

Varner Vitality Lecture Series

President Lech Walesa

November 15, 2019

Welcome guests, visitors, and, President Walesa.

First, I'd like to acknowledge several people who made tonight's special lecture possible:

- Provost James Lentini and his staff, especially Stephanie Lee, Dean Kevin Corcoran, and Professor Dave Dulio, who heads Oakland's Center for Civic Engagement.

I'd also like to thank all those who responded quickly to the opportunity to bring to campus one of the most influential people of the twentieth century....a person, whose leadership of Solidarity, not only confronted the Soviet empire during the Cold War, but remains a lasting symbol of courage and purposeful defiance in the face of totalitarianism.

It's a story, by the way, that resonates personally with me.

My grandparents were born in Russia, and persecuted for speaking out against the Soviet regime.

Because of the courage of my grandmother, my mother found a way out of the country, and eventually came to America.

My family's story and your story, President Walesa, illustrates how those of us who inherit the earth owe a debt and our gratitude to those who came before us.

And it's also a reminder that our actions determine the future course of our children and descendants.

Since 2003, the Varner Vitality Lecture Series has brought some of the most compelling and influential cultural figures to campus, including...

- Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright
- Political commentator Thomas Friedman
- Cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker
- Anthropologist Jane Goodall
- Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin

As a venue for timely and important public discourse, our mission is to foster an open, nonpartisan dialogue whereby we respect a diversity of opinions and the cultural pluralism that defines the great American quilt.

I'm reminded the Varner Vitality Lecture Series is named in honor of Oakland's first chancellor, Durward "Woody" Varner. Woody, as he was commonly known, believed Oakland could be a community gathering place where people from all backgrounds came together to appreciate the highest academic and scholarly aspirations.

Tonight, we have a guest whose actions at a critical time in history embodies the highest aspirations for those who believe freedom is an indivisible right, regardless of your country, race, ethnicity, political affiliation or gender.

Thank you, President Walesa, for coming to Oakland University, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts.