an unborn baby as its flag, and they will claim to honor and defend innocent life, but that will be a great lie to themselves — for they will not be the ones to demand DNA testing of all prisoners on death row; they will not be the ones to demand health insurance for all children, or better nutrition in all schools, or peaceful alternatives to international conflicts. They will be the ones to rail against these things, for the authority clan parades itself as pro-life while it is truly more like a cult of death. Having died themselves, strangled by authority and fear, they cannot wish happy lives for others—they cling only to that magic symbol of what might have been. They relate to an unborn baby selfishly; it is themselves: unborn, un-lived, still hoping for a life.

I am not talking about political conservatives. People who follow leaders like Goldwater, Forbes and Buckley do believe, in the great mainstream of American thought, that government is the council fire of community. They just want it not to be all-consuming. The people we are dealing with today, who are so far right of traditional conservatives that it is unfair to call them that at all, do not believe that our government is the council fire of community. They would replace it with a church, a strict family, and as they have shown us so many times in history, even with a dictatorship that derives from imagined divine powers, and with a reign of brutal authority that sanctions criminal aggressions on other nations, torture, and suspension of civil liberties. How many times have we seen this happen abroad, and how many times have we wondered if we could have the courage and character to act up if it happened here — if our own army was turned into a police force against us?

I think every man and woman of us wants to be a patriot to this great nation. How sad to miss your cue when the alarm bell rings for us! How horrible to be enslaved to the wrong way of thinking at such a time of national crisis! We owe it to our friends and neighbors to free them if we can, so they might stand with us.

I will propose a mental experiment to see if we can find a string or two that can help us lead our friends out of this dangerous maze.

Imagine your friend is very much pro-life and pro-war and doesn't see the illness of her mental conflict.

I think you might notice this friend of yours lives a slipcover-protected life and has not even allowed herself the freedoms of a good fantasy life. Let's repair that.

Let me suggest that we take her to a good arts district, rent her a studio apartment full of art supplies above a good sidewalk café, find her a lover and come back in 90 days to see if her politics have changed. As she lives a real life, as she explores her own potential, she will learn to let others live and enjoy their lives, too. She will want to help the young woman artist next door who gets herself into trouble. She will even begin to be amused and impressed instead of angered and depressed by the Clintons and other lively, joyful, free-living people of this beautiful earth.

When people begin to really live their lives, the black and white certainties do not turn to shades of gray, but to the million-jeweled hues of a morning's dew. That sparkle is the reality of life revealed. Life is about living, and about helping other real people get through this world with a minimum of pain and a maximum of human dignity. We simply can't do that with authoritarian politics and its deadly abstractions. We can only do that with our love and our freedom to think for ourselves and act individually and as a community.

And that was the example of Jesus, wasn't it? Did he not challenge the organized church of his day, challenge its authority, and overturn its rules that had hardened into cruelties and corruption? Did he not show us how we might act instead from the love and charity of our own hearts, and, in this rebellion, did he not say, follow me? Are we not to think for ourselves? Was so grand a thing as the human mind meant to be wasted?

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