

## To Change The World

A “PROFS” Lecture for Mortarboard Senior Honor Society

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Helen Fox

When I started planning this lecture last August I imagined talking to a group of undergraduates with a passion for service and activism, students who want to help make the world more fair, and who also have a taste for the excitement and adventure that come from travel and working abroad, and from making friends across cultures. And so I had planned to tell you stories from my own travels, my own efforts to promote friendship and understanding across cultures. I had planned to tell you about my Peace Corps service in India in the 1960s and later, as a Peace Corps trainer in West Africa and the South Pacific. I had considered talking about my recent trips to Armenia and Cambodia and urge you to be daring, and open to the possibility of multiple careers in your lifetime. I had imagined telling you some of the wisdom of my mother, a woman born in 1906, light years ahead of her time, who defied the conventions of her family and her social class and did things considered crazy for a woman back then, like driving to Mexico in an old car with a bunch of girlfriends sitting in the “rumble seat,” or scraping money together for a trip to Russia to see for herself whether Communism delivered all that it promised for people who had long been oppressed by a feudal system. And I would have urged you to do the same as my mother did: be light years ahead of *your* time, go see for yourselves, take risks, meet people you never imagined you would talk to, embrace the world.

But that’s all changed now. The world that you have enjoyed during your lifetime, the world of security and comfort and choice and opportunity to help others attain the same rights and privileges, has suddenly been thrown off balance. And my stories about fun and adventure and daring to defy some silly social norms seem trivial now. On September eleventh, the idea of “changing the world” took on a different meaning. Or maybe not a different meaning, exactly – maybe “changing the world” just became more serious – and vastly more important. The world has changed in ways we never expected. And now, action -- *principled* action – is no longer a career choice. It is a matter of life and death.

I want to tell you frankly that I’m scared. I’m not scared about dying from Anthrax (since after all, we live in a country with one of the most sophisticated medical systems in the world, and I trust that I would be well taken care of, in the unlikely event that I would become infected). And I’m not scared so much about dying in a terrorist hijacking, either, because with the amount I travel I do, and the kinds of planes I’ve traveled on, I’ve always had to work on my fear of falling from great heights and hitting the ground at some terrific speed. I’ve been on one of those planes where you have to get on the scale along with the baggage before take-off. I’ve been on a flight over a Southeast Asian jungle where the pilot had to fly close to the treetops to stay out of the range of enemy radar. The plane that took me to my Peace Corps service in India in 1964 just missed crashing into the side of a mountain – we were just about to land near Bombay at the height of the rainy season, and we were looking down at the beautiful emerald green land dotted with palm trees coming in and out of the fog when suddenly the plane accelerated with a roar and rose up like a roller coaster -- which caused everyone to throw

up simultaneously. So -- being in a plane crash, while very unpleasant to contemplate, isn't the thing that frightens me most about the way our world has changed.

Scariest than dying is the pain I would suffer if my family or friends had their lives cut short before they had lived them to the fullest. Family, of course, is the worst nightmare. But friends are a close second. And because my friendships extend over the entire globe, I'm not just worried about *Americans* dying, or just the security of the so-called civilized countries, or the preservation of *our* way of life. I'm worried about my friend Hassan Mohammed, a staff member of CARE Afghanistan, who until recently was running small scale development projects for families and children impoverished by the many years of war and political repression and drought that country has suffered. Hassan is now in Thailand, where he was evacuated, but he is dearly hoping to take part in an effort to provide food to the millions of Afghans who have fled from the American military attack, families who have hiked for days through the mountains in order to reach a filthy and miserable relief camp across the border in Pakistan. And Hassan, in turn, is worried about all his friends and colleagues he left behind in Kabul and the surrounding villages, all the people that CARE served, because they might have already turned into what is euphemistically referred to as "collateral damage" -- civilians caught in explosions or rocket fire, or, more likely, who will freeze to death or starve in the fast-approaching Afghan winter. And even after the fighting is over, when Hassan can go back into Afghanistan I will still be worried about him because over the last 23 years of fighting there have been laid an incredible 10 million land mines -- planted next to roads, in the mountains, in fields and river banks and even inside people's homes. One false step off the beaten track -- perhaps to pick up a package of food dropped from an American plane, or to relieve yourself, or to look for a missing member of your party -- and you can become an instant amputee.

