



## SEE CLEARLY: Sanity During Insane Times

### Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto

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---- Copies of *See Clearly* are available from the on-demand publisher Lulu Press ----

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a concerned American who has been inspired by imagining herself as the philosophic soul mate and valiantly illegitimate great-granddaughter of the highly esteemed and irreverent writer Mark Twain, who was a brilliant observer, humorist, lecturer and philosopher. She has published Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto, an astute save-the-world treatise that contains wide-ranging and far-sighted observations and good recommendations regarding all the biggest issues facing humanity here in the third decade of the 21st century. The latest versions of all the essays contained in these twelve books can be read online.

This Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto is dedicated to those who have resisted "conservatives" who abuse their influence, and to the participants in the Women's Marches, People's Climate Marches and Earth Day Marches for Science, as well as those who peacefully protested against police brutality and systemic injustices toward African Americans. May these fair-minded folks be progenitors for a new renaissance of commendable spirit and social activism like that which drove far-reaching political reform during the Progressive Movement from 1890 to 1920. A shout-out, too, to President Theodore Roosevelt's laudable efforts to protect more than 200 million acres of public land in National Parks, National Monuments, National Forests and National Wildlife Refuges. And may the many essays in this manifesto serve as an excellent guide for this renaissance.

A thought-provoking prayer is inscribed on a mantel in the State Dining Room of the White House. Penned by President John Adam in the year 1800, near the end of his tenure in office, it reads: "I pray Heaven to bestow the best blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof." Clearly, this hope was under staggering assault from January 2017 through January 2021, when deceit, political malfeasance and abuses of authority ran almost unchecked in the land of the free.

All evidence indicates that the Trump White House was occupied by deeply dishonest, greedy and self-serving people, with all too many hypocritically opportunistic Yes-men co-conspirators serving them in Congress and as agency heads in the Cabinet. So it is now the obligation of all Americans to demand that we restore our national commitment to fundamental values and "to throw off such Government," as our Founders committed to doing in their courageous Declaration of Independence from British tyranny -- to provide new, dramatically improved safeguards for the health, safety and true future well-being and security of the people.

NOTE: The Titles of the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto:

Common Sense Revival	Book One of the Earth Manifesto
Entertaining Illumination Unleashed	Book Two of the Earth Manifesto
Existential Enlightenment	Book Three of the E.M. (Version 1)
Love in the Time of Choleric	Book Three of the E.M. (Version 2)
Imaginative Perspectives and Ecopsychological Insights	Book Four of the Earth Manifesto
Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews	Book Five of the Earth Manifesto
Incisive Global Perspectives	Book Six of the Earth Manifesto
Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview	Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto
Big Picture Perspectives, and A Pursuit of Social Activism	Book Eight of the Earth Manifesto
The Original Earth Manifesto	Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto
A Marvelous Miscellany of Musings and Evolutionary Understandings	Book Ten of the Earth Manifesto
The Rather Ridiculous Ruses that Fuel Revolutionary Unrest	Book Eleven of the Earth Manifesto
See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times	Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto

See the last link before Part One on the Home Page of the Earth Manifesto online for the Tables of Contents pages for all the essays included in these twelve books. Every one of these essays can be found online, linked to the Home Page, organized in their ever-evolving form. **Sales pitch:** All these handsome insight-filled 212-page books are available right now from the on-demand printer Lulu Press.

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## Honestly Seeing Things Like They Really Are

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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Wise Native American leaders advised an eminently valuable perspective that recognized the crucial importance of living in the world in sustainable ways. They taught a Seventh Generation Principle that posited the proposition that all significant decisions should take into account how any contemplated action will affect descendants for seven generations into the future. This is a respect-worthy stewardship philosophy that was important to peoples in Native American cultures, like the Iroquois in their Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy, and to indigenous tribes around the world. This understanding reveals how crazy it is for leaders in modern times to ignore precautionary necessities for us to choose to pay forward a fairer, safer and more auspicious legacy to our heirs.

We must find much more effective ways to give adequate respect to our children and grandchildren, and to all human beings that will be born in the future. It is our ultimate moral obligation to help ensure our descendants have reasonable prospects for health, well-being, security and flourishing in coming years and decades. Let's come together now, responsibly, in making this overarching collective commitment!

Humanity is embarked on an epic journey in the 2020s. And unlike Odysseus, who encountered fantastic mythical beings like Sirens and a Cyclops during his decade-long voyage home from the Trojan War, right now we are experiencing a rapidly worsening and viscerally real "long emergency" of the destabilization of the global climate and pandemic, economic turmoil, inflation, wars, resource depletion, air and water pollution, species extinctions and natural disasters like devastating storms and terrible wildfires in many locales. These conditions are visceral portents of a deteriorating environment to come. Compounding these daunting challenges, there are a multitude of conflicts over political supremacy, abuses of authority, ruthless competition, overpopulation pressures, ideologies, stubbornly embedded racial injustices, discriminatory sexism, and the proper role of good government.

A big picture perspective reveals that this situation features worsening inequalities and consequentially harmful class, racial and gender injustices that especially oppress women and Blacks and Latinos. This woe-filled state of affairs contributed to anger and widespread street protests against police brutality in the summer of 2020, after George Floyd was murdered and police and federal agents reactively engaged in repressive activities -- and abusers of authority fanned the flames, increasing the many threats to fairness in our diminished democracy.

Ida B. Wells, an African American suffragist and early leader in the movement to gain civil rights for Blacks, once wisely wrote, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." Let these words show the way!

What's happening here should be perfectly clear. Here's the bottom line. First, the powers that dominate our politics and economy have rigged the economy to such an extreme extent that a small minority of the people is able to monopolize most of the wealth generated by using up natural resources and making big profits from the labors of working people. Both Republicans and Democrats have collaborated together in this effort by allowing wealthy donors to exert dominating influence to grab big benefits for themselves. Economic elites have severely corrupted our political system, causing extremes of inequality in income and wealth to become more exaggerated today than they have been since the end of the Roaring Twenties in 1929. To achieve this excessively unfair state, conservatives have cheated the majority of people by subverting our democratic system of representation.

Our economic system is a ridiculously unjust one featuring harsh swim-or-sink Tough Luck capitalism for the vast majority, and generous socialism for rich people. One outcome of this treacherous skewed state of affairs is that the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is becoming dangerously extreme. Adversities associated with this rigging scheme are creating anguished conflicts between Americans. This essay will clarify the ways top dogs in our society are achieving and perpetuating this grotesquely inequitable condition.

What's happening here is that business owners, executives and investors are being allowed to gain too much of the benefits of economic activities. One way they do this is by foisting externalized costs on the public. They compound this problem by evading their common good obligations to pay more taxes so that adequate revenues are available to invest in social insurance policies against desperation -- by means of a stronger social safety net and healthcare for all. Republican tax cut swindles are also causing us to fail to invest enough in environmental insurance policies that would help protect fresh water, clean air and valuable public lands. And corruption in politics is causing us to fail to make sensible commitments to stabilize the global climate, contributing to incalculably large current and future costs of intensifying storms, flooding, droughts, wildfires, rising sea levels and other natural disasters, together with increasing hardships and flows of desperate refugees from countries that are suffering. We must change course, and begin respecting basic fairness and precautionary principles.

An insightful Buddhist philosopher might observe with equanimity that we should sensibly be guided by Right Understanding, Right Intention and a commitment to responsible Right Action, three of the wise planks of the Noble Eightfold Path. The best gauge of responsible right action is to be found in accurate and comprehensive assessments of the consequences of the impacts of any given action. The Earth Manifesto points the way in online epistles like *Good Proposals for Saving Humanity*, and *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated*, and a proposed *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*. Let's start here!

#### A Major Problem: The Dominating Hegemony of the Corporatocracy

Our Founders created a democratic republic in which the American people had power because their voices were to be heard through representatives who were supposed to represent the people's best interests and the general welfare. Today, however, the USA is ruled by a corporatocracy -- a partnership of wealthy people, big corporations and crony government officials who are doing the bidding of corporate interests. Psychologist Bruce Levine explained: "In this corporatocracy, as in most modern tyrannies, there are elections, but the reality is that giant corporations and the wealthy elite rule in a way to satisfy their own self-interest. In this corporatocracy, it's in the interest of corporations and the wealthy elite that the winning candidate is beholden to them, so they financially support both Democrats and Republicans, and corporations and the wealthy directly and indirectly finance candidates who are then indebted to them. It's common for these indebted government officials to appoint persons to key decision-making roles who are friendly to, and lenient with, corporate entities and their executives. And it's routine for high-level officials in the government to be rewarded with high-paying industry positions or lobbying jobs after they move on, so that they use their relationships with current government officials to ensure that corporate interests will be taken care of." This often results in national policies and priorities that are unfair, unsustainable and basically wrongheaded, cruel and mean-spirited.

Early critics of capitalism like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context, and that social justice should be accorded higher priority than maximizing private profits to the detriment of the people. Then ecological philosophers came along and asserted that both economics and ethics must rightly take into account crucial ecological values. Republican politicians are brashly defying these understandings, striving to goose short-term profits by profligately using up resources and sacrificing the environment, and at the same time violating many codes of decency, honesty, public health and safety, cooperative good will, ethics and the moral good. And they relentlessly work to erode democratic fairness and deprive many millions of Americans of voting rights and fair representation, thereby weakening the civil rights and overall well-being of most groups, especially those of women, people of color, gay people, poor people and immigrants and refugees.

Mark Twain famously observed that we Americans have the best government that money can buy. This satirical ridicule of the corrupting influence of moneyed interests in our politics has become an increasingly pathetic parody of propriety in the USA today. A massive flood of money is giving us rudely equality-opposing political

leaders who are Orwellian in their manipulative dishonesty and ruthlessly divisive Big Brother treachery and harm-engendering impacts. These "conservatives" preposterously pretend to care about people, but what they are really doing is brazenly betraying the best interests of most Americans to give bigger benefits to the few.

In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx astutely observed that the phrase "Après moi, le déluge!" is "the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Hence, Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the laborer, unless under compulsion from society." Workers, unite! Let's come together, and generate remedial compulsion!

Joel Bakan observed that big corporations are basically designed to socialize costs onto the public. He wrote that corporations are "deliberately programmed, indeed legally compelled, to externalize costs without regard for the harm it may cause to people and communities and the natural environment. Every cost it can unload onto someone else is a benefit to itself, a direct route to profit." Corporations should not be given the full rights in courts of law that are constitutionally assured to real people, for the good reason that far too many abuses of power have been made using rationalizations like the one that wrongfully asserts the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights as individuals of Due Process and Equal Protection.

One way moneyed interests have succeeded in these schemes is by "deregulating" the economy. This approach allows those rigging the system to artificially inflate private profits in the short run through the expediency of externalizing costs, harms, risks and liabilities onto the populace. These externalized costs include health harms, damages to the environment, resource depletion, worse adversities for farmers and farm laborers, and high recovery costs from natural disasters that are intensifying due to a worsening climate crisis. Since 1980, elites have even managed to grab almost all of the bigger profits earned from increasing worker productivity.

"Deregulation" often is undoing laws that made sense in prior saner times, and doing the bidding of corporate executives seeking to maximize profits at the public expense. Deregulation is a shrewd process of reversing national rules that had enjoyed majoritarian meritocratic support before coldly-calculating politicians began obediently serving profit-prepossessed puppet masters. This strategy is maladaptive, for it wrongly allows more opportunities for Big Businesses to generate bigger profits by crushing workers' collective bargaining rights, ripping off consumers, foisting harms onto the people, and socializing costs and risks. Deregulatory zeal often torpedoes the common good by dismantling sensible protections from the predations of those who rig the system to their greedy advantage. This fervor undesirably facilitates the intensification of this assault on fair dealings, intelligent planning, good governance, propitious civic values, ecological sanity and sustainable living.

In the chaotic wake of the fomented January 6 insurrectionary riot, the Party pushing deregulation is now traitorously trying to regulate the hell out of voting rights in dozens of states around the country.

Republicans are living like there will be no tomorrow, hubristically demonstrating a heedless lack of concern for conserving resources, reducing pollution, or limiting the amount of toxic wastes generated. Worse, they try to change public policies in ways that will increase emissions of climate destabilizing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. They are broadly abusing the excessive influence they have usurped by pushing policies that will undermine prospects for the health, security and general well-being of all in future generations. They are thus acting like King Louis XV of France, who famously saw the writing on the wall, and said, "Après moi, le deluge."

We are in desperate need of good plans to deal with challenges that confront us. Here's Right Understanding. It is an ultimately unacceptable wrong to allow corporate entities to make excessive profits by poisoning or destroying an infinite multitude of wildlife habitats. Instead of having our representatives make unrestrained profiteering and wealth concentration our top national goals, we should all look to a crucial leading indicator, the Living Planet Report, which happens to be sending Code Red signals. Having estimated the number of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes in 10,000 representative species since 1970, this report reveals that a startling average of 69% of them have been wiped out, mainly due to habitat destruction caused by agriculture, mining and real estate development. We are hacking away at the branches of the tree of life, and allowing profiteers to chop into the roots of biological diversity. All for bigger dividends to be funneled to the few.

The Living Planet Index reveals that natural ecosystems are being degraded at a rate unprecedented in human history. See my Sustainability Index online for a clear-eyed evaluation of 45 important parameters that

measure how humanity is doing in its efforts to live sustainably. As human numbers march past 8 billion people, it is crazy for us to cause the carrying capacity of Mother Earth for our kind to be reduced by rashly damaging natural ecosystems and failing to adopt more sensible conservation measures. And we must support more expansive family planning options.

Young people have a big stake in future well-being, yet their voices are being largely ignored in decision-making today. To cope with grave threats posed by the anthropogenic climate crisis, the Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg told elites in Davos they need to do whatever it takes to meet the Paris Climate Accords, which seeks to limit global temperature rises to below two degrees Celsius. She had drawn global attention when she delivered an impassioned speech to world leaders at the December 2018 UN climate talks in Poland, and she has inspired tens of thousands of young students around the world to follow her lead and take off from school on Fridays to demand serious action against climate disruptions. She warned, "At places like Davos, people like to tell success stories, but their financial success has come with an unthinkable price tag. We can still fix this. But unless we recognize the overall failures of our current system, we most probably don't stand a chance."

Our political system foolishly facilitates cost-externalizing schemes by allowing costs of production to be socialized when it should instead require them to be included in a full cost pricing of products and services. This tactic generates artificially high profits, and our corrupted tax system allows a large proportion of profits to be commandeered by the few. Making matters much worse, influence-abusing rich people and corporate entities use the excessive sway of their Big Money to restrict voting, grievously skew our national policies and priorities, and institute even more tax cuts in a public borrowing swindle that succeeds by pushing Big Lie "trickle-down theory" propaganda. This lavishly propagated spin is targeted to make sure tax cuts are regressively structured to give overly generous benefits to the top 1%, as was the case with the Tax Cuts bill rammed through Congress in December 2017, without support from a single Democrat. Since then, the national debt has rapidly mounted, and first exceeded a titanic \$30 trillion in early 2022. This is more than 130% of 2021 GDP of \$23 trillion in the U.S., which is a threshold of highly risky and irresponsibly large debt burden.

Political corruption allows power abusers to obligate all taxpayers in every future year to pay interest expense costs on trillions of borrowed dollars, disadvantaging every taxpayer in every future year for the purpose of giving most of the spoils of this swindle to the already wealthy. Think about this. Even before the pandemic, the bottom half of Americans had an average net worth of less than \$12,000 per person, and roughly 20% of Americans had zero or negative net worth. These folks are financially extremely insecure, so it is wrong for the top 1% to have managed to rig the system so advantageously for themselves that they have an average net worth of \$10 million each. Even more extraordinarily, the top one-tenth of 1% of Americans has an average net worth of about \$50 million each, and the 3 richest Americans have a total net worth of over \$500 billion.

