

Enduring Ideals:

Revisiting *Lifetimes of Commitment* Twenty-five Years Later

Abstract: This article examines political commitment to work for progressive social change as a lifelong activity. Challenging assumptions that idealism is something which is associated with youth, and, appropriately, later to be ‘grown out of’, the article presents an alternative model for examining social activism as a lifelong engagement. Revisiting research published twenty-five years ago (*Lifetimes of Commitment: Aging, Politics, Psychology* Cambridge University Press 1991), the author re-examines key aspects of the study, including its most central contribution concerning activism as a feature across the life course. The discussion addresses recent debates on old age and political inclination as they are manifested in the global mourning of the death of Nelson Mandela, and the Brexit vote.

Keywords: aging and political commitment; activism and the life course; political narratives; Brexit

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The knowledge of life ... which we grown-ups have to pass on to the younger generation will not be expressed thus: 'Reality will soon give way before your ideals,' but 'Grow into your ideals, so that life may never rob you of them.'

Albert Schweitzer (1925:102)

Thus I opened the concluding chapter of my book on British political activists who had worked for progressive social change for fifty years or longer. I had come to this interest firstly as someone who had attended many demonstrations from a very young age, gatherings which were crowded with young and old alike. And yet despite what I could see with my own eyes and the knowledge that I could surmise from my own experience, there was nonetheless another message which existed somehow outside of the demonstrations, a received wisdom summed up by a phrase often attributed to Churchill, though appearing in slight variations and in an impressive range of public figures including the French monarchist Guizot, the politician Clemenceau, and the writer George Bernard Shaw amongst others: 'if you are not a liberal (or 'republican' or 'socialist') at twenty, you have no heart; if you are still a liberal (or other variant) at forty, you have no brain'. The message was clear: liberal or left-leaning politics was for youth, and while appropriate for that phase of life, it was nonetheless something to be grown out of. Indeed, only those who had crossed to the other side of the bridge, as it were, could look back on their earlier, naïve selves and see reality for what it was.

There have been many versions of this construction of the political life cycle, which associates youth with a time of idealism. And yet, I wondered, where did this leave me, with my political sensitivities, and where were those older activists who I always saw at protests? It was as if they (and indeed my imagined future self) had been completely whitewashed out of the picture, out of our idea of what it means to 'grow up'. And so it was that I dedicated myself to a study of 'lifetimes of commitment' to both document and better understand this phenomenon, of those people who as they increased in years, found in life a deepening of their commitment to work for progressive social change. This study was published as my first monograph, *Lifetimes of Commitment: Aging, Politics and Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). The purpose of the present article is to revisit some of the key arguments I made at that time, and to reflect on the observations I made a quarter of a century ago.

I conducted my study on lifetime socialist activism in the mid-1980s, in the height of Thatcher's Britain, interviewing fifteen women and men who had been politically active on the left for fifty years or longer, most of whom had become engaged in the inter-war years. At the time of our interviews, I was in my twenties, and they ranged in age from seventy-five to ninety. Most of the people who participated in my study were interviewed a number of times, and I became and stayed good friends with them.

Over the years which followed my investigation, we entered and indeed left each other's lives in ways that were deeply affecting, and on more than one occasion I found myself delivering a eulogy, sharing with gathered mourners some of the stories which I had heard in the course of our many conversations together.

Twenty-five years later, what do I make of that study? How do the findings stand the test of time, and do the observations I offered then about the ways in which political engagement develops across the life cycle still pertain today?

Sadly, our world now is just as permeated with ideas about age bringing with it a bend towards conservatism as it was when I began my research in the 1980s. There are, of course, examples of numerous world leaders well into their eighties and nineties who are revered around the globe for their visions of progressive social change and inclusiveness. Amongst these none is more well-known than Nelson Mandela, who died at ninety-five years of age. Not only did South Africa designate ten days of mourning for Mandela, but his passing was marked around the world, with heads of state attending the funeral service in – it was here that Obama and Castro first shook hands after fifty years of chilly relations between their two countries - and millions of others watched the service as it was live streamed from the stadium. Accolades were issued from every corner of the globe; here was a man who was virtually universally revered, for having an image of a more just society and for retaining his commitment to realising that vision, despite the personal cost to him for doing so. Few would be willing to openly state that they did not admire Mandela, and one could be mistaken for thinking that the characteristics which he embodied – perseverance, determination, a deep moral and political sense of purpose, conjoining belief and action, enduring and indeed deepening across a long life – were generally recognised and admired by the world at large, not only in his case, but indeed, in those unsung heroes who people our everyday lives. However, there is not much evidence of this. Rather, Mandela (and Mahata Ghandi, Bertrand Russell, W.E.B. DuBois, Eleanor Roosevelt, Gloria Steinem, Paul Robeson, Thurgood Marshall, I.F. Stone, Margaret Sanger, and countless others who made it into their eighth, ninth, and even tenth decades of life, with their commitment to working for social justice still burning bright) is still portrayed as an exception to the general paradigm that as we age, we become more inward, more insular, with a diminished concern about the fate of others less fortunate than ourselves. And this master narrative is so pervasive that it is almost impossible to recognise it, much less to challenge it, and thereby more difficult for us to see around us our own ordinary heroes and heroines who lead extraordinary lives.

The first and most important comment, then, that I would offer about my research into lifelong political commitment and activism is that it was and remains a neglected area of research. Moreover, there is a widespread tenacity to hold onto the idea that as age increases, so does the lure of an insular politics – even amongst those whose earlier lives had been dedicated to redressing social injustices. While on a personal level that might be rewarding – confirming in me a sense that my work in this area retains some significance – more broadly it is disappointing, as I feel that we strip ourselves, and those who come after us, of inspiring examples of how we all might live out our lives even into old age, if we are given that opportunity. In depriving ourselves of these inspiring examples, we deplete the resources from which we might draw on for our own 'blueprints for living' (Andrew 2009).

There are numerous factors which help to produce this arid landscape, and important implications which follow from it. Amongst these, perhaps the most salient is the intergenerational divide (which here features as both factor and implication). The acute decimation of the life course into discontinuous 'stages' is alarming, enhancing as it does a sense of cohort at the expense of a wider vision of life's horizon. While there is no denying that certain physical attributes attach themselves more to one age than another (Shakespeare's portrayal of the seven ages of man resonating four hundred years later), this need not be at the cost of severance from all that has come before and all that will follow, not only generationally but even in our own lives. The distancing of ourselves from ourselves is commonplace – to our detriment, we cannot identify ourselves in those who are significantly younger or older than ourselves, and we are the weaker for it. Our over-reliance on a vision of the life cycle compartmentalised into stages means that we cannot participate in intergenerational exchanges, which are after all the ligaments of connection between the world we have been born into and that which we will one day leave behind. If we are to live purposeful lives, whose contributions will extend beyond our own lives, then we must recommit ourselves to such intergenerational conversations, which will help us to gain a broader perspective not only of our own lives, but of the social movements we care about – and from this follows naturally that activism in its most profound sense must be regarded as potentially reaching across the whole of the life cycle. Our actions build not only on our previous actions, but also on the shoulders of others, and in turn will help to create the conditions of our own future lives, as well as ultimately the world our progeny will inherit.

Revisiting my research on lifetime political activism, then, I still find my central focus one which merits attention. However, there are other aspects of the research which leave me with some questions.

What is activism?

This has always been a difficult nut to crack, and in selecting those who would participate in my study, I selected a more restricted definition of what constituted 'activism.' Those whose contributions, for instance, were primarily writing were not included. Thus, though I was at Jesus College, Cambridge, when Raymond Williams was there, and even discussed my study with him, I felt that his 'activism' was much more of an academic nature, and therefore related to but not of the same phenomena which formed the basis of my study. In this, I might add here that I was definitely influenced by some of those I had already interviewed: while they tolerated intellectuals, and sometimes even said their work was important to the cause, they nonetheless refrained from identifying scholarly work as being, in and of itself, a form of activism. However, this work differed in kind to my subsequent longitudinal study in East Germany, where I was able to re-meet activists twenty years later in their lives and find in them a similar political worldview, but in most cases transformed modes of 'activism'. I am aware of the growing body of work in which researchers identify the actions of very young children as being those of activism. (The Connectors Study, and particularly its development of the concept of 'circuits of social action' is very engaging on this issue.) In Christos Varvantakis's very thoughtful blog on the meaning of 'activism', written from Athens in 2014, a place and time where activist/solidarity/grassroots initiatives were in abundance, he observes the

... unimaginable diversity among social activism and solidarity initiatives – in their scopes, in their purpose, in their prospect, in their organization and in their political perspectives. Facing this diversity I have been led to think that the complexity of the phenomenon is thus probably best also approached in its particular expressions rather than merely as a macro-sociological whole (Varvantakis 2014).