I'm worried, too, about my old friends Rachael and Ran Mosenson who were born and raised in the State of Israel, and whose five children and many grandchildren worry constantly that their shopping center, or their school, or their housing complex may be the next to be blown up in the never-ending hostilities between Israel and Palestine that have only gotten more serious, more deadly, since the American bombing started. And I'm worried about my friend Atef Said in Montreal, even though his physical safety is not compromised by these events, but because his name and appearance and country of birth -- Egypt -- make him the subject of an intrusive, humiliating search any time he might want to cross the Canadian border for a pleasant day-trip to Vermont, and because he must suffer the suspicions of airlines personnel and the fearful glances of fellow passengers, and even the possibility of being removed from an airplane because his seat-mate objects to his presence, or because the pilot refuses to fly if he is on board -- and all because this gentlest of souls, this devotee of Islam who wishes *only* for world peace, wants to take a little vacation.

And I am scared -- deeply and profoundly scared -- by the rhetoric of retribution, the ways that politicians and news commentators and talk show hosts and even some of my friends and neighbors contrast our supposedly "civilized" country and our "allies" with the rest of the world, who could only be -- barbarians. I've been shaken by the sneering or condescending descriptions by newsmakers of people who speak out against violence and war -- and at the ease with which those ugly words can lead to ugly actions -- a rock thrown through the window of a U of M alum who openly questions our

government's policies (as happened here in Ann Arbor just a few days ago). I've been outraged by the government's suggestion that anyone's phone or e-mail messages might be put under surveillance for the sake of national security, and by the news item that mentioned in passing that college teachers somewhere in California called the FBI when a Middle Eastern student wrote in a bluebook exam that he met someone named Mohammed or someone named Ali, names as common in the Middle East as John or James are here. I am alarmed at the seizure of brown people on the streets and their detention without bail; the New York Times said on Sunday that "after 40 days of the most aggressive criminal investigation in American history, federal officials have arrested 830 people but failed to develop evidence that anyone now in custody was a co-conspirator in the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attacks." My friend Roberto Gonzales, a light-skinned Mexican American who was born and raised in Colorado Springs, told me he went for a stroll in a shopping mall there last week when a young girl, around eight years old, took one look at him and ran for the safety of her parents' arms.

In these scary and dangerous times I see us turning against each other, against our neighbors here in the United States and against our potential friends in countries around the world. And that makes me fear that we are rushing headlong into a chain of events that will lead to the destruction of our own home, the earth, and our own extended family, the family of humankind. Because the road we're going down right now can lead so easily to disaster: nuclear sabotage, biological warfare, destabilization and further impoverishment of poor countries, disruption of trade, halting of the flow of oil, suffering and contamination and destruction beyond comprehension. This is what is so profoundly depressing and disappointing to me, whenever I allow myself to think about it -- that we might just wreck everything.

I now understand a little better how my parents' generation felt when I was young. My mother used to subscribe to a publication called *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* – not that she was an atomic scientist, she was a high school gym teacher – but she, like all of her friends, had a deep interest in politics and in making the world more fair. And at that time, in the late 1940s and early '50s, that publication had, on the front, left-hand corner of its cover, a little icon of a clock with its hands positioned a few minutes before midnight. As world events brought us nearer to nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, those hands would be moved closer to pointing straight up. That was the fear in those days, that nuclear weapons even more destructive than the terrifying bomb dropped by the United States Air Force on civilians in Hiroshima, Japan, would be unleashed upon the whole world and destroy it utterly, all because the Russians and the Americans were incapable of seeing each other as human beings who could potentially work things out. My parents' generation lived through that time, and when the crisis finally passed, they thought – we all thought – that the world would never be quite so dangerous again.

