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American Renewal

With a seemingly constant barrage of media messages asserting turmoil across the nation, today's dominant political refrain is that America is in a state of decline. But is it?

According to journalist James Fallows, nothing is further from the truth. To make his case, Fallows, also an acclaimed author, editor and media commentator, took a three-year, 54,000-mile trek across the country and reported on the surprising points of American reinvention he found along the way.

Fallows will highlight some civic projects that are rebuilding America in his talk, "It's Happening Here: American Renewal, Ingenuity, and Innovation" Monday, May 1, at the Lobero Theater. The event, which begins at 8 p.m., is free and open to the public. It is sponsored by the UC Santa Barbara's Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life.

"James Fallows is one of the most astute observers of American life in our time," said Wade Clark Roof, director of the Capps Center and a professor of religious studies. "Once a speechwriter for Jimmy Carter, he is the author of 10 books on a phenomenal range of topics — immigration, defense policy, politics, computer technology, college admission policy, China and more.

"Often a speaker on university campuses and a national correspondent for The Atlantic, he writes about who we are as a people, our challenges and opportunities today," Roof continued. "In his Santa Barbara talk, Fallows will share stories about

what be believes are examples of democratic renewal and why he thinks the country will emerge from the Trump Era as a stronger nation.”

On his reporting excursion, Fallows discovered a cross-section of generations, races and political affiliations working far from the usual metropolitan hubs. Based on those observations, he wrote, “People across the country are aware of the serious economic, political, cultural, social … and other problems of contemporary America. But in most parts of the country, the possibility of dealing with those problems seems closer at hand, and more encouraging, than it does in national politics.”

It has been noted that American mass media is often seen as dramatizing events and issues in order to attract audiences. The resulting perception of many Americans, experts say, is that a minefield of issues frequently goes unaddressed. Fallows seeks to dispel this notion by sharing the progress he has witnessed being made across the nation.

“The more we have traveled in parts of America that are actively undergoing ethnic and cultural change — whether western Kansas with its Latino immigrants, or South Dakota with its refugee arrivals, or Allentown, Pennsylvania, as it shifts from Pennsylvania Dutch to Latino, or Holland, Michigan, as it shifts from Dutch-Dutch to a more varied population — the more frequently we have witnessed the ongoing power of the American assimilative process,” Fallows says.

A national correspondent for The Atlantic for more than 43 years, Fallows is the recipient of numerous honors, including the National Book Award, the American Book Award and the National Magazine Award. His 2010 documentary series “On the Frontlines: Doing Business in China” won an Emmy Award.

Fallows has worked as a speechwriter for President Carter and served as editor of U.S. News & World Report. He is currently the chair in U.S. media at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney in Australia.

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