But must activism include not only agency, but also a sense of political consciousness, and is this possible in those too young to have developed their cognitive capacity to think in the abstract? Not only as a scholar of activism, but also as a mother, I am very clear that many individuals form their ideas about the political world beginning at a very young age, and this is manifest in the playground, in negotiations with friends, and sometimes even in participation in organised political activity. As important and fertile as this engagement is, it is nonetheless distinct from the depth of intellectual analysis that is a feature of political consciousness. Additionally, are all forms of group membership a manifestation of political commitment? Must belonging to a religious group, a sports organisation, a resident's association, or joining the governing body of a school also be considered activism, as indicated by the World Values Survey (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>)? (See Nolas 2014 for a discussion of this). I would argue not, but I think there are important conversations to be had on these issues. Some might regard this debate as one of semantics, but for me it is more than just that; I think if we dedicate ourselves to the study of sustained activism, then clarifying and perhaps even justifying our meaning of the terms we use is important. De Lemus and Stroebe (2015) define activism broadly as efforts to promote social change and improve the status of a marginalized group as a whole." This might include a range of different behaviors, which exist along a continuum from weaker to stronger versions of activism. In my own research, I have emphasized stronger versions of activism, both in terms of their content (eg more than donating money, or signing a petition) and their duration.; in retrospect, I would decide the same again, but would make my argument for doing so more explicit, and here's why.

In spring 2017, Pepsicola issued an ad which featured activism as a life style, fun and trendy but ultimately not very meaningful. In the ad, model Kendall Jenner is seen at a photoshoot, when a group of protesters appear. The crowd is diverse, and they carry signs with words like 'love' and 'conversation' painted on them. An attractive young man signals to Jenner that she should join – and so, whipping off her blond wig, she becomes not only one of the masses, but their leader. Staring down a line of riot police, she offers one a cold Pepsi. The crowd cheers, he smiles, and the social tension dissipates. Almost immediately, the ad attracted strong criticism across social media. Bernice King, youngest daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King, tweeted a photo of her father being shoved by the police, and wrote "if only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi". Other tweets evoke a bitter humour: cops with truncheons beating a black man, "Kendell please, offer him a Pepsi", or another with police whose bottle of tear gas they are spraying at the protesters has been replaced by a large can of Pepsi. Though Pepsi pulled the ad very quickly, its initial airing sparked *The Independent* to ask "Is this the worst ad of all time"? and veteran commercial director Joseph Kahn to write a series of tweets, including WHO THE FUCK THOUGHT OF THIS? THE AD WORLD JUST ENDED ITSELF and finally "I've been studying commercials for 30 years. Kendall's Pepsi ad is legitimately the worst

one I've ever seen.” (Schultz and Diaz, 2017). Amongst the most offensive aspects of the ad was the portrayal of Jenner as utterly lacking in political consciousness – epitomized in the accusation that Pepsi had demonstrated itself to be profoundly ‘tone deaf’. My interest in political activism stems from the conviction that such behavior is about something, and emerges in response to perceived injustice. It is meaningful, conscious collective action, not a generic life style choice.

A model of lifetime activism

In my doctoral dissertation, I included a model of what I termed ‘the habit of responding.’ For reasons mostly to do with style, I decided not to include this in the monograph which followed from my dissertation. And yet looking at it now, I can see that while perhaps a bit simplistic (as models often tend to be) it nonetheless encapsulates a sense of the basic movement through the life course that I was trying to convey. While previously much of the work on political activism had been oriented towards either initial political engagement, and/or one time involvement with a social movement, my attempt in this model was to represent how this develops not in a linear fashion, but rather as spiral. In the words of Eileen Daffern, one of my respondents, describing her own political development: ‘You don’t come back, it isn’t the wheel has come full circle. You come in a spiral. This is the Marxist theory of progress... Life doesn’t go back to where it became, it comes up a bit further, and that’s where you see progress’ (Andrews 1991:176). The basic premise of the model is that identification as an activist happens over time, through an accumulation of political engagements, and that the more one not only allows themselves to see injustice, but, in conjunction with others, to seek to combat it, the more one is likely to do so again. Over time, this dynamic reproduces itself repeatedly, until ultimately it becomes embedded into a ‘habit of responding’ (cf. Pedwell, 2017 for a recent analysis of the relationship between habit, revolution, routine and social change), an integral part of who one perceives themselves to be. With the women and men I interviewed, this persisted throughout their very long lives, and indeed was a primary defining feature of them.

Activism and scholarship

I received a tremendous gift in pursuing the research which I did, effectively setting myself up for conversations with very inspiring people with whom I spent many, many hours over a number of years. Clearly those I included in my study were people with whom I had (for the most part) a political infinity. But what is the relationship between activism and research on activism? I do believe that there is merit in understanding how activism and political engagement more generally operates, and I also think that spending time speaking in-depth with people whose lives are marked by their high levels of continued involvement is a good way to obtain insight into this phenomenon. People have asked me if I consider myself an activist, and I am hesitant to claim this label, feeling that my own level of participation is not sufficient to justify this self-description. Related to this question is who is the intended audience for such works of scholarship? While I always aimed to write in way which was as accessible as possible, I was committed to the importance of intellectual rigor. This meant that while *Lifetimes of Commitment* might be of interest to other people studying activism - and was even chosen by my publisher as one of the books they had selected for digitisation, thereby meaning that I continue to receive royalties on this title to this

day, twenty-five years after its publication- it was never going to reach a wider audience of political activists.

Methodologies

I have always been most inclined to working with word-based methodologies. However, in more recent years I have had the privilege of working with colleagues who are more innovative, including a range of visual and material approaches. While I felt very satisfied with the quality of the conversations I did have, nonetheless I wonder what might have happened if I had more actively pursued other pathways for learning about their experiences. While I only regarded interview transcripts (and on occasion, written communication) as ‘data’, nonetheless I did spend ample time with participants and much of what I learned in these informal settings permeated my understanding of their lives. Two examples come to mind: 1) On the first day I met Eileen, when she was ‘interviewing me for the job of interviewer’ she had spent a significant amount of time going through old photographs so that I could get a sense of Yorkshire Dales where she was a child in the early 20th century. We spent the afternoon looking at these photos together, as she ‘introduced me’ to her family members, and the dramatic natural environment which had profound influence on the woman she would become. But I did not regard these photos as ‘research materials’ in their own right, though they certainly helped to give me an impression of her life. 2) The second example was with Jack Dash, renowned organiser of dockers trade union. When he heard that I had a friend visiting from Germany who had come to London to study what was billed as the successful gentrification of the London Docks, he volunteered to walk around with us, exploring the sites of what used to be one of the most active seaports in the world. As we meandered, he explained to us how many homes and jobs had been lost, leaving us with an acute sense of a way of life that was no longer. I recorded Jack, and even took photos, but for me this was not research data. Now, nearly three decades later, I would not only include those ‘extra bits’ but would more actively solicit and document them.

Whom to include

The process of deciding whom to include in my study was rather convoluted, but in the end boiled down to pursuing a few snowball pathways. Were I to do this study again, I would more actively seek to create a pool with more diversity, particularly in terms of ‘race’ and geographic location. All of the fifteen participants lived in England and had done so for many years – interesting then that I called them ‘British socialists’ rather than English, but this resonated with their own self-definition, and indeed one participant was Scottish. (The selection of participants was based mostly on logistical considerations – including travel and accommodation.) But when I once read a (mostly positive) review which referred to it as a study of ‘little England’ I could see that this was not without basis. The same can be true of my decision to have an all white sample. My reasoning at the time was that due to the ripples of migration in the UK, there were not that many non-white political activists in the UK in the interwar years (the period of political socialisation of the cohort I studied). In retrospect, I think I could have altered the design somewhat to include those who were residents of and had been politically active in the UK, and were roughly of the same age as the cohort I selected, but who might have come to the UK only as young people. I believe such an addition would have allowed me, for instance, to include

some of the nearly 500 Caribbean people who came to Britain aboard the HMT Empire Windrush in 1948, bringing the first of what would become known as the ‘Windrush generation,’ whose arrival heralded a new face of Britain. While the design might have been rendered messier, the benefits of these voices would have outweighed the cost of the compromise.

From the Real to the Imagined

Finally, most of my analysis of the interview data relied upon a close reading of what was told to be about events which had happened in the lives of my participants. I now wish that I had departed slightly from that conventional orientation, and had instead invited them to speak more about the worlds which they had imagined, the visions which had propelled them in their lifetimes’ work. Creating more forums to explore the narrative imagination with them may well have produced results that uncovered more layers of meaning and understanding between us. Nonetheless, I am also very aware of how much time was demanded for the study as it was carried out, and perhaps it is more realistic to accept that sometimes decisions regarding research design and data analysis are by necessity heavily influenced by factors of convenience.