I've always been fascinated by human behavior and why people act so predictably at times, and so unpredictably at others. And that interest has led me to read in a lot of diverse fields: anthropology, psychology and psychiatry, sociology, biology, history and rhetoric, international relations and international development. My search has, at times, led me to literature – to novels written by people who speak with their own voice, explaining their lives and their history through characters they create, and it has led me to

memoir, the setting down of memories of a particular time and place in order to say something larger about the human condition. Even more important than reading, though, has been travel, which allows me to immerse myself in the daily activities and conversations of people from other places, and this has led me to value careful listening – even to points of view I can’t stand, or think I can’t stand – in order to figure out where those people are coming from. A little girl in Cambodia, where I was last August, asked me how many countries I had visited. And I had to stop and think – and while I was trying to count them up she guessed ten. No, that’s too little, I said. An older boy guessed a hundred. No, too many. I finally counted twenty seven: Canada, Mexico, Britain, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Lichenstein (I had to count Lichenstein), the former Yugoslavia – every corner of that country (which would now include Serbia and Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo), Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Armenia, the former USSR, India, where I did my Peace Corps Service, Nepal, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, Togo, in West Africa, Cote d’Ivoire – the Ivory Coast – also in West Africa, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Some of these countries I’ve worked in, others I visited as an ordinary tourist. But even as a tourist I’ve had the good fortune to see some unusual things and make lasting friends. In Japan a few years ago I somehow got an invitation to go on a personal tour of the grounds of the royal palace where ordinary mortals, especially foreigners, aren’t allowed to go, and later, after taking a train up into the mountains, I found myself invited to stay for a couple of days with a family of folk artists who kept a fish tank in their living room with a huge carp in it, just because they liked to be off-beat. On my way back, I stopped in Hawaii where I managed to find a hula competition where I was one of about three haoles, white folks, in a gigantic sports stadium, and where the program was introduced in the beautiful Hawaiian language and traditional hula schools from the Islands, and Japan, and the mainland, performed ancient spiritual chants as well as modern, sexy numbers that drove the teenagers wild. And then I went over to the Big Island where I stayed for a couple of days at a Buddhist retreat that you have to drive five miles through cane fields to find, where feral piglets run squealing, and peacocks stroll in a regal processional round and around the grounds, and you cook your own food in the communal kitchen and chant at dusk and at dawn. I’m so grateful for these opportunities that have come to me not only because they have entertained me and made me happy to be alive, but also because they have also given me practice in observing and listening and comparing and challenging my previously held ideas in ways that I would not have been able to do otherwise.

I think these are skills we don’t teach you very well at the U of M. They’re certainly nothing I learned in my college education. Why isn’t learning to listen and really *feel* how different people understand the world a central aspect of your education at one of America’s foremost universities, a university that claims to be *world class*? We teach you to write about yourselves and your own feelings -- as if they were more important than the feelings of others. We teach you to argue your own point of view – even when you’re unsure of your own point of view because you haven’t had time to think about it enough, or get enough facts and ideas digested before the assignment is due. We teach you to read scholarly analyses of what’s going on in other countries and inside the heads of other people – though all too often they are written not by authors

from those countries or of those peoples, but by outsiders. We teach you to formulate your own opinions way before you have had a chance to gain wisdom. We teach you to work yourselves into the ground, preparing you for a lifetime of workaholism and stress-related diseases, without giving you time to appreciate the falling leaves, or look into the faces of children, or connect in meaningful ways with your families, much less think deeply about all the ideas we throw at you. And what we don't teach you very well is how to find common ground with people who are different from you. We don't teach you how to slow down, and listen to the voices of people whose histories and experiences and points of view could help build a better world. We don't even make it easy for you to live together on campus, or reach out across identity groups to build coalitions. It's no wonder that the world is full of the songs of nationalism, the sounds of rage and revenge, the rhetoric of "us and them."

If subjects like conflict resolution, and cross-cultural leadership, and dialogues across borders, and self-reflection, and discussions of values, and examination of one's own biases and blind spots had been made central aspects of the college experience, starting from way back in the cold war period (since that's when most of our current national leaders went to college), we would be better equipped as a nation to survive the terribly dangerous situation we are in right now.

