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**Remarks at the Park Blocks Ceremony Dedicating a Plaque to Commemorate the PSU Student
Antiwar Strike of May 1970
David A. Horowitz
May 11, 2022**

“There must be some kinda way out of here” – I don’t know how many times I’ve asked that question about American politics. Out of graduate school to teach History at Portland State in 1968, I shared the New Left view of the Vietnam War as an imperial venture. I subsequently modified that conviction but not my horror of the technological violence unleashed in an war to preserve the fiction of power. Stories of the “Good Germans” who had gone about their business while the Nazis systematically murdered *millions* haunted me, as did the realization that my class privilege as a student had spared me the draft. I came to Portland vowing I would do everything to support the antiwar cause.

By May 1970, 50,000 U.S. service personnel had been killed in Vietnam. Philosopher Albert Camus once observed that “one can be right and yet be beaten – force can vanquish spirit.” In that sense, the decision to bear witness to the removal of the Park Blocks hospital tent was a statement that the movement was not going away. As a faculty member who participated in the protest, I have been honored to help place the strike in the university’s institutional memory.

Yet the organizers of this event would like to pass something on to those coming into their own political maturity. This is a challenge in today’s widely altered political universe. Some 30% of the American public now appears open to the imposition of harsh social morality codes on their adversaries, the denial of the protection of the law for those they despise, the abrogation of voting and human rights for their opponents, and the right to overthrow elections that don’t go their way. Some even express admiration for authoritarian figures overseas.

Democracy is in peril. Without it, no substantive change is possible. The good news is that the next generation can become the greatest in American history if democracy is saved. Yet young people and activists cannot do it alone. They will need to engage the middle 40% of the country exhausted by political divisiveness and sectarian cant. Several challenges remain.

1 – social goals are best framed as common aspirations beyond special pleading. Barack Obama understood this when he advocated “Black Lives Matter – no more, no less.” It’s not what we say but what others hear.

2 – destructive street protests and acts of gratuitous violence only provide ammunition that adversaries do not deserve. Rubbing the wound raw is not the same as finding allies to repair it.

3 – voting is essential but political candidates must go beyond congenial social media profiles and reassuring talk to the base to inspire confidence among widely varying constituencies.

There are grounds for hope but this is no time for self-deception. A passage from Scripture comes to mind. “Let us stop talking falsely now,” a young poet from the Midwest once proclaimed, “the hour is getting late.”