Old Age and Its Disregard for Tomorrow’s World: Brexit and Beyond

Historian Peter Laslett, who has written extensively about intergenerational relations, argues:

It could be claimed ... that many more duties of older people go forward in time than is the case in those who are young. This follows from the fact that they owe less to their own individual futures – now comparatively short – and more to the future of others – all others... In this the elderly of any society can be said to be the trustees of the future (Laslett 1989:196).

Similarly, I have already tried to demonstrate that for some, old age can be a time of life when people continue to fight for social justice, despite the fact that they might not live to see the fruits of their labour. But does it matter if this construction of old age is not one which is generally adhered by the world in which we live?

I think it does.

An examination of reactions of the British public to the outcome of the Brexit vote on social media is a very revealing case in point. The UK referendum on leaving the European Union, on June 23, 2016 produced results showing that age was a strong indicator of how citizens voted; indeed, while 25% of young voters (18-24 year olds) voted to leave, that percentage grew with increased years, culminating in the figure of 61% of those voters aged sixty-five and older (Bruter and Harrison, 2016).

This demographic breakdown produced a torrential outpouring of ageist abuse from those who considered themselves to be ‘not old.’ Giles Coren’s rant was particularly noteworthy. (Coren, himself 46, belonged to an age cohort 44% of whom had voted to leave). With his article leading with the heading ‘Wrinklies have well and truly stitched us up’ (*The Times* June 25, 2016), Coren writes:

... make no mistake, it is the old people who did this to us... The less time a person had left on earth to live and face up to their decision ...the more likely they were to vote to leave the European Union. The wrinkly bastards stitched us young 'uns up good and proper... From their zimmer frames, their electric recliner beds and their walk-in baths, they reached out with their wizened old writing hands to make their wobbly crosses and screwed their children and their children's children for a thousand generations. ... Old people are always wrong. About everything... [they] give less and less of a damn what happens to the rest of us as time goes on.

It is of course surprising that Coren identifies himself as a 'young 'un'; all things being equal, one thing that will happen 'as time goes on' is he will join the ranks of those he vilifies. But the point he makes here is that old people (those 65 and older) voted that way because they don't give a damn and cannot see beyond their own (now very limited) futures.

This anger at the old was all over social media. By lunchtime on the day following the election, David Vujanic's tweet (itself sent less than two hours after the result was announced), 'I'm never giving up my seat on the train for an old person again', had been retweeted 15,000 times. Another tweet 'you voted to leave the EU but you gonna die soon so it's not your problem' was retweeted 11,156 times and received 10,620 likes. And still comments elsewhere, exploding with rage: 'these fuckers should not have been allowed to vote for a long time. There's a reason why people grow old and die. If old people still had power, we would still be living in the stone age'.

There is good reason why young people might feel robbed of a future by those who will be affected for a shorter time by the outcome of the Brexit vote. Yet that does not really explain why this resulted in such vociferous vitriol towards the old. (Had the reverse been the situation, it is difficult to imagine that youth, as a group, would have been castigated in such a threatening way.) One of the reasons why the reaction was so prevalent and powerful was because it resonated with an already-existing master narrative that this is what 'old people are like.' Comments which appeared on social media and elsewhere, had they been written about women, or people of colour, or disabilities, or transgender, etc. would have been challenged. But this was not the case. Thus, my argument here is not a statistical one about voting behaviors, but rather concerns the ways in which the outcome of this vote functioned as a platform for the rehearsal of an ageist stereotypes, which often go wholly unchecked by researchers and the public alike.

And yet it remains true that in the Brexit vote, age was indeed an indicator of how an individual voted. This is also true of the British national elections in 2015. Of people aged 65 and older, 78% voted, and of those votes, 47% voted Conservative and 17% voted UKip (Ipsos Mori 2015). So how can this phenomenon be explained? My answer here is two-fold: first, it is important to consider more fully who comprises the British population of those aged 65 and older? The British population aged over 65 is less ethnically and racially mixed than any younger age group, and 39% of Whites who voted, voted Conservative, while only 23% of BMEs did. The statistics show that owning one's home was nearly as strong an indicator as that of

age in the same election, with 46% of homeowners voting Conservative. These figures, when taken together, demonstrate that age as a single factor of analysis is an unstable indicator of the political propensities of any individual person, no matter how old. For a more comprehensive investigation of how older, or indeed any age, people vote, one would need to employ an intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1989) in which race, gender, ethnicity and other relevant variables were considered alongside or instead of age. This echoes back to the argument I made in the opening paragraphs of this article, that rigid segmentation of the life course by chronological age is a limited unit of analysis. It is, then, important to look beyond mere age when trying to assess how and why people vote as they do.