"There are lies, damned lies and statistics," sagaciously stated Mark Twain. Sadly, there are really consequential opportunity costs related to reducing government revenues by making big Tax Cuts and assessing low tax rates on the huge amount of income earned from investments, compared to rates assessed to those who earn income by working for a living. One of the worst of these opportunity costs is the necessity to reduce spending on contagious disease preparedness and people's healthcare, like making cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, as Trump Republicans strived to do in their annual budgets. Another opportunity cost is chronic underfunding of public education, failing our children and having the insidious collateral impact of causing student debt to more than double in the last decade. Outstanding student loan debt in the USA now exceeds \$1.7 trillion, and this steadily rising level of onerous obligations are being incurred at usurious interest rates. This exacerbates wealth inequalities and makes hardships faced by countless younger Americans needlessly harsh. Intergenerational injustices like this are a betraying design feature of the real nature of our current economic system.

Thomas Paine wrote that Americans have it in their power to make the world over again. One thing is currently clear: We need to act now! A bugle horn sounds for solidarity of purpose. It's not like there aren't excellent plans out there to address all our national ills. Like Elizabeth Warren, "I've got a plan for that!" Good plans to transform our world are found in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Let's pay forward a better legacy! We should shift our national priorities from a primary focus on pandering to



the donor class and wealthy vested interest groups, and instead declare it to be our top priority to emphasize smarter national planning by acting in ways that are much more responsible, equitable, humane, ethical, moral, just and empathically peaceable. We should give greater respect to far-sighted precautionary principles, and be more ecologically aware. We must make concerted efforts to stop facilitating "Tragedy of the Commons" outcomes and allowing externalized costs to be imposed onto the general populace. The best way to accomplish this would be by ratifying a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*. And let's respect its overarching guidance.

A reasonably objective observer would see how cynically immoral it is for politicians to pretend to care about "forgotten" men and women and children in order to gain power, and to then double-cross these folks with contrary policies and distorted national priorities. Making matters worse, MAGA Republicans deceive people about what they are doing, and why. Remember that the ultimate judge of what is the true moral good in an action is how consistent it is with the greater good, and how consequential its impacts are, for better or worse.

Let there be no doubt or confusion about what is happening here. Our democracy is under concerted assault by power-abusing politicians and corporate entities that are demonstrating consequential attempts to cheat in elections, pass unfair laws, corrupt public policies, pervert national priorities, repeal sensible regulations, and tragically undermine the common good. And MAGA Republicans have told Big Lies and engaged in seditious conspiracy, making this *Amazing Disgrace* worse by obstructing remedial justice, covering up their misdeeds, violating laws and the Constitution, and tricking people into letting them get away with betrayals of public trust.

Bernie Sanders described Trump's 2020 Budget proposal as "breathtaking in its degree of cruelty and filled with broken promises." Trump had told Americans he would be a different type of Republican, that he would be a champion of the working American, and that he would not cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. But his budgets did the exact opposite of what he promised. At a time of stark inequalities of income and wealth -- and becoming drastically worse with the pandemic -- Trump's last budget proposal would have helped pay for huge tax cuts that primarily benefit the few by cutting \$1.5 trillion from Medicaid, \$845 billion from Medicare and \$25 billion from Social Security. Make no mistake about it: Trump's plans constituted a massive transfer of wealth from working class families to the wealthiest people and most profitable corporations in America.

Conservatives in effect wage a "war on the poor" through the federal budget, and the budget is also one of the main pressure points where public lands and the environment are being sacrificed. The majority of Americans did not support Republicans' arrogant attempt to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a "mean" new plan that would have given rich people \$800 billion in tax breaks at the cost of millions of Americans losing their healthcare coverage. The majority supports improving public education, not slashing funding for it to subsidize privileged people and their kids in private schools. The majority of Americans favors expanded women's rights and empowerment, and they oppose new limitations on contraception and safe abortion before fetal viability.

The majority supports environmentally sane planning and greater efforts to leave a more secure legacy to our children and grandchildren and all persons in future generations. The majority disapproves of leaders who pander to those who profit from wasteful and polluting uses of fossil fuels and abdicate responsibility for taking smart steps to ameliorate the effects of climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emissions. No matter what Republicans tell us, we must soon adopt good plans that will ensure we make an accelerated and necessary transition to cleaner energy and a reduced reliance on the use of polluting non-renewable resources.

One particularly deplorable aspect of the current corrupted status quo is that the USA has become a terribly unjust *Incarceration Nation*. A main reason for this is that controlling interests use a discriminatory criminal justice system to repress persons who are adversely affected by excessively harsh laws. These interest groups have effectively put in place vile policies like draconian drug laws that have been used to lock up millions of people. Victims of this injustice over the decades include hippies long ago, and liberals, and mercilessly disproportionate numbers of Blacks, Latinos and other disadvantaged racial minorities. To add insult to the injury of depriving these wronged folks of many freedoms and personal security, the designers and enforcers of this highly unjust system further deprive them of having any voice about this situation by making it harder for them to exercise voting rights. Worse, these politicians give big opportunities to businesses in the private prison industry to make huge profits from these inequities and prevent overturning of wrongful convictions.

In another swindle-like indulgence, "rent-seekers" carve out profits for themselves instead of contributing to making the economic pie bigger, to the real detriment of the masses. This is one reason why half of the poor people in the world live in resource rich countries. The prominent economist Joseph Stiglitz explains the true dimensions of the negative impacts of this scheme, especially in countries corrupted by powerful fossil fuel interests, in his insightful book, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*.

Our national economy and the global economy are structured to maximize profits not only by extracting natural resources and taking ruthless advantage of working people (especially "essential" but expendable blue collar folks), but also by promoting materialist consumerism and profligately wasteful hyper-stimulus of the economy.

Given all these aspects of the status quo, it is completely crazy to inadequately govern the wily predations of gigantic corporate entities, and to let these tax-evading behemoths prosper at the expense of the people. It is downright dumb to give wider latitude to Big Pharma, Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Chemical, Big Agribusiness, Big Tech, Big Tobacco, Big Insurance, Big Military, Big Gun Manufacturers and the corrupt (why tax-exempt?) NRA.

Big Tech is having some far-reaching harmful impacts on people, especially the young in our communities, and on the health of our democracy. In the exceptionally insight-filled Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*, some of the creative people behind the success of gigantic companies like Facebook, Google, Twitter, Amazon and Apple make it clear that a corrosive business model and perverse financial incentives are fundamental to their success. These companies have become the biggest and most profitable companies in history by designing their platforms using profoundly persuasive psychological manipulation techniques to capture people's attention and get them addicted to their services or devices, and to profit from polarization by stoking culture wars and engaging in "cancel culture". A tragic side effect: a calamitous spike in suicides, especially among the young.

The ultimately irresponsible capstone of this concatenation of qualities that characterize the current corrupt establishment is a staunchly promoted pro-birth stance that is propped up by a deep-seated "be fruitful and multiply" opposition to family planning, contraception and reproductive rights for women to choose to have a safe and legal abortion. Anti-choice pro-natal promotion of births is a perverse way for vested interests to conspire to dominate women, and push consumerism, exploit resources, plunder assets as fast as possible, deprive working people of the fruits of their labors, and get away with damaging ecosystems and killing wildlife.

Humanity faces daunting challenges in the world today in every sphere -- locally, nationally and globally -- so it is becoming imperative for us to deal comprehensively with the forces underlying these perplexing issues. The government of the United States of America has a moral obligation to solve complex problems, and not to make them worse by deceit and rigging the system even more reactionarily against the general welfare of humanity.

Excellent consensus solutions can be found to all these challenges, and it is pathological that the main way the puppet masters who control our misbegotten national decision-making get away with preventing these common good solutions is by driving wedges between people to keep them from gaining fairer representation. They despicably try to benefit by exploiting grievances, riling up resentments and provoking racial prejudices, and by taking crude advantage of tribal identity politics and people's fears and insecurities -- so that the largely white supremacist schemers can continue to dominate our politics and oppress the lower classes.

Let's respect this honorable understanding, and come together in common cause! Witness this conundrum that afflicts humanity: Control-obsessed "conservatives" demand dominion over all the people, and one of their primary drives is to achieve an irresponsible goal -- to sell humanity down the river to an unnecessarily harsh fate by treating our home planet like a business in liquidation. They do this by helping convert natural resources to cash at the fastest possible rate in order to give most of the benefits of this insanely foolhardy course of action to a small minority of influence-abusing rich people. They achieve this purpose by deceiving people, wielding excess control in Congress, giving profit-obsessed corporate entities too much influence, stimulating demand for goods and services through ratcheted-up public borrowings to create what is a "fool's gold" artificial patina of a healthy economy, and enacting inequitable regressive tax cut scams. This, in addition to eliminating many common sense regulations and making concerted efforts to foist many cost-externalizing schemes and harms on the public, and lying to the people and railroading them using emotion-manipulating propaganda.



Simultaneously, the top priority of scheming Trump and McConnell Republicans was to ram through a record number of overly partisan judges to side with the rich over the poor, and Republicans over Democrats, and men over women, and the powerful over a majority of people whose best interests are hurt by these actions.

It is rudely unscrupulous for dominating conservatives to wield excessive influence by following Roger Stone's diabolically Machiavellian understanding that hate can be a more powerful motivating force than love. Some say, "You reap what you sow", and this applies doubly here, for hate viscerally harms those who are conditioned to hate, as well as their targeted victims. A sad side effect of such divisive gambits -- and MAGA Republican efforts to blame others -- is to make Americans into emotional wrecks. Republicans like the dirty trickster Roger Stone and others have used despicable smear campaigns and extremist rhetoric against rivals, and fomented racial biases with "dog whistles" to get stronger support from those in their baited political base.

These schemers regard negative political advertising and manipulative social media spin as highly effective and profitable ways to gain power and money. They are effective because they make it easy to hijack people's emotions, but though this shrewdly works, it seriously degrades civil discourse and undermines the vital qualities of unity and social cohesion that are needed to implement reforms and broadly positive collaborative solutions.

Dutch historian Rutger Bregman told billionaire elites at the economic summit in Davos in 2019 that the bottom line issue of almost every consideration is low taxes for the rich. "What Bregman said, put simply, was the Davos emperors have no clothes. They talk a lot about how something must be done about inequality and the need to address social unrest, but cavil at the idea they might be a big part of the problem." Bergman told his audience that people in Davos talked about participation, justice, equality and transparency, but "nobody raises the issue of tax avoidance and the rich not paying their share. It is like going to a firefighters' conference and not talking about water." He explained that the biggest factor causing extreme levels of inequality was "taxes, taxes, taxes, and all the rest is bullshit in my opinion." He later wrote that his activism "is about saving capitalism."

Budgets are moral documents, for they have determining impacts on people's lives and economic outcomes, and on the environmental commons upon which all future well-being is crucially dependent. All tax and spending decisions involve trade-offs, and there are winners and losers associated with every one. Government budgets and plans for raising revenues and allocating spending reveal the real priorities of our representatives, and these decisions are immensely consequential. Unfortunately, Republican changes in national tax law are dumbly narrow in their focus by being riskily short-term in orientation, and they cruelly make economic injustices worse. The real reason that the biggest element of the Trump Tax Folly was to cut taxes on corporations is because the top 1% of Americans receives more than two-thirds of all dividends paid out every year, and capital gains realized, so these tax cuts mainly benefit CEOs and large shareholders -- and the cunning politicians they buy. Capital gains, curiously, are taxed at exceedingly low rates. Rigged at every turn!

All of these scams are being achieved by pushing ideological propaganda to fool the people, as well as by using divide-to-conquer strategies targeted to trick them into accepting this sad state of affairs. But as income and wealth disparities and inequalities keep getting worse and worse, angry unrest is brewing in the USA. And matches were lit to the tinderbox after white police officers mercilessly killed George Floyd in Minneapolis. "One might wonder", I speculated before the widespread protests began, "how much harsher this insecurity and public corruption and moral turpitude and poisonous twitter spin will get before the rude ploys of succeeding by deceiving and dividing people FAIL, and powerful people and the wealthy find out how disastrously dangerous these system-corrupting conditions really are -- even to themselves -- and to freedom and mutual security."

Republicans portray criticisms and protests and dissent as anti-American -- and try to criminalize them. But in fact, these are often patriotic stands against injustices, corruption and power abuses. Open-minded folks see clearly that such misdeeds pose basic threats to our democracy, public health, civil rights and overall well-being.

Republicans are sticking with their Big Lie trickle-down theory, which they have been propagating since Ronald Reagan adopted it in 1981 to rationalize further enriching the rich. Bah, humbug! This ruse is a pathetic key in exacerbating extreme inequalities and associated hardships. The billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer made incisive observations about the folly of trickle-down propaganda in his article *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For*

*Us Plutocrats*. In this 2014 article, addressed as a Memo to "My Fellow Zillionaires", Hanauer expressed this provocative understanding: "The problem isn't that we have inequality; some inequality is intrinsic to any high-functioning capitalist economy. The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. ... Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution. And so I have a message for my fellow filthy rich, for all of us who live in our gated bubble worlds: Wake up, people. It won't last. If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

Our tax code really should reward work, not wealth. Yet politicians are egregiously preserving one of the most corrupt provisions of anything in the tax code -- the "carried-interest loophole". This notorious tax break allows highly compensated private-equity managers and real estate investors and venture capitalists to be taxed at very low rates. This violates the progressive principle of a more highly graduated tax system that makes the highest earners pay higher rates on the top levels of earnings. "These are guys that shift paper around and they get lucky," said Donald Trump before the 2016 elections. They were, he concluded, "getting away with murder." Then lax Trump Republicans generously gave a forgiving pardon to these people, despite knowing their guilt before Lady Justice, the great personification of the moral force in judicial systems.

Listen for the echoes of a stentorian female voice reverberating down from the skies above a burning bush on the Mount, and visualize a cartoon balloon with jagged edges crashing like lightning across dark skies, spelling out how deeply dishonorable and extraordinarily irresponsible the Trump agenda was, with its anti-environmental, anti-Black, anti-egalitarian, anti-immigrant, anti-democratic bent. Another flash of lightning illuminates a stark panoply of parenthetical footnotes, including *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways Our System is Unfairly Rigged*, an essay that provides a fuller understanding of the underhanded schemes being perpetrated against Americans.

"If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed; if you do, you are misinformed."

--- Often attributed to Mark Twain

### Where We Stand

Republicans have created a vicious cycle of minority rule and abuses of power in which they use *Dark Money* and voter suppression tactics and twisted partisan gerrymandering to exert excessive influence, using that power to make it harder for millions of people to vote, and to pack courts with conservatives. We should rightly enact fairer campaign finance laws and lobbying reforms to rectify the Supreme Court's wrongly decided corruption-enabling 2010 *Citizen United* ruling. And we must end partisan gerrymandering that allows politicians to choose their voters, instead of properly letting voters choose their representatives. We should also reverse all the restrictive Republican voter suppression laws enacted in recent years in states controlled by "conservatives", so that politicians are forced to compete more fairly for their influential positions. Do this by passing the proposed John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and make voting by mail easier and even more secure.

We must strengthen our democracy by rejecting those who stubbornly refuse to compromise with the majority of people and their representatives. We should ratify a Constitutional Amendment like one advocated by the Move to Amend coalition that would make it clear that corporate entities are not persons, and should not have the same rights as individuals, because of their tendency to wantonly abuse power. Corporate behemoths should be broken up again today, like Theodore Roosevelt did when many corporate trusts had to be busted up into smaller entities to protect society from the negative monopoly outcomes associated with too much power.

Supreme Court conservatives narrowly ruled by a 5-4 vote in June 2019 to give state legislatures a green light to gerrymander congressional districts "to their heart's content, no matter how partisan or racist their motivations (and they're always partisan or racist)." This outrage against fairness in elections caused a new realization to dawn. The court of public opinion can be more powerful than federal courts, and people's voices

become critically important when courts have been stacked with judges who act in accordance with partisan biases and suspiciously disingenuous rationales. So let's join together and apply powerful public pressure to our representatives to honestly and responsibly create nonpartisan districting in every one of the 50 states.

Under Trump, the U.S. government came to resemble a banana republic, corrupt in politics and featuring all too many officials willing to commit improprieties, and illegalities, to advance a narrowly self-serving and excessively unfair, pathetically unjust and environmentally insane agenda. This is scary, for the USA is a superpower and the world cannot afford to have it act like a rogue republic with a large and unfairly exploited poor working class, overly stratified social classes, political instability, and an oligarchic, plutocratic, crony capitalist, corporatocratic, influence-abusing ruling class composed of elites in business, politics, religion, the military and corporate media networks. We should never again allow an incredibly dishonest, greedy, anger prone, bullying, emotionally unbalanced, vindictive authority-abusing narcissist to occupy the Oval Office.