Our leaders would not be so quick to rain smart bombs and peanut butter crackers on the exhausted, famished, war-weary country of Afghanistan. Our news media would invite anti-war activists, spiritual leaders, and analysts who question aggressive, military solutions to human problems to suggest viable alternatives, and to calm and strengthen us when we feel under attack. Historians and anthropologists and sociologists would remind us of how futile is the cycle of violence, the cycle Martin Luther King referred to when he said:

The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of revenge. Man has never risen above the injunction . . . 'Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.' In spite of the fact that the law of revenge solves no social problems, men continue to follow its disastrous leading. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path.

Have some of you heard of Rigoberta Menchu? Rigoberta Menchu is the youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize. When she was 33 years old, this Quiche Mayan woman, raised in an impoverished peasant family in Guatemala, whose family members were tortured and executed by the Guatemalan army *in the name of peace*, won this most prestigious prize for her work in conflict mediation and the preservation of peace with justice. The day after the attacks of September 11, she wrote a letter to President Bush, which I would like to share with you. Her thoughts are worth considering carefully, not only because she won the peace prize and became the personal advisor to the General Director of UNESCO, but because she is a representative of people who have suffered terrorism on a level most of us can't even begin to imagine: constant, daily experience of paralyzing fear, the horrible pain of torture, the invasion and destruction of their homes, the burning and raping and massacring of their family

members in front of their eyes. Here is what Rigoberta Menchu says about the attacks in New York and Washington on September 11<sup>th</sup>:

*Honorable Mr. President:*

*I wish, firstly, to reiterate to you the solidarity and condolences which I expressed to your people last Tuesday the 11, after hearing of the painful events in your country, as well as to share my indignation and to condemn these acts of terrorism.*

*These last days, I have been monitoring the evolution of events, convinced that the best reaction to these is reflection, not rigidity; measured wisdom, not anger; the search for justice, not revenge. I have asked that the conscience of the peoples of the world, the media, the eminent personalities with whom I share the ethical mission for peace, the Chiefs of State and the leaders of international organizations, that serenity enlighten our acts.*

*Nevertheless, Mr. President, hearing the speech which you gave to your Congress last night, I have not been able to repress my fear for what your words may bring. You call on your people to prepare for "a large campaign as we have never before seen." And for your military to be proud, marching into a war in which you intend to involve all of the peoples of the world.*

*In the name of progress, of pluralism, of tolerance and liberty, you leave no option for those of us who do not share the benefits of the liberty and the fruits of the civilization which you wish to defend for your people, those of us who never sympathized with terrorism, as we have been its victims. Those of us who are proud expressions of other civilizations; who live day by day with the hope of turning discrimination and discard into recognition and respect; those of us who carry in our souls the pain of genocide perpetrated against our peoples; those of us who are fed up with burying the dead in foreign wars, we cannot share the arrogance of your infallibility nor the sole road which you wish to push us toward when you affirm that all nations in all regions of the world must now make a decision: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists".*

*At the beginning of this year, I invited men and women of the planet to share a Code of Ethics for a Millennium of Peace, declaring that:*

*There will not be Peace without Justice  
There will not be Justice without Equity  
There will not be Equity without Development  
There will not be Development without Democracy  
There will not be Democracy without respect for identity and Dignity of Peoples and Cultures*

*In today's world, all of these are very scarce values and practices; nevertheless, the unequal manner in which they are distributed does little more than to fuel the impotence, the desperation and the hate. The role of your country in the actual world order is far*

*from neutral. Last night, we expected a sensitive speech, with reflection and self-criticism, but what we heard was an unacceptable threat.*

*I agree with you when you say that the “course of this conflict is not known,” but when you declare that “its result is known,” the only certainty which invades me is that of an enormous useless sacrifice, that of another colossal lie.*

*Before you give the cry for war, I would like to invite you to think about a different type of world leadership, one which must convince rather than conquer, in which the human species can show that in the last one thousand years we have overcome the idea of “an eye for an eye” which represented justice for the barbarians who took over humanity during the dark Middle Ages; in which we don’t need new crusades to learn to respect those who have a different idea of a God and his work of creation; in which we share with solidarity the fruits of progress, and we protect more carefully the resources which remain on the planet; a world where no child lacks bread or schooling.*