Moreover, to what extent are we prepared to make an assessment of political outlook based exclusively on voting behaviour? In 2014, the Pew Research Centre released the findings from a study with more than 10,000 Americans, using expressed values and attitudes to explore political typologies across the life cycle (Pew June 2014). Far from older people being more conservative, Pew found the landscape to be much more complex, and a key determinant to political attitudes was the era in which one grew up, what Pew terms 'generational imprinting' (see also Grasso et al. 2017). Of people 65 and older who were included in the study, 55% belonged to the typologies "Solid Liberals", "Faith and Family Left" or "Next Generation Left", compared with 45% of those aged 18-29. 17% of those in this younger category were classified as 'Bystanders' while that was true of only 3% of those aged 65 and older. Indeed, those who were born before 1949 (i.e. who were 65 or older in 2014) were the least likely of all groups to be classified as bystanders, which is not surprising when one considers that they were born in the shadows of the Second World War. The Pew study indicates that the impact of early political socialisation plays its part through the life course - bringing us back to our original discussion.

However, the debate about if and how political outlook correlates with old age is for me a bit of a red herring. My argument has never been that older people as a group are more or less conservative than other age groups; it is, rather, that such inclinations, in either direction, are not necessarily linked to age. Moreover, not only as a political psychologist, but as a human being, I think it is significant that people can and often do stay true to the moral principles which they adopt in early life; growing up does not mean growing out of our ideals, though it may include learning different ways of realising one's goals as political climates change and the body matures into old age. My interest has always been on how political engagement is expressed across the life course as a whole, not on any particular segment. Clearly, though, if one wishes to look at enduring political commitment woven into the fabric of a whole life, then one is directed toward those who have lived longest; thus, it was that my original study focussed on later life and activism.

Closing Thoughts

I would like to conclude this article by relating a personal memory. It was December 2000. The previous month, on November 8th, 2000, voters around the United States had cast their ballots in the election for president. My heart sank as Al Gore conceded his defeat, only to recant his concession, saying that in the state of Florida, with its 25 electoral votes, the race was too close to call, with approximately 300 votes dividing the two main contenders. Ultimately, more than a month later, the Supreme Court

ruled 5-4 that the clock had run out on the recount, and that the previously certified, though contested, total of votes in Florida should hold. Thus, it was that on December 12th, 2000, George W. Bush was declared the winner of the election.

On that day, I had previously arranged that I would go see my dear friend, Eileen Daffern, for lunch in Brighton. Eileen had been one of the 15 people who had participated in my study on lifetime commitment years earlier, and we stayed in regular contact. Arriving at Eileen's house on the sea front, I felt completely deflated. Like many, my sense was that the election had been 'stolen' – decided by the Supreme Court (with a helping hand from Jeb Bush, brother of the candidate and at that time Governor of the state of Florida), rather than by the electorate. Knowing Eileen as I did, I should not have been surprised to be greeted by her, then in her early nineties, full of energy as she answered the door. "Come" she said, taking me by the arm, "I've prepared a little something for us." And then she led me first into the kitchen, where she took a quiche out of the oven, and then into the front sitting room where a bottle of wine was chilling. She knew I needed her, and her very long-term perspective on the movement of history. By the end of our lunch together, she had very nearly convinced me that indeed, this dark moment was but a blip in the forward direction of history. Throughout that afternoon, she repeatedly made the case that we must not be thrown by momentary setbacks, but rather must always have our eyes set on making a future that was fairer, more just, and egalitarian. Even if it is two steps forward and one step back, history always moves in that direction, she reassured me. I knew she had lived through much worse than this, and her resilience was inspiring for me; her commitment and experience helped me to imagine a future beyond Bush's presidency.

I was more than forty years younger than Eileen, and she could offer me a perspective that few others could. We met and talked much during the dark days and years that followed, but I couldn't help but think of her when, at Obama's inauguration in 2008, I witnessed the helicopter taking Bush away from the White House, serenaded by many in the crowd who sang 'Na na hey hey, good bye'. The helicopter hovered, and then departed, leaving the crowd of over 1 million who had gathered to celebrate the end of a bleak era, and a new beginning.

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