Despite the tinderbox conditions that prevail, it is very hard to get self-interested hard-right representatives of a minority of Americans to change course and commit to greater fairness and honesty and integrity, or demonstrate more inclusive concerns for the public health, general welfare, domestic tranquility, truer liberty and justice for all, fiscal responsibility, a better overall quality of life, and peaceable coexistence. MAGA?

It is overly difficult to get special interests to change course because they are too busy using divisive strategies to keep people from uniting against power-abusing factions that insist they be allowed to continue rigging our economy and political system. They use powerful tools to perpetuate this division in organizations like the corporate-funded ALEC, which promotes sneaky "model legislation". State propaganda machines like Fox News and One America News grease the wheels of this corrupting influence, along with right-wing organizations like the Federalist Society that picks right-wing judges. "Dividers" have been successful in using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to propagate falsehoods and confusion by emotionally hijacking people and taking advantage of their resentments, fears, racial biases, gullibility, and propensities to believe all manner of contorted conspiracy theories. By sowing seeds of doubt about everything, they are able to divert attention from the misdeeds that allow them to gain and misuse power, and from all the scandals and schemes they are perpetrating that are unethical and unconstitutionally contrary to people's best interests.

Those who relentlessly push a far right agenda of stacking federal courts with extremist judges basically want to undermine democratic fairness and torpedo unity and further enable the excessive concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. These judges fail to rein in cost externalizing scams, while rationalizing wrongs and repressing people. These are reasons why effective democracy reforms are needed, with a goal of altering the nefarious trajectory toward undemocratic rule, worsening inequitable outcomes and policies that reduce protections of the environment, all in the interests of the greedy few at the expense of the many.

The House of Representatives first passed sensibly fair voting measures in March 2019 with the For the People Act (H.R.1), and such initiatives would be a good step in the right direction. In the Senate, however, Mitch McConnell stubbornly prevented this remedial legislation from even coming to the floor for a vote, ludicrously claiming it was an unfair "power grab" for regular citizens to have more influence. This is a grotesque contrast to his power-hungry devotion to allowing unlimited amounts of corporate money to drown out the voices of the vast majority of Americans! Since Republican politicians so staunchly oppose remedial actions, we should all figuratively throw open our windows like crazed Howard Beale in the film *Network*, and yell out "We're not going to take it anymore." We must throw the bums out of office with every vote made in all future elections!

### On Patriotism

A true American patriot pledges allegiance to the principles upon which our republic was founded, not to political officeholders, and especially not to those who abuse the power of their positions to benefit themselves and rich people and corporate entities at the expense of everyone else. George Lakoff notably wrote in *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*: "Patriotism is about improving the lives of one's fellow citizens and improving one's country's contribution to the world. In the conservative moral hierarchy, our country is taken as simply better than other countries. This is jingoism, not true patriotism, which rests on progressive values."

It is traitorous to relentlessly push lies about election fraud and then desperately incite insurrection to cling to power, and it is antithetical to honorable patriotism to support leaders who engage in such activity. Robert Reich conveyed astute understandings on what really constitutes true patriotism in his 2018 article *Trump pushes destructive distortion of patriotism*. He observed, "America's core struggle has been one of inclusion, not exclusion. ... Trump's patriotism centers on symbolic displays of loyalty like standing for the national anthem and waving the American flag. Real patriotism involves strengthening our democracy -- defending the right to vote and ensuring more Americans are heard, not claiming without evidence that millions voted fraudulently and pushing for laws that make it harder for Blacks and Latinos to vote. ... True patriots don't inundate government with industry lobbyists, attack the freedom of the press, or criticize judges who disagree with them, or fill the airwaves with lies. True patriots don't court foreign dictators, and don't excuse tyranny by denigrating America. True patriots don't fuel racist, religious or ethnic divisions. They aren't homophobic or sexist. To the contrary, true patriots seek to confirm and strengthen and celebrate the 'we' in 'We the People of the United States'. ... If we are losing our national identity, it is because we are losing those ideals: a commitment to the rule of law, to our democratic institutions, to truth, to tolerance of our differences, to equal political rights and equal opportunity, to participating in our civic life and making necessary sacrifices for these ideals we hold in common. Trump is doing everything he can to destroy these ideals. We must do everything we can to strengthen them. This is the true test of our patriotism." Kudos to Robert Reich for his clarity of observation!

Let's see clearly. As George W. Bush's former speechwriter David Frum states, the Trumpian GOP seems, in effect, to hate democracy because, as he writes: "The Republican party has a platform that can't prevail in democratic competition. When highly committed parties believe strongly in things that they cannot achieve democratically, they don't give up their beliefs, they give up on democracy." This is why "the GOP fights tooth and nail to make voting as hard as possible, to kick people off voter rolls, to gerrymander, to appoint ideologues to the Courts, to blow up all institutional norms in Congress: the new GOP has a twisted agenda, and they don't care how they get it. Democracy isn't to be protected, it's to be thwarted." This is tantamount to twisted! In *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic*, David Frum persuasively clarifies the nature of a whole litany of rude shenanigans that were taking place under Trump, thanks to him, his Cabinet members and GOP congresspersons who tried to rationalize and hide all the far-reaching misdeeds. In the face of such wrongs, dissent and opposition are most patriotic! This is not fake news, or a hoax. And trying to hold perpetrators accountable was and is NOT a witch hunt! Trump's 3/30/23 indictment is well deserved.

Impeachment is the remedy prescribed by framers of the U.S. Constitution for a leader who seriously abuses power by putting his self-interest above the public interest, betraying his oath of office, and conspires with foreign leaders to gain personal political advantages. Trump is a clear and present danger to both national security and true fairness of representation because he promotes falsehoods, tells lies promiscuously and tries to cover up his malign influence and misdeeds. Republicans in the U.S. Senate became accomplices to these abuses of power through two impeachment trials, so are complicit in this malfeasance. Vote them out of office!

In March 2020, Trump had the inane audacity to retweet a piece that showed him playing the fiddle, with captions that read, MY NEXT PIECE IS CALLED ... NOTHING CAN STOP WHAT'S COMING. One can easily imagine ominous music swelling in the background, as the contagious coronavirus continued its insidious spread around the globe. Is irony dead? This Trump retweet was bizarre self-satire, for it evoked the Roman emperor Nero -- who fiddled while Rome burned. At that very moment, with the miserable viral disease proliferating, the Con-Man-in-Chief was lying, boasting, and revealing his ineptitude and treachery in administration. Having met an implacable adversary, immune to his spin, it was an ill-advised time for the moronically smug demagogue to be tweeting from Mar-a-Lago, where he was golfing and spending a sumptuous weekend -- and conspiring to cling to power for "four more years" by scaring and trying to fool the people again. Worse yet, Trump was not just witnessing this carnage, he was acting as a flame-throwing arsonist and violence-inciting demagogue.

Stop him and his MAGA disciples! To accomplish greater good goals, we need to follow the advice reflected in a handwritten protest sign seen at a Women's March: **MAKE AMERICA THINK AGAIN!**

Truly, Tiffany Twain April 1, 2023



## Visionary Insights 2023

March 12, 2023

These writings in the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto contain some entertaining and illuminating stories, with a breadth and scope that explores an extraordinary range of ideas. The recipes contained in this manifesto are alone worth the time spent reflecting on the ideas herein, for I am an excellent cook with a good appreciation of delicious flavors and healthy eating. *See Clearly* is by far the most political of my writings -- of necessity, for it addresses issues that broadly affect all our lives, and all humans in the future, and the fate of life on Earth.

The British writer H. G. Wells expressed a poignantly provocative perspective in 1920, stating: "Civilization is in a race between education and catastrophe. Let us learn the truth and spread it as far and wide as circumstances allow. For the truth is the greatest weapon we have." This is a call for good understanding -- and Right Action!

John Steinbeck and 'Doc' Ed Ricketts had discussed and debated valuably holistic worldviews during their famous voyage on the Sea of Cortez in 1940. One conclusion they reached was that seeing things clearly and with keen insight is a prerequisite to "breaking through" to fuller and more holistic understandings. John Steinbeck saw humankind as "a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim", and he believed it was vitally important to see things whole, and to work purposefully to change the way things are, for the better.

I am a strong believer in the power of a positive and compelling narrative, and reasonably accurate worldviews. The clarity of such conceptions could help inspire actions to champion causes that auspiciously advance Golden Rule fairness and the common good. True narratives are surely superior to false ones, so it is of serious concern that our beliefs are being profoundly skewed by dishonesty, manipulative propaganda, devious partisan spin, fear mongering, perversely distorted values, tribal triumphalism, extremist rhetoric, false conspiracy theories, and misinformation in the news and on social media. Distorting disinformation can be all too effective in manufacturing consent, and this gives undeserved power and money to deceitful swindling politicians and other puppets of the ruling class. Such malicious propaganda derails our freedom-loving idealistic appreciation of truer fairness in our society -- and allows ruthless leaders to have an easier time taking unfair advantage of the people.

Perceptive folks say that if you want to change someone's mind, give them facts -- but if you want to change someone's heart, tell them a story. Let me tell you dozens of stories -- and pardon me for including a plethora of facts and persuasive evidence, hoping to transcend their propensity to gum up "sticky" ways of communicating.

Sometimes an idea develops the quality known as "stickiness" by striking a resonant chord within us. Sticky ideas are ones that are generally better understood and more memorable than run-of-the-mill conceptions. They achieve this by relating a good story that generates interest and curiosity, and is simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, engaging, emotionally impactful or maybe even inspirational. The stickier an idea is, the more likely it will be to make people care, and thus to have a lasting impact by actually changing people's opinions or behaviors. Malcolm Gladwell coined the term "stickiness" in his book *The Tipping Point*, and Chip and Dan Heath adapted the idea in their illuminating book, *Made to Stick*. The Heath brothers emphasized the importance of clearly identifying core ideas in all attempts to be effective in setting forth transformative messages and positive plans.

A core understanding in *See Clearly* is that extreme foresight-deficient short-termism is a form of existential insanity. Foresight is perhaps our most important human capability, for it gives us an ability to improve the prospects for truly saving ourselves through redemptive clarity of understanding. I envision Prometheus, the

pre-Olympian Titan god of forethought in Greek mythology, and imagine this deity looking down on us today in disapproval of our compulsive behaviors, and of the selfish treachery of irresponsibly scheming leaders.

My foresight-respecting essay *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated* contains wise understandings that are an important adjunct to the ideas expressed herein, so they are included by this reference. They can be found linked to the Home Page in the Earth Manifesto online, and are among the core ideas in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*.

John Fowles wrote in his thought-provoking book *The Aristos* that money in our capitalist materialistic world has become a towering idol in our minds. "Much more than we let philosophies guide our lives," he observed, "we allow obsessions to drive them; and there is no doubt which has been the great driving obsession of the last one hundred and fifty years. It is money. ... Money, not being, governs our time."

Religious folks reading the Bible might wonder why God got so angry at the worship of idols, and at irreligious behaviors people demonstrate -- and with rich people who were going to have a hell of a hard time getting into heaven because of the pathological way they generally treat poor people and neighbors and strangers.

Mark Twain decried "lies, damned lies and statistics", and certainly there is a potentiality for truths to be oddly obscured in our minds due to the agitated ascendance of cartoon-like beliefs and biases. Mark Twain was a great writer and philosopher who concluded his thought-provoking essay *Corn Pone Opinions* with an observation about Public Opinion: "It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God."

Conservative ideologies like those promoted by the libertarian Ayn Rand -- and by MAGA Republicans -- make one think of perspectives written in crayon, for they tend to be one-dimensional, self-referential, simple-minded and juvenile -- and poisonously prejudicial against larger humanitarian understandings and social cohesion. A far more accurate and enlightened view of the world is related in this manifesto, though it has yet to have had even a small fraction of the impact of the deviously tweeting, boasting bloviating bullying maniacally narcissistic Trump and his loyalist enablers. It is time for this excessive imbalance to drastically change.

### The Great Four Freedoms

Think about the four freedoms that President Franklin D. Roosevelt set forth in January 1941, which he stated should be given to people "everywhere in the world" -- the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of religious belief, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Fast forward 80 years, and it behooves us to assess how the USA is doing with these liberties in the era of Trump Republicanism.

Look what Republicans gave us from 2017 through 2021. While we still have fairly good freedom of speech rights, inspectors generals and whistleblowers who exposed corporate and government misdeeds are inadequately protected, and protestors engaged in courageously speaking out against structural racism, police brutality and malfeasance by politicians are often treated badly. Also, conservatives have found new respect for a perverse facet of freedoms of speech, expanding it to mean the right of religious people to disregard the rights of others, especially the rights of women and gay people. This is a grotesque violation of the Golden Rule principle. Conservatives act like it is an inviolable right for rich people and big corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money to dominate our political process, both in elections and in lobbying for laws that narrowly benefit themselves, despite this being detrimental to the public. Status of the freedom of speech -- Grade = B, for the general populace, and an F relative to Blacks and Latinos having their voices heard and respected.

With regard to the freedom of religious belief, this is reasonably well assured, though Trump Republicans often villainize and scapegoat Muslims, and banned people from coming to the U.S. from Muslim-dominant countries. Also, right-wing Christian nationalism is a danger to our democracy. Status of religious freedoms -- Grade = C.

With regard to the freedom from want, inequalities have almost never been as extreme as they are in the USA today, with more than 40 million Americans living in poverty. And things got drastically worse with the pandemic. Corporations have made things unnecessarily difficult for workers by opposing minimum wage increases and collective bargaining rights of wage earners. In addition, partisan judges are excessively championing the interests of Capital over Labor in this long-fought battle. The sound of the mantra, "jobs, jobs,



jobs" rings in our ears, and an apparition floats into our collective consciousness of this as a cartoon-like distraction of working people from the fact that the top dogs in our society are monopolizing almost all the gains from increases in worker productivity. Republican politicians have gone rogue by further mortgaging the future to make a series of debt-financed tax cuts that mainly benefit the top 1%. This is creating powerful pressure to slash spending on the social safety net that gives tens of millions of people greater freedom from want. Status of the freedom from want -- Grade = C, with a D-minus relative to the bottom 50% of the people.

With regard to the freedom from fear, since COVID-19 has killed well over 1,000,000 Americans through the beginning of 2023, and gun violence is spiking, and duplicitous Republicans have politicized public health measures like wearing masks and getting vaccinated, this has caused angry resentments and heightened fears and deep discontent and destabilizing social unrest. These conditions have been exacerbated by schemers exploiting people's emotions, stoking insecurities, pushing big lies about election fraud, and promoting falsehoods, devious spin, propaganda and debunked conspiracy theories in order to wield excessive power. Status of the freedom from fear -- Grade = C, with an F with respect to Blacks and Latinos, who are unsafe in many communities for all of their lives.

Rev. Al Sharpton gave a eulogy at the memorial service for George Floyd in Houston, and he used a provocative refrain that echoed with a visceral resonance for oppressed people everywhere: "Get your knee off our necks!"

### A Titanic Issue

Climate scientists are prophetic seers of future conditions for life on Earth, and they confirm our worst suspicions. They tell us that human activities are irreversibly altering climate conditions everywhere around the globe, and they explain exactly how these outcomes are being caused by unconstrained burning of fossil fuels and rash efforts by timber and agricultural interests to chop down (or burn) large tracts of tropical and temperate forests. They further make it clear that this is causing temperatures and storm intensity to become more extreme, and destabilizing normal precipitation patterns, and causing both worse floods in many areas and more severe droughts in others. California suffered whiplash at the start of 2023 when years of extreme drought were suddenly interrupted by a three-week deluge of atmospheric river storms.

Climate scientists also tell us how these activities are making wildfires more destructive, frequent and widespread, and causing glaciers and icecaps to melt, and changing the temperature and chemical composition of the oceans, and causing sea levels to slowly but inexorably rise. And they warn us about dire consequences associated with these changes -- for us and for life on Earth, right now and in years to come.