*With hope on a thread, I remain sincerely,*

*Rigoberta Menchu Tum*

*Nobel Peace Laureate*

*Ambassador of Goodwill and the Culture of Peace*

What I hear Rigoberta Menchu saying is that she knows from both personal experience and the historical experience of her people, the Mayans and Aztecs, who lived through five hundred years of butchery and attempts at total extermination, that the urge to conquer is a dead-end road. That we need to “convince rather than conquer.” That the words that are now being used to comfort us, words like “We’re going to stamp out terrorism,” and “You’re either with us or you’re against us,” are arrogant words, words that do not appeal to the world’s marginalized peoples, which is to say the two billion people who live on less than two dollars a day, and who do not have enough to eat and or adequate shelter or clean water or basic education or the happiness and vigor that come with good health. She is saying that the world’s resources, including the resources of respect, dignity, voice, and democracy are very scarce values and practices and that “the unequal manner in which they are distributed does little more than to fuel the impotence, the desperation and the hate.” She is saying that militarization and threat and intimidation and dehumanization and ever-increasing violence do not solve human problems. But have you heard about the contents of this letter on the news? Have you heard from Rigoberta Menchu in your classes? Have you any confidence that her letter was even read by our President?

This is what people in other countries mean when they talk about American arrogance, or “the arrogance of your infallibility,” as Rigoberta Menchu puts it. This is what happens when our schools do not teach the way the world looks to others but only the way it looks to ourselves. A Buddhist scholar, David Loy, suggests that the rhetoric of good and evil that is used to describe the world situation today reminds him in a chilling way of the most horrifying events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Hitler’s extermination of the Jews, and Stalin’s slaughter of the peasants. In an article called “A New Holy War

Against Evil?” appearing in a Buddhist magazine from Malaysia called “Eastern Horizon,” Loy writes:

What was the problem with Jews that required a “final solution”? The earth could be made pure for the Aryan race only by exterminating the Jews, the impure vermin who contaminate it. Stalin needed to exterminate well-to-do Russian peasants to establish his ideal society of collective farmers. Both were trying to perfect this world by eliminating its impurities. The world can be made good only by destroying its evil elements. Paradoxically, then, one of the main causes of evil in this world has been human attempts to eradicate evil.

Let’s think about this for a moment. Doesn’t this sound like the very trap we’ve walked into, ourselves? Every night on the news we hear reassurances that the United States is the defender of all that is good in the world, and that our mission is to eliminate the evil of terrorism, personified by Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda Network, who on their part, see the *United States* as the force of evil that is bringing corruption and domination into the Islamic world. As David Loy says, “What bin Laden sees as good -- an Islamic jihad against an impious and materialistic imperialism – Bush sees as evil. What Bush sees as good – America, the defender of freedom – bin Laden sees as evil. They are two different versions of the same holy war between good and evil.” This is not to equate them morally try to excuse the horrific events of Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, or to say that the United States deserves to suffer. No nation, no people deserve such a fate. Loy is just pointing out that both sides are looking at the world in a very simplistic way, a way that is not worthy of graduates of US educational institutions – nor of Islamic institutions, for that matter, which have a long and distinguished history.

Let’s look at the ways this dualism blinds us to the suffering we cause when we try to exterminate evil. Before the bombing started in Afghanistan the World Food Program was feeding three and a half million people. The Afghanis needed this aid because their agriculture had been disrupted by a three year draught, which followed those twenty three years of war (which, by the way, had been aided and abetted by the United States – did you know that during the 1980s, the US actually *funded* Osama bin Laden and others to the tune of millions of dollars when they were fighting our cold war enemies, the Russians?). As soon as President Bush declared this “new war” on terrorism the World Food Program stopped. The roads are too dangerous for truck convoys of food to travel into Afghanistan from the outside world. Once winter sets in, providing adequate food and medicine may be impossible. There are estimates that seven and a half million Afghanis will face starvation in the near future. Now we can say this is all the fault of the Taliban, which is hoarding United Nations food stores and refusing to give up. But somehow, millions of people, may die as a result of our dualistic thinking, our extraordinarily limited idea of how to address this crisis.

