

## Video 21

### The Non-Violent Renaissance

Young People of the World, as you stand outside the Parliament on Fridays and hold up your sign declaring School Strike for Climate, keep in mind that you are doing more than demanding a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. As your growing movement seeks to enact legislation which will encourage the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, so we need to encourage a transition in our thinking. We need to move from the pervasive and unrelenting violence toward Nature, and toward each other, to an intelligent respect toward Nature, and toward each other.

We need to shine a bright light on violence in all its forms—whether toward children caught in a war zone, or creatures in the Arctic caught in a heat zone—so that we can move *beyond* our old ways of thinking . . . and thus find new solutions for the problems which now threaten to overwhelm us.

Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States in the middle of the Civil War, wrote a message to Congress on December 1, 1862, one month before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation which freed the slaves in America. In his address, he wrote:

“The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

*Dogmas* means “a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true. Old ways of thinking. Old beliefs.”

*Disenthrall* means “to free from bondage or slavery. To liberate, to set free.” Lincoln here refers not only to the freeing of the slaves, but the freeing of *all* Americans—“ourselves”—from their old ways of thinking.

Traditionally, young people have been taught in their schools to become good citizens in their society, able to earn a living, willing to support the laws, ready to protect the nation from military aggression. Young people were taught to fit into a social structure which already existed, and to contribute to that established way of life.

Today, however, our established way of life is destroying planet Earth. Our economic system plunders natural resources, so that a tiny percentage of the human population can become immensely wealthy, and powerful. Our industrial system, powered for two centuries by coal and oil, has polluted every remote corner of our planet—from the tops of the mountains to deep in the rainforests, from patches of farmland to the depths of the oceans—so that everywhere, *everywhere*, habitats are dying. And our political system not only allows the global devastation to continue, but *encourages* this arrogant destruction by subsidizing the corporations—and thus their wealthy owners—who daily poison our unique and fragile world.

Thus we are urgently in need of a generation—a global generation—determined to think anew, and to act anew. We need to shine a bright light not only on the violence which is killing our forests and our farmland, our lakes and our seas, but—equally important—on the violence within ourselves which *allows* this devastation to continue year after year, decade after decade.

We have been handed a bloody hatchet and told to become warriors in the great tradition. The time has come not only to bury that hatchet *deep* in the earth, but to plant a young tree in the soil that covers that hatchet, so that the tree may grow, and the hatchet may never be dug up again.

And so we need to bring our schools *around the world* into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to invite the sun and the wind into our classrooms. We need to invite a broad range of speakers into our classrooms. We need to do our own research. We need to take long walks where the wildflowers are blooming, not with our telephones, but with our notebooks.

We need to become visionaries, with a vision of a far better world. And we need to learn from each other, sharing our research, sharing our visions—so that instead of living, as we do now, with this anxiety in our guts that the world is crumbling around us . . . we awake in the morning with the reassuring confidence that we are part of a team. That we have a *purpose*. That wind turbines and solar panels around the world are already building the foundation of our Renaissance.

Now, *now*, we can really hear those birds singing in the morning.

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John Slade