In November 2017, fifteen thousand scientists from 184 countries issued a stark "warning to humanity" in which they predicted there will be "widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss" if we fail to take serious steps to alter our heedless trajectory. Then in late 2019, more than 11,000 scientists issued a fresh warning that a climate emergency is taking place, declaring that dramatic remedial action is necessary. And the latest IPCC reports confirm that we are in a "code red" situation.

Faced with the daunting dilemmas about what to do with respect to the aggregate activities that are causing this destabilization of the global climate, the worst possible plan for the USA is to try "to squash action in every other country, too." Yet that is what Donald Trump did by pulling the U.S. out of the Paris climate accords. As Bill McKibben observed, "It was as shameless a moment as ever in our recent history: the country that produces more carbon than any other announcing that it was now the only country on Earth not willing to make even a modest international commitment to solving climate change."

Since the United States has spewed more climate-destabilizing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than any other nation, and done so almost every year for more than a century, it is morally wrong for business leaders and Republican politicians to arrogantly, unjustly and belligerently oppose taking responsible remedial steps to prevent or mitigate resulting harms. We should rightly be paying much larger sums of money into the UN Green Climate Fund to help compensate those in every country adversely affected by disastrous damages occurring as temperatures climb and extreme weather events proliferate, and sea levels accelerate their rate of rising.

The fact that these harms will prove to be irreversible in the timeframe of human history makes it especially wrong to allow polluter profits to be given higher priority than the future well-being of humanity. It is an ultimately wrong course of action to allow corporate entities to grab privileges to foist so many externalized costs and damages and liabilities onto everyone in the future.

In December 2009, 100 prominent business leaders put a full-page ad in the New York Times urging President Obama and Congress to pass effective laws and regulations to prevent anthropogenic climate change. The ad was insightful in its understandings: "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and the planet."

Catastrophic and irreversible consequences! Twelve years later, we are in the ominously advancing stages of a global climate crisis, and here's why. We live in a world of cause and effect. Greenhouse gas warming in the northern latitudes of the Arctic is taking place more than twice as fast as warming elsewhere on Mother Earth. This causes reflective white sea ice to melt, an annual melting that is taking place earlier in the year than ever before in human history. This is ominously amplifying climate-disrupting feedback loops.

These feedback loops are releasing more heat energy into the climate system, speeding up global warming trends and agitating El Niño and La Niña conditions. This is destabilizing the jet stream and causing disturbing perturbations in the Polar Vortex. These basic changes in ecological conditions rashly upset the providential balance of normal temperatures and patterns of precipitation around the globe. "Pineapple Express."

As energetic rays of the sun impinge on the exposed wine dark sea, the waters absorb the sun's heat, causing them to warm. Early summer sea surface temperatures in 2019 were a stunning 9 degrees warmer than usual in the Arctic. This in turn caused the melting of vast regions of frozen permafrost -- which covers about one-fourth of all exposed land in the Northern Hemisphere. When frozen permafrost thaws, microbes are activated and flourish, converting organic matter into methane and carbon dioxide. Methane is a greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere much more effectively than carbon dioxide, and both these gases are dangerously accumulating right now. The extent of this thaw is taking place 70 years earlier than climate scientists had been predicting. And enormous wildfires raged in the past few summers, drying out peat lands in Alaska and Siberia, and ravaging the Amazon, "the lungs of the planet." In early 2020, Australia suffered the worst wildfires ever in its history. And in the last few years, California suffered the most extensive wildfires ever.

Stunningly, 4 of the 100 business leaders who signed the 2009 ad in the New York Times were Donald Trump and Ivanka, Don Junior and Eric Trump. It is unconscionable for these selfish schemers to know that failing to act will cause catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity, yet to have chosen to ally themselves with giant fossil fuel corporations and rich conservatives to gain power. They parleyed this treacherous collaboration into profit, power and control over the best interests of the people, and thereby committed outrages against true fairness, decency, integrity, ecological sanity and intelligent action. This is grotesquely mercenary and self-serving, and reveals how irresponsible the Trump family has been in pushing its agenda. This is the height of a tragic lack of mindfulness, and of contemptuous greed-driven self-centered heedlessness and hubris. It sadly reflects a glaring lack of honesty and humility, and a sad nadir of sane being.

An African proverb cited at the bottom of the 2009 ad read, "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." The Trump family has nefariously elected to go alone, with ignominiously base motives, on the backs of rich conservatives and politically interfering complicit evangelical fundamentalists, with fervent support from a deluded, dominion demanding, narrow-minded and blindly loyal tribal cult-like political base. This is a Tragedy of the Commons outcome that prevents us from going far together, in unity, for the greater good.

Consequential ethics passes judgment that knowing how harmful the consequences of an action will be, and then doing it by usurping and abusing power to greedily gain advantages -- and artificially maximized profits -- is all but evil incarnate. This makes mere con man hucksters seem veritably virtuous in contrast. It is practically unbelievable what depths of expediency and betrayal politicians will go to, to get money and power.

We have a vital need for strong responsible leadership to address the unfolding climate crisis, and we must chart a new course to save ourselves from base motives. We need to take effective steps to stave off the

worst scenarios of incalculably costly and deadly impacts that the chaotic "conservative" crony establishment promotes. Adaptive change must come, driven by powerful incentives to make sure remedial action is guided by wisdom, inclusiveness and sustainability. We need breakthroughs in human perception and understanding, and concerted efforts in every arena of the economy, especially including transportation, clean energy, forestry, mining, agriculture, animal husbandry, construction, the media, social media, and the military-industrial complex.

As a creative gal, I have enjoyed specializing in good design. Like Elizabeth Warren says, "I've got a plan for that." See some such good ideas in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Let's mobilize like our leaders did when they committed our country to fly to the moon with the Apollo Project in the 1960s. We need visionary inspiration similar to that exhibited by our leaders when the United States spent the equivalent of \$100 billion on the Marshall Plan in the aftermath of the Second World War in order to achieve the laudable goal of helping millions of people recover in war-devastated Western Europe. Right now we need a far-reaching Green New Deal that helps us cope sensibly with the climate crisis and rectify the great inequities and risks inherent in growing extremes of inequality and climate injustices. Let's think big!

One consequential outcome of intensifying climate instability is that it increases the likelihood of conflicts between people, causing spikes in numbers of desperate refugees from economic despair and natural disasters like floods, droughts, failed crops and depleted resources. Internecine strife accompanies this, along with wars and faltering states. Right-wing conservatives who deny that the climate is changing due to human activities are diabolically using hyped-up sentiments against immigrants and refugees to strengthen their grips on power -- and their ability to abuse it -- in many nations around the world. This is morally wrong.

The American people have despised despotism ever since colonial days, and though megaphones are blaring right now to rationalize profiteering and authority-abusing rule, a majority of people in our liberty-loving republic see through the hyper-manipulative deceptions, political corruption, swindles, cronyism and mind-numbing distractions, and recognize that we are all like frogs in a pot of water being brought to a poaching simmer, with too many fools cheering on the schemers. The outcome is an insidiously destructive form of Tragedy of the Commons.

### Populism and White Nationalism

Democratic fairness is a common good. It promotes the general welfare, social cohesion and a more perfect union. Populist energies can be marvelous as grassroots movements to inspire and enable courageous efforts to rectify injustices, buck wrongful authority and prevent despotism. In stark contrast, rabble-rousing far-right populist leaders manifest a false-prophet patina of rectitude and cunningly manipulate prejudices and hijack emotions and exploit fears and scapegoat immigrants. Despots and rich conservatives take zealous advantage of such ruses to co-opt passions that should rightly be channeled into more widely beneficial common causes.

At a Black Lives Matter moment of proliferating demands for fairer treatment, it is ironic that poor white folks, betrayed and impoverished by their white supremacist overlords, want desperately to have someone to be superior to, to pay forward injustices to, "since nothing so elevates a dispossessed farmer or a factory worker on relief", as Sinclair Lewis satirically expressed it in *It Can't Happen Here*, "as to have some race, any race, on which he can look down." Poor whites resent the injustices they have been subjected to, like unaffordably expensive health care or a dearth of fair educational and work opportunities, or being made to unnecessarily suffer the indignities of being victims of a cruel fate. It is thus bizarre that they have chosen to support Trump Republican politicians despite their villainous racially-exploitive tactics. It is ironic for them to continue to blindly support the most dangerous con man in U.S. history, a race-baiting betrayer of public trust and wrecker of chaotic and misguiding administration -- who still presents such a grave threat to our democracy.

In unity, *We the People* would embrace neighborly attitudes of Golden Rule respect and cross-cultural tolerance, and enjoy a much more auspicious atmosphere of amity. And the 99% of Americans would come together behind fairness-championing leaders to rein in the predatory cunning swindles of the top 1%. Together, we could soon put a halt to all the kowtowing to wealthy capitalist masters, and end the unaffordable generosity of the public allowing them to get away with their deviously anti-egalitarian, harm-engendering and repressive agenda.

Rabble-rousing demagoguery is effective because it is an easy way to provoke people's anger and prejudices by hijacking their emotions and scaring them. Authoritarian swagger appeals to blind followers of authority figures and their instincts toward tribal affiliation and obedience to alpha male posturing. These folks are overly susceptible to propaganda that claims the mantle of being patriotic, even when it betrays foundational principles of our democratic republic and ethical underpinnings of the values for which they stand. Patriotism isn't just the last refuge of scoundrels, but one of the first subterfuges of emotion-manipulating demagogues.

Right-wing populism achieves its goals by taking shrewd advantage of human nature. Since it is our evolutionary propensity to affiliate with tribal groups against others in "out-groups", this feature of human nature is today becoming an adaptation-hindering instinct that is proving to be contrary to the greater good.

America First nationalism embodies a cynical circular strategy that seeks to gain power by scaring people about amped up dangers posed by immigrants, and then reducing foreign assistance to unstable countries from which people are forced to flee because leaders in those places are failing to provide their people with security and opportunity. This strategy is absurdly myopic, creating new surges of desperate immigrants that strengthen increasingly strident calls by demagogues who scapegoat immigrants and demand that walls be built and public funds be appropriated to build harsh detention centers to staunch the migration of desperate people. This outcome is accompanied by an insistence that seekers of refuge and asylum be treated as criminals.

George Shultz, Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan, once said we should invest more foreign aid in Central America, rather than cutting it off, as Trump threatened. This would be a better way to reduce the number of people trying to cross our southern border. In a July 2019 Op-Ed in the Wall Street Journal titled *Make Central America Great Again*, Shultz wrote that illegal immigration from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras is understandable. "If you were there, you would leave too. Aliens often come for the economic opportunities in the U.S., and many times are fleeing crime and violence. President Trump has urged the three countries to stop this illegal migration, but it is doubtful that they have the capacity to do so on their own." His sound advice was for our leaders to address the real causes of this humanitarian crisis, not just to rashly and uncompassionately exacerbate the problems by cutting off aid to these countries and callously portraying desperate immigrants as threatening criminals -- and cruelly treating them like dirt.

A Big Picture serious problem with white nationalism is that it violates the Golden Rule, the great social cohesion-inducing fairness-oriented principle of reciprocal treatment. It does so pathetically when it succeeds by perpetuating discrimination against oppressed groups in order to cement in place a ruthless hegemony of wealthy puppet masters and their collaborators over the masses. White nationalists favor disadvantaging the majority of Americans, especially Blacks, Hispanics and disdained poor people -- and women. This discrimination is notably focused against people who have already been given extremely short shrift in our society -- against folks who have suffered mightily at the hands of prejudice-exploiting, racist and sexist white male supremacists. Unfortunately, this form of fundamentalism gives excess influence to organizations like the profit-prepossessed National Rifle Association (the NRA), which opposes even sensible steps to address the lethal epidemic of gun violence that diminishes the personal safety of millions of people in the USA today.

Human survival is by definition the moral good for our species. We may not be likely to drive our species to eternal extinction in the next 100 years, but how will we survive a thousand years, or ten thousand? These spans of time are a mere instant in the incomprehensibly long eons of geologic time. We have been recklessly hacking away at the branches and roots of the tree of life, and have already contributed to wiping out more than two-thirds of the populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs and amphibians -- since 1970!! -- according to shocking information summarized in the latest World Wildlife Fund's biennial Living Planet Reports.

The world is in a very risky spot right now, partly because Republicans have thrown many obstacles in the path of necessary remedial measures. They are waging ruthless assaults on the environment for narrow purposes of maximizing short-term profits and funneling most of them to the few. From the time he took office, Trump and his Cabinet appointees -- like disgraced former EPA Chief Scott Pruitt and his replacement, former coal lobbyist Andrew Wheeler -- tried to roll back, delay and weaken protections of the environment that had been in effect for decades. These safeguards were designed to keep the air and water safe, and protect people and

the health of ecosystems, and prevent destabilization of the global climate. These persons engaged in excessively heedless activities by facilitating damages to habitats, overfishing of the seas, building in zones that are vulnerable to flooding, stoking tribal fights with others, obtusely opposing more generous funding for healthcare and family planning programs, and failing to take steps to ensure our home planet remains habitable.

Let us stop failing to see the forest for the trees. There is a powerfully determinative Population Connection between the global ecological challenges we face and the overwhelming needs and greed of a human population that is approaching an unsustainable total of 8 billion persons in the next few years.

### Foreign Interference in Our Elections

Since our Founders loved liberty and hated despotic abuses of power, it is pathologically wrong for partisan politicians today to give higher priority to narrow Party advantages than to loyalty to democracy and the general welfare. We must clamor for real election integrity, and honestly fairer representation of the common good.

In Ayn Rand's monumental novel, *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark defiantly bucked established precedents. This prompted the dean of the architecture school to say, "My dear fellow, who will let you?" In response, Roark declares, "That's not the point. The point is, who will stop me?" This question, according to climate activist Bill McKibben, "may turn out to be the crucial question of the human future." Who will stop the saboteurs of future well-being? How will we recover from the "conservative" corporate court capture scheme that has bought an illegitimate supermajority on the Supreme Court, and is now running roughshod over the people?

It is a vastly more rational, sensible and intelligent goal to seek to achieve the greatest good for the largest number of people over the longest period of time, rather than to allow schemers to maximize profits for the few in the short run. It should be a top objective to improve the overall quality of life, and greater respect should be given to persons in future generations and those who see that it is ultimately wrong to push anti-choice policies that serve to maximize the quantity of babies to be born, regardless of their circumstances.

The job of president and leaders in Congress should be to represent all Americans. But Republicans succeed in gaining power only by dividing people, with help from rich persons and lavishly funded distorting propaganda broadcast by emotion-manipulating media outlets like Fox News. They use deceitful rhetoric to hijack people's feelings and stoke their resentments and prejudices to grab power. Unity threatens their domineering influence, gained through a long litany of illegitimate means, so we must come together to diminish that control. We should reject efforts to undermine our democracy, and prevent MAGA Republicans from grabbing advantages by allowing Vladimir Putin or other foreign leaders to ever again influence outcomes of our elections.

Thomas Jefferson speaks to us today, from beyond the grave, about an impressive list of "what I deem the essential principles of our Government", as he spelled out in his First Inaugural Address in 1804. "Should we wander from these principles in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety." (Hallelujah for progressive change!)

When Thomas Jefferson spoke about what he saw as essential principles in government, he adduced what are basically principles of *The Common Good, Properly Understood* that should faithfully be followed in a democratic republic. Jefferson had just been through a hard-fought election contest, and noted: "During the contest of opinion through which we have passed ... this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the Constitution, all will unite in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will must be reasonable to be rightful; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us, then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind."

Trump got away with welcoming hacked information by WikiLeaks in the 2016 elections, which Russian operatives used to divide the American people by micro-targeting unsuspecting folks on social media and amplifying their resentments, stoking fears, exploiting racial prejudices and spreading inflammatory conspiracy theories. Trump seems to relish nothing more than dividing our country along lines of political leanings, religion, gender, race, "tribe", sexual orientation and immigration status. Co-conspiring officials in his administration and campaign

were complicit in this effort, along with self-serving treacherous enablers in Congress, all of whom are acting as puppets to the ruling class and giant corporations, often in collaboration with autocrats in other countries.

South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg directed a statement to sitting Republican congressmen during a presidential debate in July 2019, saying: "... if you are watching this at home, and you are a Republican member of Congress, consider the fact that when the sun sets on your career, and they are writing your story -- of all the good and bad things you did -- the thing you will be remembered for is whether in *this* moment, with *this* president, you found the courage to stand up to him, or you continued to put party over country."

"Moscow Mitch" McConnell has blocked efforts to protect the United States from past and future cyber-attacks by pro-Trump Russian operatives, or by other foreign nations trying to interfere in our elections. His actions clearly demonstrate that he is unpatriotic, as he reveals in his fealty to an overarching goal of triumphing through skullduggery to give him and wealthy conservatives and Republicans the ability to continue abusing executive, Congressional and judicial power over the people. He values this socially harmful ability much more than common good goals and honorable American values like honesty, integrity, democratic fairness and reasonably expansive concepts of liberty and justice for all. He even opposed creating a bipartisan commission to investigate the circumstances of the January 6 insurrection, knowing it would make Republicans "look bad."

Let's throw these cunning cheating puppet politicians out of office, especially the worst of them -- Mitch McConnell, Lindsey Graham, Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Jim Jordan, Marjorie Taylor Greene and Paul Gosar and their ilk in the Sedition Caucus that tried to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

"Not a puppet, not a puppet", Trump pathetically pouted in 2016, posturing in a comically threatening manner, though ever since he has come across like an angry spoiled child displaying Malignant Narcissistic Character Disorder. The rude results of his deceitful, undemocratic and thuggish behaviors are wide-ranging and far-reaching, and are unacceptably detrimental to millions of Americans alive right now, and to countless numbers of people in the future who will be affected even more consequentially as the "long emergency" to come unfolds.

### The Bottom Line

We Americans should rise up as one and throw Trumpian Republicans and MAGA maniacs out of power on account of their blatant violations of most of the primary purposes of the U.S. Constitution, which include promoting the general welfare and the blessings of liberty while preventing despotically-inclined and illegitimately unfair rulers from seizing power and abusing it. It is unacceptable to have conspiring self-serving manipulative leaders do the bidding of elite factions and wealthy people, thereby putting the health, safety and collective well-being of the people -- and our national security -- at unnecessarily grave risk.

The whole litany of these violations of propriety is outrageous, as spelled out in detail throughout *See Clearly*. Curiously, these "injuries and usurpations" vastly exceed the relative pittance of complaints that our colonial ancestors bemoaned in the Declaration of Independence as reasons they gave for cutting ties with the British.

The devil is in the details, as they say, and the details of the abuses of power that took place between January 2017 and January 2021 in the USA are extraordinarily damning. Damning from the standpoint of considerations of legitimacy, ethics, morality, the public health, the general welfare, legality, constitutionality, national security, and the health of the environmental commons. We should honestly examine a big picture summary of details of this extremely unfair assault on Right Action, and be motivated to seek common cause with all wronged people, and demand really big structural changes in our politics and how corporations are governed.

The influence of blaring megaphones, lavishly financed by Big Money, is overwhelming in our society today. Rich people have succeeded in getting large tax cuts for themselves as a top policy priority, and they are preventing higher tax rates from being assessed on levels of annual incomes over \$250,000 each year. The vote on this plank would be 98 to 2 in favor of those who would be helped by more progressive tax and spending plans, yet the top 2% of taxpayers continue to get away with imposing regressive Tax Cut scams on the populace, financed by public debt, as they have since Ronald Reagan reduced top tax rates by a huge 60% in the 1980s.

When Republicans rammed through yet another massive debt-financed tax cut in December 2017, they designed



it in ways virtually certain to make inequality much worse. A U.N. expert noted in an official report that the tax law was driven by a strategy that "seems to be tailor-made to maximize inequality. ... It seems driven by contempt, and sometimes even hatred, for the poor, along with a 'winner takes all' mentality'."

People must fight for a fairer national agenda, because those who oppose a progressive restructuring of our economy and more inclusive politics are powerful, obstinate, uncompromising and committed to protecting advantages for themselves in our rigged political and economic systems. These abusers of power and influence work craftily to discredit or crush those who resist their domineering hegemony over the masses.

### Big Ideas for Rebuilding American Democracy

Elections have far-reaching consequences, and it is crucial for fairness in a democracy to drive up voter turnout to defeat divide-and-conquer tactics and make elections about what kind of people we want to be, and what kind of future we want to create. We Americans share many values, and serious damage is done and vulnerabilities are heightened when power abusers aren't held accountable for trampling on cherished values and civil rights.

Donald Trump, while complaining about the Mueller investigation, falsely told a room full of teenagers at a Turning Point USA Teen Student Action Summit that the Constitution gives him "the right to do whatever I want." Note -- IT DOES NOT. No one should be above the law. No one is above the law in a healthy democracy.

We need to save democracy itself. American democracy is under serious assault, and the majority of the people must win back power and make big reforms to save it. The first step was to take control of the Senate and Presidency in the 2020 elections, and "Step two is reforming American democracy -- but what does that mean?"

"Democracy" is a big issue. It was a good step, back in March 2019, when the House passed a *For the People Act* that included many common sense reforms like campaign finance limits, making improvements to election security, and expanding the right to vote and the ease to do it. Now similar legislation is before Congress, and the filibuster in the U.S. Senate should be eliminated for this issue to pass it, to counter the many voter suppression laws that Republicans are enacting in state legislatures in the wake of the 2020 elections.

Bill McKibben makes astute observations about "leverage" in his book *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out*. He makes it clear that humanity is seriously off kilter and may discover that it is terminally risky, in effect, to live too high on the hog. McKibben writes that the worst possible plan with respect to our impacts on altering the global climate would be to do two things: (1) to throw obstacles in the way of dealing rationally with the accelerating costs of the climate crisis by sowing doubt about the reality and causes and consequences of the crisis; and (2) to try to obstruct remedial action in every other country on Earth. Trump Republicans have been shamefully pursuing this course of action by allowing fossil fuel industries to exert a corrupting hegemony over our national policies and priorities.

James Hansen gave a startling clarion call in testimony to Congress in July 1988 about the risks of global warming. One month later, "Exxon's public affairs manager recommended in an internal memo that the company 'emphasize the uncertainty' in the scientific data about climate change. Thus began the most consequential lie in human history." So writes Bill McKibben in *Falter*. "Within a year, Exxon, Chevron, Shell, Amoco and others had joined together to form what they called the Global Climate Coalition, 'to coordinate business participation in the international policy debate' on climate change". This launched "conservatives" on a track of climate denial and retrograde opposition to a cost internalizing tax on fossil fuels, thus weakening efforts to mitigate climate change. These *Merchants of Doubt* even hired the same lawyers who had propped up the tobacco industry against the health harms it has caused to countless numbers of people by "catapulting the propaganda".

Disinformation campaigns by fossil fuel industries about climate change are "predatory delays", according to the environmental writer Alex Steffens. He was referring to efforts to block or slow needed change "in order to make money off unsustainable, unjust systems in the meantime." These profit-prepossessed delays to taking necessary climate action will prove to be unconscionably costly.

Koch Industries continues to rake in huge profits from fossil fuels while foisting costs and harms on the public. The Koch network of wealthy people spends hundreds of millions of dollars on elections and funding for junk

science seeking to spread doubt about the deleterious impacts and threats posed by the climate crisis. Such fossil fuel industry apologists and zealots for excessively irresponsible profiteering apparently believe in their own dogmatic ideology more strongly than they believe in scientific disciplines like physics, biology and ecology. Greed-driven corporate "libertarians" like the many billionaires in the Koch network push their anti-government propaganda with such zeal that it is creating severe climate risks that will cause incalculable and unacceptable damages to the future well-being of all of humanity and life on Earth.

Their top goal is to maximize private profits, and do so by engaging in a public debt swindle that is excessively irresponsible because it mortgages the future with a heavy burden of public debt, AND allows extensive harms and huge costs to be externalized onto people in the future. This stimulates wasteful exploitation of resources and stokes fires of depletionary consumerism. This gambit is perversely perpetuated to mainly benefit the few, who have no need for the wealth generated. As wealth is more and more narrowly concentrated, so is power -- and this power is reprehensibly abused to continue this über scam. This is an ultimately harsh form of inter-generational treachery that damages future prospects, and is thus morally wrong and ecologically insane.

It is crazy to give corporate entities domineering power, since these organizational tools are designed to maximize profits by taking advantage of working people and exploiting natural resources, mindlessly depleting them. Corporate entities strive to externalize large amounts of costs and risks, and abuse the influence of the money they generate to corrupt our decision-making and skew our national priorities. Their strategies include hyper promoting the products they produce and services they offer, and bombarding everyone with a barrage of suggestively persuasive advertising and emotion-hijacking political spin and propaganda.

Environmental organizations are trying to hold big polluters accountable through strategic campaigns in the media, and in corporate shareholder meetings, and in the corrupted halls of government. In one instance of this, the organization Corporate Accountability publicizes a Corporate Hall of Shame to try to force big businesses to pursue more socially responsible courses of action. "More must be done."

In an surprising development in August 2019, 180 CEO members of the Business Roundtable declared that they intended to try to ensure a more inclusive prosperity in the U.S., setting forth a new modern standard for corporate responsibility. Instead of the long-standing main focus on maximizing profit for corporate CEOs and shareholders, these business leaders stated an intention to strengthen commitments to other stakeholders by dealing more fairly and ethically with customers, employees, suppliers and people in various communities, and they asserted they would give greater consideration to a healthy and sustainable environment.

The glaring light of extreme inequality and extensive harms resulting from the excessively narrow focus by corporate entities on maximizing profits has prompted this remarkable about-face by members of the Business Roundtable, a group of CEOs of big U.S. corporations that promotes pro-business public policies. "Each of our stakeholders is essential," they honorably say. "We commit to deliver value to all of them, for the future success of our companies, our communities and our country." Well, there is good reason for skepticism about the real courses of actions corporate executives are pursuing, and will pursue, but responsible action along these lines would be positive. Let's hold them to account!

### Racism and Sexism Persist in the Supposed Land of the Free

The brutal killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, by four white police officers in Minneapolis, caused a paroxysm of widespread peaceful street protests that were marred by many instances of violence, property damage and looting by bad actors. Public dialogue and discord proliferated around issues of police brutality and racial injustices, and Donald Trump used the protests and social unrest to threaten martial law. He inflamed divisions with rhetoric like a tweet describing protesters as "THUGS", and attacked the "very weak Radical Left" mayor of Minneapolis, and threateningly declared that when "the looting starts, the shooting starts."

A week later, as protests continued in more than 100 cities around the country and the world, Trump said, "As we speak, I am dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers, military personnel and law enforcement officers to stop the rioting, looting, vandalism, assaults and the wanton destruction of property." Soon thereafter, Attorney General Bill Barr tear-gassed peaceful protesters to clear the streets near the

White House so that Trump and an entourage of administration officials and military brass could walk across Lafayette Park to St. John's Episcopal Church to stage a photo op of Trump grimly holding a Bible aloft to demonstrate his support of strict law-and-order and threaten military action and "dominance". He was doubling down, ostensibly, on his divide-to-conquer commitment to white supremacy and toxic Christian nationalism.

Look what has been happening here! Republicans have been spending hundreds of millions of dollars to promote national policies like opposition to affordable healthcare that measurably disadvantage black people, brown people and women. Social conservatives who indignantly protest that they are not racist or sexist are being disingenuous when they act, in effect, to support politicians and figures in positions of power who abuse the power of their influence to perpetuate a system that is unjust, deeply discriminatory and oppressive.

Getting votes by using emotion-hijacking demagogic tactics is wrong, because conservatives use this Divide and Conquer strategy to torpedo governance "of the people, by the people and for the people." It is sad to see these people striving tirelessly to trump the common good, and to replace it with an illegitimate authoritarian hegemony of Trojan horse politicians and their puppeteers, like the nefarious crony capitalist billionaires Charles Koch and the Mercers and the now-deceased Sheldon Adelson and their right-wing cause championing ilk. Social conservatives, in particular, thou doth protest too much thy innocence and rectitude. You do not deserve respect when you support politicians who impose harmful and discriminatory policies on the people.

There is a deep level of deceit, corruption, fraud and anti-egalitarian intrigue in Republican voter suppression, gerrymandering, fear-mongering, scapegoating, devious propaganda, and religious hypocrisy. None of us can trust conservatives to rule equitably or reasonably or fiscally responsibly, for they don't seem to care or be cognizant of the pathological impacts that their intrigues are having against democracy, liberty and the common good.

Rule by plutocratic interests has increasingly become the Republican's *modus operandi*. Not only do they try to restrict voting and gerrymander, but they also engage in a long litany of unscrupulous tactics that show they are not trustworthy, because of their use of any means necessary to grab power and abuse it. We have seen what's possible when a con man like Trump takes advantage of these demagogic anti-democratic tactics. "Trump has not hesitated to embrace white nationalists and give racists power -- just look at Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller and Jeff Sessions -- which is exactly why it's prime time for *Roe v. Wade* to come up on the chopping block."

The editorial board of the Baltimore Sun newspaper, a city fixture since 1837, joined many Maryland residents and leaders condemning Trump tweets that called Rep. Elijah Cummings' district a "rat and rodent infested mess" where "no human" would want to live. The scathing editorial, which drew responses from across the world and which the Sun expected would help break records in readership and subscriptions, highlighted Baltimore's strengths, and accused Trump of deploying "the most emotional and bigoted of arguments" against a Democratic African American congressman who represented a district that happens to have a majority of Black people.

The Editorial staff at the Baltimore Sun took strong exception to inflammatory rhetorical attacks Trump made against Baltimore in July 2019, and they did not mince words. "Better to have a few rats than to be one," the editors declared in their headline. "It's not hard to see what's going on here. The congressman has been a thorn in this president's side, and Mr. Trump sees attacking African American members of Congress as good politics, as it both warms the cockles of the white supremacists who love him and causes so many of the thoughtful people who don't to scream. President Trump bad-mouthed Baltimore in order to make a point that his border camps are 'clean, efficient & well run,' which, of course, they are not -- unless you are fine with all the overcrowding, squalor, cages and deprivation to be found in what the Department of Homeland Security's own inspector-general once called 'a ticking time bomb' under the Trump administration."

Notably, Elijah Cummings served as Chair of the House Oversight Committee, which was leading investigations into Trump's illicit activities, foreign intrigue and crooked finances. It is a vital Constitutional duty for House committees and the legislative branch to exercise good oversight and enforce accountability on any abuses of power in the executive branch. Trump always tries to defend himself from his manifest guilt by vindictively attacking others, employing many lawyers and co-conspirators, and refusing to comply with subpoenas from Congress. In this, he has enlisted brainwashed supporters and dutiful treachery-committing loyalists.

### Kudos to the Wise Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt declared in a 1907 speech that "malefactors of great wealth" had been responsible for causing much financial stress and widespread hardship around the world in the Panic of 1907. He decried rich persons who abused power by trying to "discredit the policy of the Government and thereby secure a reversal of that policy, so that they may enjoy unmolested the fruits of their own evil-doing." Roosevelt continued, "In the last six years we have shown that there is no individual and no corporation so powerful that he or it stands above the possibility of punishment under the law. Our aim is to try to do something effective; our purpose is to stamp out the evil; we shall seek to find the most effective device for this purpose; and we shall then use it, whether the device can be found in existing law or must be supplied by new legislation. Moreover, when we thus take action against the wealth which works iniquity, we are acting in the interest of every man of property who acts decently and fairly by his fellows."

"Experience has shown that it is necessary to exercise a far more efficient control than at present over the business use of those vast fortunes, chiefly corporate, which are invariably used in inter-state business. When the Constitution was created, none of the conditions of modern business existed. They are wholly new and we must create new agencies to deal effectively with them. There is no objection in the minds of this people to any man's earning any amount of money if he does it honestly and fairly, if he gets it as the result of special skill and enterprise, as a reward of ample service actually rendered. But there is a growing determination that no man shall amass a great fortune by special privilege, by chicanery and wrong-doing, so far as it is in the power of legislation to prevent; and that a fortune, however amassed, shall not have a business use that is antisocial."

Echoing with resonance down through the generations, the courageous "trust-busting" President Theodore Roosevelt added the observation, "There is unfortunately a certain number of our fellow-countrymen who seem to accept the view that unless a man can be proved guilty of some particular crime he shall be counted a good citizen, no matter how infamous the life he has led, no matter how pernicious his doctrines or his practices." Wow. That perspective casts a light of infamy on the villainous Trump and his malign administration.

"Many men of large wealth have been guilty of conduct which from the moral standpoint is criminal, and their misdeeds are to a peculiar degree reprehensible, because those committing them have no excuse of want, of poverty, of weakness and ignorance to offer as partial atonement." Heck, even the Bible says folks like this will never have a chance of getting into Christian heaven because of their decidedly unchristian behaviors.

Theodore Roosevelt also stated, "Men must be judged with reference to the age in which they dwell, and the work they have to do." Fast forward to today from Roosevelt's 1907 speech, and Trump Republicans should be judged harshly for their failure to honestly rein in corporate abuses of power, and for their disdain for taking responsible steps to address the costs and growing risks and threats of climate change. And for their profound failure to make our society healthier, fairer, safer, happier and more secure, and to protect ecosystems and public lands, and to ensure a more sustainable future. Having rendered this due judgment, and seeing that these politicians are refusing to stop pushing their backwards agenda, or alter their illicit actions, voters must join together and ignore all the lavishly financed demagogic deceitful propaganda, and throw them out of office.

A media genius named Sam McClure assembled a group of investigative journalists who electrified the country at the beginning of the 20th century by exposing the plundering of America. Theodore Roosevelt cracked down on those responsible, the "malefactors of great wealth", and progressives at the time promoted the middle-class dream -- what really made America great. According to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, Roosevelt needed "a seismic shift in national consciousness" to succeed in making this change, and he needed the media and clear-seeing outspoken journalists and commendable muckraking writers to help produce it. Today, let us see clearly, and come together in common cause to improve the general welfare by altering the dastardly aspects of the status quo!

Truly,  
Tiffany Twain  
March 12, 2023



## "My Country, Right or Wrong"?

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
November 2017, latest revision July 4, 2022

Mark Twain made extraordinary observations about blind loyalty, unthinking patriotism and imperialist nationalism in his provocative unfinished work *Glances at History*, in which he called the phrase "My Country, Right or Wrong" an insult to the nation. He wrote this thought-provoking piece, quoted below in full, in 1906, four years before he died. Today, with too many Americans putting Party over Country, more honorable views are needed.

Carl Schultz, a German immigrant who served as a military general in the Civil War and as a Republican Senator from Missouri, expressed a true patriotic sentiment back in 1872 when he stated, "My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right." That's a good call.

The great philosophic writer Mark Twain also weighed in on issues of loyalty and patriotism in his 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, when he wrote, "You see my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags -- this is loyalty to unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy, was invented by monarchy; let monarchy keep it."

Democracy in the USA today, in its turn, is what needs to be cared for, and loyalty should be given to inclusive fairness-oriented representation of all constituencies. This is especially crucial at this juncture in history, because our democracy has just narrowly survived an insurrectionary coup against Congress and is under assault by demagogues, abusers of authority, swindlers, reactionary partisans, con men and right-wing judges, as well as by operatives in foreign countries.

The wise Athenian lawmaker Solon earned the reputation of being "the father of democracy" for having been effective in forging adequately fair compromises between the rich and the poor in classical Athens. In doing so, he saved the republic from revolutionary strife. We would be smart to see this good lesson in history, and to emulate it. Let's join together and seek common good consensus solutions to all our biggest challenges!

President Theodore Roosevelt advocated a Square Deal for the American people, saying "We must treat each man on his worth and merits as a man. We must see that each is given a square deal, because he is entitled to no more and should receive no less." He also honorably said, "Let the watchwords of all our people be the old familiar watchwords of honesty, decency, fair-dealing and commonsense." He had pointed out in 1903: "The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us." Let's give respect and demonstrate solidarity with these ideas, and those behind France's national motto, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*

Misunderstandings can have catastrophic consequences, so we need courageous patriots who are loyal to their country over their political party. We cannot afford to have contemptible politicians fawning over and helping enable ruthless authority-abusing leaders who do not respect ethical norms, rules of law and the Constitution.

Today, wealthy conservatives are strongly opposing efforts to right wrongs in their drive to push for more and more perks for themselves and their cronies, and for an ever-bigger monopoly on the total accumulated wealth in the United States by the proverbial few. This is a bizarre and rash top priority, as made clear by the brilliantly simple understandings articulated by Nick Hanauer in his article *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*. In this piece, published in his Memo "To: My Fellow Zillionaires" in 2014, Hanauer contended that it is in the best interest of all Americans, rich and poor alike, to create a fairer society than we have today, so that justice, prosperity and peaceful coexistence have a better chance of reigning in the land of the free.

The relentless agenda of wealthy people is reckless due to the hyper-focus of "conservative" politicians on shredding the social safety net and making big cuts in public funding for healthcare in order to partially offset the costs of more tax breaks for the highest income earners. They are accomplishing this cruelly retrogressive goal by perpetrating scandalous scams. For one, by imposing austerity measures and unnecessary hardships on the vast majority of Americans, who they are mercilessly cheating and lying to, and effectively stealing from -- at a terrible cost to the overall well-being of the populace. Along with this forced austerity comes a diminished democracy, a degraded environment, Tragedy of the Commons harms, spiking public debt, and a pathological faithlessness to Golden Rule fairness principles. These outcomes are a lousy contrast to the more commendable plans advocated by proponents of more broadly shared prosperity and greater social justice, environmental justice and efforts to achieve "domestic tranquility" and peaceable coexistence.

A main way the super-rich are getting away with their swindle against the common good is by driving up the national debt every year. This is an insult to the nation because these folks have already gotten away with paying historically low tax rates since Ronald Reagan radically reduced the top tax rates in the 1980s from a long-standing 70% or higher to only 28%. They achieved this treachery by pushing a "trickle-down" Big Lie, claiming that low tax rates on the highest levels of income would be the best national plan. Fast forward four decades, and this foolhardy strategy has been a principal factor in unconscionably driving up the debt from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to a staggeringly risk-laden \$30.5 trillion, and rapidly increasing, in June 2022.

It is colossally foolish to give more debt-financed tax breaks to rich people, because this heightens the risks of a severe debt crisis. It would have been much smarter and fairer to respect the sentiment that "NOT ONE PENNY MORE" should have been given in Tax Cuts to the top 1%. It is crazy to allow rich people to add any more to the national debt, burdening every taxpayer in every future year, merely to increase the fortunes of the few, while exacerbating the glaring disparities in income and wealth between them and all others.

Mark Twain also focused in his essay *Glances at History* on the propensity for the U.S. to become involved in wars abroad. This issue rang with a particularly poignant and important clarion call in the world when Donald Trump and North Korea's "supreme leader" Kim Jong-un engaged in dangerous saber rattling, and religious theocrats in Iran and the United States regularly stridently demonize each other, and Russia is involved in an unbelievably deadly and destructive war against Ukraine, and China poses big geopolitical threats. With so much turmoil and chaos in national politics during the Trump presidency, there was an increased likelihood that he would engage in a *Wag the Dog*-like war to distract people from domestic shenanigans, public corruption, foreign intrigue, glaring injustices and justified investigations into Trump administration malfeasance. And the January 6, 2021 MAGA mob assault on the Capitol set in motion an even more grave domestic peril to our democracy.

Mark Twain was upset at U.S. militaristic imperialism when he wrote *Glances at History*, specifically because of terrible injustices perpetrated by our military in the Philippines. He courageously spoke out against harsh injustices against peoples abroad, especially when he served as Vice President of the American Anti-Imperialism League during and after the Philippine-American War from 1899 to 1902. He penned this brilliantly satirical *Glances at History* to persuade readers of the reality of his way of understanding. He was also no doubt irked at the time because of the bigger context in that era of profound economic inequities, which prevailed due to the excessive power of "robber barons" and giant corporate entities ("trusts") in those days. Listen in:

*Glances at History*



We, free citizens of the Great Republic, feel an honest pride in her greatness, her strength, her just and gentle government, her wide liberties, her unsmirched flag, her hands clean from oppression of the weak and of malicious conquest, her hospitable door that stands open to the hunted and the persecuted of all nations; we are proud of the judicious respect in which she is held by monarchies ... and proudest of all of that lofty patriotism which we inherited from our fathers, which we have kept pure, and which won our liberties in the beginning and has preserved them unto this day. While that patriotism endures, the Republic is safe, her greatness is secure, and against them the powers of the earth cannot prevail.

I pray you to pause and consider. Against our traditions we are now entering upon an unjust and trivial war (in the Philippines), a war against a helpless people, and for a base object -- robbery. At first our citizens spoke out against this thing, by an impulse natural to their training. Today they have turned, and their voice is the other way. What caused the change? Merely a politician's trick -- a high-sounding phrase, a blood-stirring phrase which turned their uncritical heads: *Our Country, right or wrong!* An empty phrase, a silly phrase. It was shouted by every newspaper, it was thundered from the pulpit, the Superintendent of Public Instruction placarded it in every schoolhouse in the land, the War Department inscribed it upon the flag. And every man who failed to shout it or who was silent, was proclaimed a traitor -- none but those others were patriots. To be a patriot, one had to say, and keep on saying, "Our Country, right or wrong", and urge on the little war. Have you not perceived that that phrase is an insult to the nation?

For in a republic, who is "the Country"? Is it the Government that is for the moment in the saddle? Why, the Government is merely a servant - merely a temporary servant; it cannot be its prerogative to determine what is right and what is wrong, and decide who is a patriot and who isn't. Its function is to obey orders, not originate them. Who, then, is "the Country"? Is it the newspaper? Is it the school superintendent? Is it the pulpit? Why, these are mere parts of the country, not the whole of it; they have not command, they have only their little share in the command. They are but one in the thousand; it is in the thousand that command is lodged; they must determine what is right and what is wrong; they must decide who is a patriot and who isn't.

Who are the thousand -- that is to say, who are "the Country"? In a monarchy, the king and his family are the country; in a republic it is the common voice of the people. Each of you, for himself, by himself and on his own responsibility, must speak. And it is a solemn and weighty responsibility, and not lightly to be flung aside at the bullying of pulpit, press, government, or the empty catch-phrases of politicians. Each must for himself alone decide what is right, and what is wrong, and which course is patriotic and which isn't. You cannot shirk this and be a man. To decide it against your convictions is to be an unqualified and inexcusable traitor, both to yourself and to your country, let men label you as they may. If you alone of all the nation shall decide one way, and that way be the right way according to your convictions of the right, you have done your duty by yourself and by your country -- hold up your head! You have nothing to be ashamed of.

Only when a republic's life is in danger should a man uphold his government when it is in the wrong. There is no other time. This Republic's life is not in peril. The nation has sold its honor for a phrase. It has swung itself loose from its safe anchorage and is drifting, its helm is in pirate hands. The stupid phrase needed help, and it got another one: "Even if the war be wrong, we are in it and must fight it out: *we cannot retire from it without dishonor.*" Why, not even a burglar could have said it better. We cannot withdraw from this sordid raid, because to grant peace to those little people on their terms -- independence -- would dishonor us. You have flung away Adam's phrase -- you should take it up and examine it again. He said, "*An inglorious peace is better than a dishonorable war.*" You have planted a seed, and it will grow.

Wow! -- These understandings are a sly way of speaking real truth! As author Michelle Alexander put it: "The right to speak truth to power is the foundation of democracy and must be vigilantly protected and defended. Now more than ever." These words reverberate off the interior walls of the echo chambers in which we are ensconced, suddenly competing to focus our attention and put a spotlight on all the epic distractions, which notably included the Master-Manipulator-in-Chief's tweets (until he was permanently banned from Twitter right after January 6 for inciting violence), and our online social feeds and the scandal-obsessed daily news that featured ranting-and-raving Rush Limbaugh (until he died in February 2021) and ideological extremists like Alex

Jones, Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Fox & Friends hosts, for millions of people, and Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes, Lawrence O'Donnell and Brian Williams for millions of others. Progressive folks appreciate generally more honest and accurate perspectives, like those conveyed by historian Heather Cox Richardson and in the Washington Post's excellent Daily 202, and in Crooked Media's slyly informative news recap, "What a Day".

The following perspicacious ideas explore and elaborate upon these ways of seeing things, and are brought to bear to help explain what is happening in our world today, and how and why we find ourselves in such dauntingly dilemma-filled straits -- and what we should rightly do about it.

Today, extreme partisanship is dominating our politics to such a degree that the vast majority of Americans are unable to get their representatives to act in their best interests. This is because we have a "political duopoly" system of governance that lets the wealthy few sow acrimonious divisions among the many, thereby helping them satisfy their narrowly selfish drives for an increasingly restrictive monopoly on wealth and power.

Behind this apparent bitter divisiveness in our politics lies a deeper bipartisan consensus in which Big Money donors are able to buy excessive influence in our democracy and oppose any real changes to the pathetic planks that are foundational to this undesirable dominance. This is what is preventing urgently needed reforms from being made. This is how the interests of the wealthy few are advanced while those of the majority are undermined by efforts to shred the social security safety net. This is why the worst provisions of the *Amazing Disgrace* debt-financed Trump Tax Folly were enacted in 2017 without a single vote of support by Democrats in Congress. As a sad result, the voices of tens of millions of Americans are being arrogantly ignored, and their well-being and personal security are being sacrificed. These times are definitely trying our souls.

Charles Ferguson wrote about aspects of this situation with incisive understanding and persuasive insight in his book *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. He made this point that moneyed interests dominantly control our political duopoly system in the U.S., and consequently the government generally acts in matters related to Wall Street and tax and environmental policies to primarily benefit the wealthy few. They do this in part by manipulating public opinion using the influence of people in deeply ideological "conservative" think tanks and unbalanced media outlets like Fox News that shrewdly affect public opinion in harm-engendering ways, pathologically helping perpetuate the swampy corrupted status quo.

And there's no question about it: "Money talks", by hook or by crook -- and with brazen hands tipping the scales of justice, people with Big Money have been allowed to have far greater influence than the vast majority of the people. Donald Trump served as a treacherous Trojan horse for rich conservatives to seize, maintain and increase dominating influence, and to use that power irresponsibly and repressively, and to facilitate abuses of influence by plutocrats, letting them excessively determine our national decision making in the USA.

Americans everywhere on the political spectrum love personal freedoms, from leftist radicals and hippies of the Sixties to Libertarians and partisans waving "Don't Tread on Me" flags and anti-government Tea Party types and members of the far right Freedom Caucus faction and today's MAGA crowd. So it is ironic that manipulative politicians have managed to impose Tough Luck policies that are contrary to individual liberties and the overall well-being of the people. It is truly bizarre that they have been able to sabotage principles of live-and-let-live Golden Rule reciprocity, and to give more wealth and power to the top 1%, to the detriment of everyone else.

Let's open our eyes, and demand action to reduce the influence of Big Money in our elections through sensible campaign finance restrictions and reforms related to gerrymandering, voting rights and lobbying. The Senate should pass the anti-corruption initiative, the For the People Act, and also adopt fairer and more steeply graduated national tax policies, and act to facilitate more inclusive social priorities, and rise up in salubrious solidarity to positively change the current retrograde state of affairs.

In a world that reeled from the exceedingly high costs of the severe credit crisis and subsequent recession of late 2008, I again consulted Charles Ferguson's red-jacketed book with the provocative title, *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. Ferguson, after all, had directed the illuminating documentary film, *Inside Job*, which exposed some ugly and damning culpabilities that contributed to the cathartic calamity of the financial crisis. On the very first page, Ferguson did not disappoint, providing

food for thought with the observation that the financial crisis that struck during those panicky days was caused by a variety of factors that notably included massive fraud -- and yet not a single financial executive was sent to jail, "and that's wrong." He added, "Nor has there been any serious attempt by the federal government to use civil suits, asset seizures, or restraining orders to extract fines or restitution from the people responsible for plunging the world economy into recession" -- despite the fact that this cost trillions of dollars.

On Page 2 of *Predator Nation*, Charles Ferguson made an intriguing statement. He wrote that since the release of *Inside Job*, "a large amount of new material has emerged that reveals that many bankers, including senior management, knew exactly what was going on, and that it was highly fraudulent." ... "The evidence is now overwhelming that over the last thirty years, the U.S. financial sector has become a rogue industry." And Ferguson was only getting started. As he delved into the meat of the matter, the details were sensational. This state of affairs is facilitated by a political duopoly of Republicans and Democrats that allows such swindles, and gives the preponderance of all benefits of economic activities to a small elite of influence-abusing rich people. We should take our cue from the great Declaration of Independence, in which our Founders bemoaned "a long train of abuses and usurpations" by the British monarchy, and asserted the right of the people to institute a new system of governance "laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

After Republican politicians used a scurrilous litany of basically illegitimate means to grab power in the 2016 elections, they acted like "evil doers", reversing the consumer protections hammered out in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, and tried to sacrifice the environment to benefit polluters and profiteers in the short term, and then after losing the presidency in the 2020 elections, tried to overthrow our democracy by preventing Congress from certifying the election results on January 6, 2021. As the pendulum swung backwards in the four years of the Trump reign, this was bad news for humanity!

Revealingly, Wall Street banks are among the biggest beneficiaries of the Republican Tax Cuts boondoggle. "In fact, fresh off getting caught lying about millions of fake accounts and systematically ripping off its own customers, Wells Fargo got a \$3.35 billion windfall.' Other Big Banks also fared well. "It takes an army of lobbyists to get these kinds of results from Washington. And the sad truth is that you may be paying for that army." Hear here the cacophonous twanging of a consortium of screeching electric guitars.

A main strategy of "conservatives" in Congress and the Trump administration was to reduce protections of the environment so that big corporations can get away with treating our home planet like a business in liquidation, rather than as a healthy going concern. In the satirical 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, the character Buzz Windrip is a demagogue and authoritarian who takes over the U.S. government, and the triumphant Windrip declared that there would thereafter be only one political party, the American Corporate State and Patriotic Party ("no!", he added, "with something of his former good-humor, there are to be two parties, the Corporate and those who don't belong to any party at all, and so, to use a common phrase, are just out of luck!")

Revealingly, entrenched interests exploit people's resentments, anger, misunderstandings, confusion, apathy and despair to prevent common good reforms. They encourage modes of thinking that lead us to believe problems are not solvable, that nothing we do will matter, and that issues are too complex for there to be even an opportunity for change. Alex Steffen wrote in *The Politics of Optimism* that "it is a long-standing political art to sow the seeds of mistrust between those you would rule over." Nice going, guys! Mitch McConnell, "grim reaper" of progressive remedial legislation, you're an imposter and disgusting betrayer. Begone!

Cynicism is often seen as a rebellious attitude in Western popular culture, but in reality, cynical people are often dutifully complacent in conforming to the desires of those in power. In this regard, cynicism can be a form of inadvertent obedience. As for pessimistic attitudes, ponder these words from the great ecologist and environmentalist, aerial photographer and filmmaker Yann Arthus-Bertrand, in his extraordinary film *Home*: "In the past 200,000 years, humans have upset the balance of planet Earth, a balance established by nearly four billion years of evolution. We must act now. It is too late to be a pessimist. The price is too high. Humanity has little time to reverse the trend and change its patterns of consumption." Watch Yann's *Home* online!

Alex Steffen also expresses the idea in *The Politics of Optimism* that optimism is a political act; and that great movements for social change always begin with statements of great optimism. This is one reason why I, Tiffany B. Twain, so passionately propose providentially good solutions to problems throughout the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto. Alex Steffen wrote: "Optimism, by contrast, especially optimism that is neither foolish nor silent, can be revolutionary. Where no one believes in a better future, despair is a logical choice, and people in despair almost never change anything. Where no one believes a better solution is possible, those benefiting from the continuation of a problem are safe. Where no one believes in the possibility of action, apathy becomes an insurmountable obstacle to reform. But introduce intelligent reasons for believing that action is possible, that better solutions are available, and that a better future can be built, and you unleash the power of people to act out of their highest principles. Shared belief in a better future is the strongest glue there is: it creates the opportunity for us to love one another, and love is an explosive force in politics."

Hallelujah! Let us adopt a philosophic attitude -- I again invite readers to exit their echo chambers and join me in a Big Picture arena informed by comprehensive understandings, and to make honest efforts to see how potentially positive these extensive understandings really are. Keep in mind that all the policy proposals made in these writings honor social justice and environmental justice, and therefore all these recommended plans are fair-minded, and are structured in highly progressive ways rather than in regressive ways.

Unfortunately for the American people, the Republican Party represents entrenched special privilege, and worse, Republican politicians have allowed their extreme right-wing fringe to come in from the cold of their deserved exile, and to wield too much malign influence with their chaos-engendering cult leader and strategists like the diabolically cunning Steve Bannon and the bigoted Stephen Miller. In the bizarre Trump regime, Bannon was given a seat as the most influential White House advisor for the first 7 months of that era of folly. Bannon went back to heading the emotion-exploiting, conspiracy theory-propagating Breitbart News, a far-right news, opinion and commentary website that he described in 2016 as "the platform of the alt-right". This group rejects mainstream conservatism in favor of white nationalism and extreme right ideologies.

Steve Bannon had a tumultuous tenure as the Chief Strategist in the White House, and then after being ousted from his rabble-rousing position of power and returning to Breitbart, he declared he felt "jacked up" and ominously declared war with the words, "Now I've got my hands back on my weapons." *Fire and Fury!*

These developments caused me to hear a refrain that keeps on coming like a reverberating voice from above, again echoing the extraordinarily prescient novel *It Can't Happen Here*, which was written by Sinclair Lewis in 1935. Lewis was America's first Nobel Prize winner for Literature, in recognition of the cogent stories he told about middle class folks and their struggles during the Roaring Twenties. *It Can't Happen Here* tells the story of Buzz Windrip, a shrewd demagogue who runs against Franklin D. Roosevelt and others in the national elections of 1936, and managed to triumph by using demagogic rhetoric and manipulative actions to grab power. Not long after he took office, Windrip imposed dictatorial rule, and enforced it with terrorizing paramilitary militia forces ("the Minute Men"). Some say that this couldn't happen in the USA today. The book's refrain echoes in the interstices of my mind, "The hell it can't!" When secret police were in Portland, I wrote, "let us be aware!"

The man who seizes totalitarian power in *It Can't Happen Here* happens to be the Democratic candidate for the presidency, and that makes it quite a contrast to the Populist-Demagogue-in-Chief who has taken over the Republican Party. It is revealing that Donald Trump was a registered Democrat as recently as 2009, so indeed a demagogue could almost as easily have come from the fringes of the Democratic Party as from the fringes of the Republican Party. But it just happens that Trump managed to usurp power in Republicanland because it offers the most fertile soil for the sprouting of authoritarian impulses. As Bob Altemeyer wrote in his online *The Authoritarians*, conservatives tend to be easily manipulated because they exhibit the psychological trait of tending to feel comfortable being "authoritarian followers", as he defines in a dozen specific tendencies.

Could the good old USA actually become an authoritarian state? To quote and paraphrase and extrapolate on the words of the central character Doremus Jessup in *It Can't Happen Here*, "Why, there's no country in the world that can get more hysterical -- yes, or more obsequious -- than America. Listen to the divine oracles on the radio and in the media. Remember all the episodes of Tammany graft and Chicago gangs and crooked Wall

Street bankers. Remember the million-dollar evangelists and the Ku Klux Klan and our Red scares and war hysteria and wartime censorship of honest newspapers. Bad as Russia! Remember when the hick legislators in certain states, in obedience to William Jennings Bryan, who learned his biology from his pious old grandma, set up shop as scientific experts and made the whole world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution? Remember how trainloads of people have gone to enjoy lynchings? Not happen here! Prohibition -- shooting down people just because they might be transporting liquor -- no, that couldn't happen in America! Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!"

The January 6 insurrection was a close call. "It's not clear that the Republican Party is willing to accept defeat anymore," says Steven Levitsky, a Harvard political scientist and co-author of the book *How Democracies Die*. He added, "the party itself has become an anti-democratic force." The world today has become increasingly vulnerable to anti-democratic authoritarian rule due to the ease with which dictator-wannabes are able to gin up anti-immigrant fervor and exploit people's insecurities and biases. This situation is being sadly accompanied by a rising tide of refugees and desperate asylum seekers, and racial and class strife, political instability and spiking sentiments of tribal factionalism, white nationalism and stoked sectarian religious fanaticism. All of this is unfolding in a context of the hegemony of a system of what Naomi Klein calls *Shock Doctrine* "disaster capitalism". A pathetic aspect of the malign rise to power of operatives who promote disaster capitalist outcomes is that it features an unprecedented spike in extremes of inequality between rich people, on the one hand, and insecure poor people and those in the middle classes, on the other.

Trump frequently launches unrestrained fusillades of invective against journalists, saying reporters are peddling "fake news" and repeatedly describing them as being "the enemy of the people". These ruses, and his many distortions of the truth and devious "alternative facts", are antithetical to democratic values. Trump twisted the truth and told more lies than any president in history, as evidenced by a long list of these untruths summarized for readers by "lie trackers" at the Washington Post Fact Checker, who counted more than 30,000 false or misleading claims made by Trump from 2017 through 2021. The environmental advocacy organization NRDC commendably evaluated some of the most consequential of his lies, revealing a reality that urges us to oppose him. "O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!", said Sir Walter Scott.

The Internet and "data analytics" profiling on social media have immeasurably magnified this malignant effect. "In our clickbait-driven, post-truth media environment, a lie can travel around the world several times before the truth has had a chance to check its Twitter feed."

Mark Twain insightfully wrote in his *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2*, published by the University of California Press in 2013: "The glory which is built upon a lie soon becomes a most unpleasant encumbrance. ... How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!" Similarly, the famous satirist Jonathan Swift wrote way back in 1710: "... as the vilest Writer has his Readers, so the greatest Liar has his Believers; and it often happens that if a Lie be believ'd only for an Hour, it has done its Work, and there is no farther occasion for it. Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv'd, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect."

Good investigative reporting is invaluable in a democracy, as can be seen with the unraveling of glaring omissions and apparent lies that Donald Trump Jr. and Attorney General Jeff Sessions and others in the Trump circle told about their involvements with Russians interfering in our 2016 elections. Treacherously, Trump loyalists on Capitol Hill zealously undermined Robert Mueller's investigation and the subsequent impeachment inquiry, and impugned the integrity of career professionals in the FBI, Justice Department and State Department.

The succinct words of President Harry Truman warn us: "Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens, and creates a country where everyone lives in fear." Good citizens in a democratic republic support their leaders when they do the right things -- those consistent with the common good -- and they oppose leaders when they do the wrong things. Perhaps it is true that understandings of right and wrong have been contested and convoluted ever since God supposedly banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for having eaten the fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil". According to astute psychologist Stephen Pinker, opinions have become "loyalty badges for one's tribe." In the confines of our echo chambers, we often don't see other viewpoints or fuller perspectives.

But truer understandings of right and wrong can easily be found. For instance, the perceptive Professor Robert Reich articulated the things that honestly constitute good citizen goals in his book *Supercapitalism*, contrasting them to narrower and more selfish goals of consumers that want good deals and low prices, and investors that want the highest possible returns on their money. I have summarized these things online in *The Common Good, Properly Understood*, and Robert Reich's book *The Common Good* also contains excellent insights. I enthusiastically recommend my own visionary *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*.

In the biggest picture perspective, humanity should rightly be loyal to the future well-being and survival of our kind, NOT merely to officeholders in our government and the priorities of their narrowly-focused corporate backers and wealthy campaign contributors. As British philosopher Bertrand Russell once declared, "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." Don't doubt that strategies to divide people are an all-too-effective way to undermine liberties and the general welfare, and that blaming the wrong people or causative factors is a seditious ploy used by savvy propagandists and scheming politicians to gain power, and to treacherously abuse it.

Adolf Hitler declared that absolutism was desirable to achieve totalitarian goals, saying this: "The greatness of every mighty organization embodying an idea in this world lies in the religious fanaticism and intolerance with which, fanatically convinced of its own right, it intolerantly imposes its will against all others."

Master manipulators have savagely divided the American people into antagonistic camps that reside in their own propaganda-informed echo chambers. Facts have become slickly fluid, and the leaders who gained control of the government in the Trump era demonstrated a radical and arrogant disdain for rules of law, civil norms, ethical action and the U.S. Constitution. The pathetically sad staccato of Trump telling brazen manipulative lies deeply disturbed the night, and day. Social media has served to exacerbate these dangerous divisions by promoting selective spin on news stories and fooling millions of folks into believing false conspiracy theories. Journalists have been threatened for doing a good job of investigative reporting. Trump undermined the independence of the Justice Department, with corrupt intent, and Supreme Court rulings continue to be twisted by excessively partisan conservatives. This situation got worse with the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy and the subsequent controversial confirmations of the long-time Republican partisan Brett Kavanaugh and the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett. Their corrupt court capture scheme and activist rulings are abominable.

Conservatives all too often refuse to compromise, and political sycophants are marching to the tune of a narcissistic insecure bloviating crazed alpha male king wannabe, whose demagogic actions gave him great power and influence in spite of the fact that his priorities are shamefully self-serving, and his character seems to be in a state of egomaniacal arrested development. He transparently cares much more for money and himself than for the true general welfare of the people. And he veritably disdains democratic fairness, and seems not to give a damn for the future well-being of people and life on Earth.

The right thing to do would be to act in ways honestly most likely to put the top priorities of country over political party, and to choose the common good of the American people over loyalty to Trump, McConnell and the Republican Party. Republicans should stop disgracing our nation with loyalty to Trump, no matter what he says or does. They should stop going along with whitewashing Trump's involvements in inciting domestic insurrection on January 6th and things like foreign interference in our elections and Trump's Ukraine extortion plot. And Republican politicians should stop opposing oversight inquiries into abuses of power. All should support the January 6 Commission to expose what really happened, and the Big Lie campaign that ignited it, and how to prevent future such episodes. Conservatives should stop enabling all the rash ruses described in *See Clearly*.

Republican politicians today demonstrate that they are driven by one overriding principle, and that is to gain and maintain power by pandering to rich people who want to perpetuate the system that gives them outsized benefits while skimping on more vital national priorities. This is why they push to cut spending on the social safety net and environmental protections, and allow costs to be foisted onto the masses and all folks in the



future. To accomplish this, they unconscionably contribute to continuing to run up the national debt to finance on-going regressive tax cut outrages like the carried interest boondoggle and others. These politicians are dedicated to this tax cutting *Santa Claus Strategy in Political Economics*, despite its terribly tragic implications for the long term health, well-being and future security of the American people and all of humanity.

One of the most serious ways Trump tried to cling to power and perpetuate a lasting extreme influence over American society is by stacking federal courts with partisan conservatives who he hoped would be loyal to him and his self-interest and corporate friendly agenda, which primarily benefits rich people and facilitates corruption, and is deeply discriminatory, and encourages resource exploitation and damages the environment. He appointed judges who are young, with an average age under 50 years old. "That is surely no accident. Like George W. Bush before him, Trump appears to favor younger nominees who will remain on the bench for decades -- and serve as a farm team of future Supreme Court picks. With a friendly Senate and a defanged filibuster, this strategy ... ensures that Trump's nominees will shape American law for generations to come ...". The payoff for proponents of the far right agenda has become increasingly obvious since the end of June 2018, when the high court made a string of 5-4 rulings, with the deciding vote made by the partisan conservative Neil Gorsuch.

Extreme political partisanship should have no place on the Supreme Court or federal district courts. After all, every judge or Justice of the United States is required to take an oath of office in which they solemnly swear that they will administer justice "without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich ... So help me God." Let's demand that Supreme Court Justices honestly do equal right to the rich and to the poor!

Donald Trump has shown little loyalty to friends and allies who honor principles higher than his self-interest. As Time Magazine's Nancy Gibbs wrote in 2017, "Most successful leaders, certainly most Presidents, preach an American gospel about freedom, justice, imagination, ambition. They invoke values in the service of both achieving goals and healing wounds. But that is not this President's liturgy. Instead of summoning our better angels, he strums deep chords of grievance and resentment: The world is not a community, it's a business. If you're not winning, you're losing. And anyone who invests in a common good or a shared sacrifice is a sucker."