Many Americans think that September 11, 2001 was the first time the United States suffered from widespread terrorism. But this is not true. The most recent time that United States citizens suffered from organized terror was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ku Klux Klan paraded freely in the streets, burned crosses on people’s



lawns and tossed firebombs into their homes. Caught up their in self-righteous emotions, they would storm local jails and drag out prisoners who had not yet been tried, to make sure their idea of justice was done. Even people who were completely innocent of any crime were set upon by Klan mobs and beaten, strung up, mutilated, set on fire, as hundreds of whites stood around enjoying the spectacle. Imagine if today's terrorism was like this for you. Photographers even took pictures of the bodies and made them into picture postcards that were sent freely through the US mails. Many of these postcards survive today. You see the blackened body of a man or woman, hanging from a tree or off the side of a bridge. You see crowds of white men, women and children, grinning, as they mill around the remains of the victim. Oh yes, America knows terrorism.

But at that time, many in the government, the police, the courts, the legislature, turned their heads the other way. You didn't hear, "We have to do SOMETHING!" the way you do today. There was no question of bombing the perpetrators, not even much hampering of their activities. And not because the authorities couldn't find them. They were stellar members of the community! In the early 1900s there were even children's clubs devoted to mini-Klan activities, with lemonade and cookies and games of dress-up in little hoods and sheets. You don't believe me? Read *Women of the Klan*, by Katherine Blee. In 1924, fifteen states, mostly in the Midwest, had chapters of the junior order established by invitation of Ku Klux Klan grand dragons. Little girls "pledged themselves to the seven sacred symbols of the Invisible Empire: the fiery cross, water, mask, robe, Bible, sword, and flag. They recited the Klan catechism – spelled with a "k" -- of loyalty, obedience, selflessness, and Christian patriotism." Boys, of course, had their own separate junior orders. Interestingly, the Klan of the 1920s believed their issues were moral ones, in much the same way as the Taliban and other authoritarian groups do today. They were not racist, they said, they were simply defending traditional moral standards against the seductive allurements of modern society. And Jews, blacks, and Catholics just happened to be morally unfit and dangerous. Hate groups have similar slogans, similar appeal the world over. They are not, for the most part, made up of deranged individuals. Our own home-grown terrorist organization was made up of good folks from the Midwest heartland: farmers, doctors, nurses, realtors, shop owners, dressmakers, laborers, clerical workers, political officeholders -- all were members of the Klan.

The Klan of course is much smaller and less dangerous today – though it is by no means extinct. Only two years ago the Klan had its representatives spewing their hate speech in front of City Hall, guarded by 200 Ann Arbor police in full riot gear. Citizens were advised to ignore all this. "Just stay home. Don't listen to them. Don't give them an audience." Not bad advice, except for the awful irony of it.

So we might ask, how could the terrorism of yesterday be ignored when today it is a terrible scourge that must be annihilated from the world? Well, it all depends who you identify with.

I identify with people. All people. My travel and study, as well as my religious affiliation – I'm a Quaker -- has led me to a simple conclusion: every human life is sacred. Even my enemy's life is sacred, because *it is life* and because, as Quakers say, "there is that of God in everyone." And since every person's life has worth and value, solving problems by violence or the threat of violence is both useless and morally wrong.

In these frightening times, “changing the world” means finding a way to walk down the path of peace. And one of the ways to promote peace with justice -- for that is the only lasting peace -- is to seriously address the conditions in the world that give rise to resentment and hopelessness, and that allow terrorism to erupt in such grandiose acts of violence as occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Rigoberta Menchu speaks about the gross disparities between the way millions of people on this earth must live in poverty and despair while others, who live in opulence and comfort, excuse this human suffering as the collateral damage of free market capitalism. In the Philippines outside the city of Manila, thousands of human beings live on a mountain of garbage 50 feet high and 74 acres wide that stinks and smokes and flares up when the methane generated from rotting food catches fire, and every once in awhile collapses in an avalanche, swallowing everyone: families eating dinner in their miserable shacks, children scavenging for paper or metal to sell, old people waiting to die. Can you imagine having to live out your life like that? Even in our own country, in Los Angeles, and Chicago, and Boston, and Miami, children live with the stench of garbage and the fear of going to school because of the violence that awaits them on the street corner. So dangerous is the war fought every day on some urban streets that children learn that all they have to live for is the day their lives will be cut short. The day they will die. Of course you know all this. And you know, too, of the kind of luxury that millionaires bathe in. We accept it. But do these obscene disparities contribute to the global climate of hate, violence, and fear? Of course they do.

Building a new world community based on principles of fairness, cooperation, mutual understanding, civil liberties, religious freedoms, international law based on shared principles and values, and a strong commitment to non-violent conflict resolution is a long, complex process. But that’s the challenge. Hundreds of thousands of people have already started making the road by walking down the paths of peace with justice. You can join them.

Here are some ways you can get involved:

**1. Organize on-line petitions:** Using only the Internet and starting by sending a petition to a group of their friends, a small peace organization collected 500,000 signatures from 190 countries on a petition to President Bush, NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson, and European Commission President Romano Prodi affirming that war is not an effective response to terrorism. But this petition is only a beginning. What we need now is for world leaders to stop the bombing to ensure that enough aid reaches the Afghan people before it’s too late. And then, after this part of the war on terrorism is over, we must not abandon Afghanistan. We’ve bombed their infrastructure, knocked out their power plants and electric wires, and trashed their roads and bridges, all the while telling ordinary people that we’re their friends. True friends would at the very least, repair the damage.

**2. Write your Congress people:** Whenever I suggest this option, students look skeptical. They wonder if their elected representatives read their mail or are in any way influenced by their constituents. Of course they are. They may not read their mail themselves –they employ interns to handle it – but those interns keep track of who is saying what. And

since so few people bother to write letters, your representatives assume that for every letter they receive there are ten more people out there who share the same views. That makes letter-writing campaigns a pretty powerful tool.

**3. Educate yourself.** Though the amount of stuff you don't know may seem overwhelming, you don't have to learn everything at once. Just take it a little bit at a time, like I do. The Internet is great for this sort of thing. Country by country, issue by issue, you can learn a lot about this conflict and the web of causes behind it.

**4. Insist** that the US and other rich countries seriously address the problem of poverty. Forty million people die yearly from hunger and hunger-related causes. This is like 320 jumbo jets crashing every day with half the passengers being children. The poor notice this. And they notice, as the United Nations points out, that 82.7 percent of the world's income goes to the top 20 percent of the people, leaving 17.3 percent for the rest of humanity. This is not fair.

**4. Talk to your friends and parents.** Once you have some information, and some ideas, start conversations with about what you've learned and how you feel about it. You don't have to convince everyone you're right. Listen to their side, too. Find something in what they say that you can agree with. Then ask them what they think about some of the contradictions you've heard tonight or something you've learned about the conflict that will make them think.

**5. Talk to your professors and your school administration.** Insist that your education include information and practice and reflection about alternatives to violence, ways to reduce gross income disparities, economics as if people mattered, political science and history and sociology from points of view of people around the world, cross cultural leadership training, understanding and appreciations of all the world's religions, and the contributions of all of humankind to the world's storehouse of wisdom and knowledge.

**6. Help protect vulnerable U.S. minorities.** Be an ally. Speak up when you hear negative generalizations about whole groups of people based on the actions of a few individuals. In fact, be more vigilant about derogatory comments, including "harmless jokes," about any group. A safe climate for all reduces the level of fear and mistrust around issues in the current crisis that spell danger.

**7. Refuse the draft** -- if it comes down to that. Do you want to fight a ground war in Afghanistan – or the next country on the list of those that harbor terrorists (or at least the terrorists that we don't like) – Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia (today our friends but who knows about tomorrow)? Or how about Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, which is now becoming more strident and angry, not because of religious differences, but because of the ways the US exacerbated the Asian economic crisis a few years back. Who knows what countries will be considered "not with us" but on the side of the terrorists? And then, if the ground war expands, you may need to make a decision. It takes great courage to refuse to kill. Isn't that ridiculous? It takes great

courage to refuse to kill. But principled people have done it before. As Gandhi said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”