Let's beg to differ, and redesign our great country to resoundingly refute these divisive attitudes!

Trump values loyalty over all other qualities -- loyalty to him, that is. In contrast, he seems to be trigger ready to abandon anyone whenever it is convenient for him personally. He told FBI Director James Comey privately, before firing him in an apparent act of trying to obstruct justice, "I need loyalty. I expect loyalty." He often expressed intense anger at his first Attorney General Jeff Sessions for having recused himself from the investigation of the Trump campaign's coordination with Russia to help Trump and other Republicans get elected. It is exceedingly odd that a man so sensitive to the issue of loyalty would be so eager to betray the best interests of millions of struggling Americans who voted for him by giving huge tax breaks to the rich, and by jeopardizing the health of millions of people. How did he get away with trying to shred the social safety net and eliminate protections of consumers, a habitable environment, and women, children and racial minorities?

Having seen Trump demand loyalty from others, yet throw anyone under the bus that displeases him (even, finally, the ultimate sycophant Mike Pence), we can see clearly how misguided it is to be loyal to such a person who indulges in self-serving conflicts of interest and brazen abuses of power. We should rightly be loyal to the principles upon which our democratic republic was founded, as spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution: "to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity".

Those Americans who are part of the Resistance against power-abusing Republican politicians are the true patriots in America today, and those who proudly wear "Make America Great Again" caps are often manifesting a foolishly blind obedience to "conservative" politicians who are double-crossing them and betraying the common good, and in many instances undermining the moral good of human social groups.

To help win his campaign for the presidency in 2016, Trump ruthlessly enlisted the help of Steve Bannon because he was an expert at exploiting people's emotions through the resentment-filled "bile factory" at Breitbart News. Bannon had been able to mine the "deep Web" to try to dig up dirt on the Clinton Foundation

for Peter Schweizer's innuendo-filled book *Clinton Cash* in 2015. Trump and Bannon received lavish financial support from the nefarious billionaire Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah, and exploited information from the data-analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, a part of a British company "that advised foreign governments and militaries on influencing elections and public opinion using the tools of psychological warfare."

The dark figure of Steve Bannon is illuminated by Joshua Green in his book *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency*. Green tells the story of Bannon acting as "the shadowy President of the United States" who utilized insights into people's involvements on the Internet for his political purposes and developed "an apocalyptic narrative of righteous warriors waging an end-of-days battle by all necessary means against assorted enemies: jihadists, progressives, Acela-corridor Republicans, the Clintons."

Among the shrewd strategies that demagogues utilize to seize power, one of the worst is making unrelenting efforts to create divisive wedges between people by blaming others and scapegoating them, and by promoting crude stereotypes. "Animals!" These ruses are contrary to unifying principles and the common good, and they can be better understood as a part of the twelve main tactics and manipulative schemes used by demagogues to stir up fanatical support, as examined in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*.

Favorite targets of those who blame and scapegoat other people throughout history have alternately been Jews, communists, socialists, immigrants, poor people, those in racial minorities, feminists, investigative reporters, journalists, dissenters, protestors against injustices, liberals, marijuana users, long haired hippies in the Sixties, heretical religious folks, Muslims and terrorists. Since September 11, 2001, trillions of dollars have been devoted to destroying terrorists and assorted freedom fighters around the world, many of whom have been driven to their violent opposition by extreme injustices perpetrated by those who decide that one of our nation's top priorities should be to spend trillions of dollars waging this offensive.

Of the many villainous ploys demagogues use to grab power, the exploitation of people's racial and ethnic biases is one of the most ethically deplorable. In *It Can't Happen Here*, Senator Windrip set forth his political platform during the first week of his campaign for the presidency, issuing a proclamation, "The Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men." Among his fifteen planks was one that prohibited all Negroes "from voting, holding public office, practicing law, medicine, or teaching in any class above the grade of grammar school, and they shall be taxed 100 per cent of all sums in excess of \$10,000 per family per year which they may earn or in any other manner receive." This absurd proposal basically condemned African Americans, for a simple reason: "since nothing so elevates a dispossessed farmer or a factory worker on relief as to have some race, any race, on which he can look down." That's downright Trumpian!

Ever since slaves were freed in the 1860s and black people were subsequently given more expansive civil rights in the mid 1960s, there has been a backlash against Blacks and their rights to vote. This was the basis of the Southern Strategy developed by Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon to increase political support among white voters in the South by appealing to racism against African Americans. This strategy stubbornly persisted to help Republican politicians gain a narrow majority in all the branches of government in 2016 (until they lost the House, and Nancy Pelosi again became Speaker on January 3, 2019).

Non-Hispanic whites are continuing a long-term demographic decline from about 90% of the population in 1950 to about 60% today, and it is estimated that white people will slip below 50% of the population in maybe 25 years. It sure would be a good time to set a precedent for treating minorities more fairly, given that whites will become a minority as these demographic changes continue long-term trends. Given that rates of childbearing are much higher for females in racial minorities, why don't Republicans strongly support contraception?!

Give close consideration to the underlying reasons that the U.S. has waged a harsh "War on Drugs" for the last 40 years. There is one overriding reason that this prosecution is pursued so mercilessly and with such zeal. It is hinted at in a simple statistic -- only about 12 percent of the U.S. population is African-American, but 36 percent of people in jails and prisons are Black. Overly punitive drug laws are supported by authority-abusing law-and-order conservatives in order to control and oppress the masses. Such laws are also designed to keep

desperate underclasses from demanding reforms or developing a propulsive enthusiasm for revolutionary change. This is why reasonable folks want to make society truly fairer by helping overturn the unjust status quo.

While he was Attorney General, Jeff Sessions tried to ramp up the War on Drugs again, with harsher penalties for the use or sale of marijuana. The satirical *Onion* imagined a guy asking, "Shouldn't we at least fail at a couple more new ideas, before going back to something we already know doesn't work?"

A friend of mine from North Carolina relates a story of her time in the South in the 1960s, when there were anti-cohabitation laws between unmarried adults that were used as a pretext to justify raids on homes of long-haired young people to try to bust them on drug charges. This in turn was a tactic used to disenfranchise liberal student activists, hippies and professors, and people in racial minorities, especially including African Americans and Latinos. Almost half a million people are locked up in prisons and jails right now due to drug offenses, and many millions have been unjustly convicted over the years. Tellingly, individuals convicted of a felony are not eligible to vote while incarcerated or on parole or probation, or for years after the completion of all supervised releases. Here is another coldly-calculated means of suppressing votes by those opposed to injustices.

On a positive note, Florida voters decided in the November 2018 elections to restore voting rights to convicted felons who have served their time. This ballot initiative expanded voting rights to more than 1.5 million people in Florida, and was a victory for the ACLU and other activists. Republicans reacted with a despotic attempt to institute a new version of Jim Crow era poll taxes, along with absurdly restrictive new voting laws, to continue depriving these people and others of rights to have their voices heard. Governor Ron DeSantis is a rogue in trying to unfairly make Florida permanently Republican, in what may be the nation's most significant swing state.

Demagogues also exploit people's nationalistic impulses to gain support. Trump manipulatively took advantage of people's feelings of nationalism by proclaiming "America First" during his campaign and tenure in office. Sadly, America First seems to mean being bad neighbors and exploiting others and undermining social cohesion and using divisive tactics, and pompously declaring we must build a huge wall on the border with Mexico (and "Mexico will pay for it") -- and separating children from their parents who are seeking asylum. And wreaking havoc on Nature. These things are morally wrong. It is wrong to treat people in other countries shabbily, or to maintain attitudes of imperial hubris. It is also wrong to, in effect, wage a war on the poor to further enrich the rich.

Empathy and compassion may be the key to positive change, and surely it is a terrible plan "to act like an asshole toward shithole countries". While it may be a convenient expediency to adopt asshole attitudes, such stances are grotesquely antithetical to American values, and it is cartoonishly foolish to dangerously antagonize others instead of treating them in ways that are more equitable, just, inclusive, mutually secure and peaceable for all concerned. More generous international assistance would be a smarter plan than oppressively pushing other countries toward being failed states. Instead, the Trump administration declared it would cut hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to retaliate for what it regarded as their lack of help in reducing the flow of migrants to the U.S. border. Trump's intentional temper tantrums had bizarre shortsighted impacts in this regard, for in the long run they worsened conditions in those countries and uprooted more desperate families, hyping up fears and making our alleged "border crisis" worse.

Donald Trump made a big deal out of Made-in-America Week in July 2017, leaving many observers perplexed at the depth of his hypocrisy in using products manufactured abroad in his American hotels and golf resorts. It was stunning to hear he had requested more than 230 foreign workers for his Florida properties after having launched his presidential campaign. And it just did not square up for Ivanka Trump to have had all the goods she sold be made in Asian countries that have cheap labor and often dangerous working conditions. "Come on, Ivanka, tell us real economic truths about abusive labor practices and child labor in factories abroad!"

Clear understandings can inoculate us against alternative facts, deceptive spin and blatant lies in our "post-truth" world. Consider the words of Eugene Robinson, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who penned this stinging observation in July 2017 in *The Country Deserves Much Better than Trump*: "It's exhausting, I know, but don't let outrage fatigue numb you to the moral bankruptcy and gross incompetence of the Trump administration. This ugly departure from American norms and values must be opposed with sustained passion -- and with the

knowledge that things will probably get worse before they get better. Heaven help us, look where we are. We have a president -- commander in chief of the armed forces, ostensibly the leader of the free world -- whose every word is suspect. Trump is an inveterate liar. He dismisses provable facts as 'fake news' and invents faux facts of his own that bear no relationship to the truth. He simply cannot be trusted."

"We have a president whose North Star is naked self-interest, not the good of the country. Trump cares about his family, his company and little else. He dishonors the high office he holds, then reportedly spends hours each day railing against cable-news coverage that he finds insufficiently respectful. His ego is a kind of psychic black hole that devours all who come into its orbit." One instance of this was revealed when it was reported that Trump, who had evaded military service by claiming to have "bone spurs", called men and women who fight for our country "suckers" and "losers" for having made sacrifices to defend our American freedoms.

Another of many quotes attributed to Mark Twain, perhaps apocryphally, was this: "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled." This concept rings true today, when way too many supporters of Trump Republicans are sticking with their hoped-for savior, despite all evidence that demagogic con men are double-crossing them and failing to invest in the greater social good. Mark Twain suffered many personal tragedies in his family, and many financial setbacks, but he was still able to articulate this fine sentiment: "A healthy and wholesome cheerfulness is not necessarily impossible to any occupation." In light of this auspiciously holistic attitude, let's breathe deep, and let go, and honor the counsel in the Bible, "in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer."

One character in *It Can't Happen Here* observed that another did not seem to be depressed by the election of a rogue authoritarian as president, and seemed instead to be quite cheerful about it. "Depressed? Why good Lord, Mr. Jessup, I thought you knew your revolutionary tactics better than that ... Depressed? Why, can't you see, if the Communists had paid for it they couldn't have had anything more elegant for our purposes than the election of a pro-plutocrat, itching militarist dictator like Buzz Windrip! Look! He'll get everybody plenty dissatisfied. But they can't do anything, barehanded against the armed troops. Then he'll whoop it up for a war, and so millions of people will have arms and food rations in their hands -- all ready for the revolution!"

Today, Republican politicians in particular cannot be trusted to support their country or the majority of the American people over their political party and the entrenched special privilege for which it stands. Walter Shaub, the head of the Office of Government Ethics until he resigned in disgust in July 2017, pointed out that actions by Donald Trump and other White House officials created a "historic ethics crisis," and he called for major changes in federal law to combat this threat by expanding the power and reach of the oversight office. Shaub said the Trump administration had flouted or directly challenged long-accepted norms in a way that undermined the United States' ethical standards, which were once admired around the world.

"It's hard for the United States to pursue international anti-corruption and ethics initiatives when we're not even keeping our own side of the street clean. It affects our credibility," Mr. Shaub stated. "I think we are pretty close to a laughingstock at this point." Foreign leaders mocked Trump at a NATO summit gathering in early December 2019 for his "jaw-dropping" press conferences. Good riddance to him. Let's invoke the 14th Amendment to prevent any possibility of his returning to power for having incited insurrection!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Begun in November 2017, with latest revisions on July 4, 2022

Postscript. See *A Fusillade of Philosophy*, which sprang forth from an earlier Addendum to "My Country, Right or Wrong"? In this essay, readers will find an elaboration on Charles Ferguson's perspectives on the nature of the power-abusing Wall Street financial sector and deregulatory zeal, together with more incisive ideas about the increasing concentration of economic power in corporate entities and the sad implications of these trends that constitute a Great Bargain for rich people and a Bad Deal for everyone else.



## Core Values of Democracy - and How to Thwart Conspiratorial Threats Against These Values

July 2018, with latest update June 21, 2022

When I first published this essay on July 4, 2018, I wrote, "Bravo, my fellow Americans, as we commemorate Independence Day on its 242nd birthday! Our democratic republic has much to celebrate, but we currently face the most consequentially serious crises in our history, and we must deal honestly, honorably and effectively with this colossal challenge." Today, these dilemmas have gotten significantly more daunting.

Let's all exit our echo chambers, and congregate in the middle to seek collaborative compromises that improve our hopes for realizing greater good goals. Let's listen, and talk and debate respectfully, and seek common ground in principles most likely to contribute positively to *The Common Good, Properly Understood*. FOR ALL.

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there."

--- Rumi

This essay is dedicated to a clear understanding of the core values of a true democracy -- and the many threats against these propitious values. The fundamental tenets of democracy include an overarching commitment to common good goals and personal liberties; a reasonable modicum of equality of opportunity and justice for all; fair dealings toward everyone in their individual pursuits of happiness; popular sovereignty that assures fair representation and power to the people; inclusiveness in diversity; virtue in public service; fiscal responsibility; and honesty and patriotic dedication to human rights and these core values of democracy. In the United States of America, these Enlightenment Era-informed values are laudably set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and in evolving rules of law and a good many important documents, speeches and writings.

Winston Churchill made an astute observation in the British House of Commons in 1947: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time ...".

Make no mistake about it: having a government that allows a good degree of democratic fairness is vastly preferable for the citizens of a country than having an oppressive authoritarian form of rule imposed over the people. There are overarching values to democracy, and to honest efforts to promote the common good, so threats to democracy like voter suppression schemes, discriminatory gerrymandering, court packing intrigue, seditious conspiracies, coup overthrows and other decidedly illegitimate abuses of power and influence are seen in the woeful light of infamy.

The word crisis is represented in Chinese by two characters roughly meaning 'danger' and 'opportunity'. Dishonest and manipulative politicians have gained excessive influence in the U.S. through a long litany of illegitimate means, and they are arrogantly abusing this power for a variety of wrongheaded purposes. *We the People* should rightly seize the day and use this period of dangerous opportunity to right our ship of state and restore assurances of healthier and safer communities, cohesive unity, expanded freedoms and prospects for future well-being. We must recommit our nation to vital values, and reclaim the virtues of good government by throwing off the shackles of the hegemony of excessively narrowly focused, profit prepossessed, scandalously corrupt, bamboozling and tyrannically anti-democratic rule by corporate interests and wealthy people and their enablers. Ecologically sane

ways of living are called for.

There are many enemies of inclusive democratic values. They include influence peddlers, divisive demagogues, authority-abusing leaders, freedom-infringing opportunists and other greed-driven exploiters who support excessive power for the rich against the common good and the general welfare of the people in our democratic republic. There are those who consequentially distort the truth and undermine freedoms of the press, those who push for primary privileges for white males at the expense of females and people of color, and those who champion corporate power over the rights, safety and well-being of individuals. There are many politicians who take ruthless advantage of people's emotions to gain power and greedily selfish benefits, and engage in pay-to-play schemes and self-dealing and other forms of political corruption that are corrosive to core values of democracy. And there are many excessively partisan conservatives in the court-captured judiciary.

There's something happenin' here  
 What it is ain't exactly clear  
 There's a man with a gun over there  
 A-tellin' me I got to beware  
 I think it's time we stop  
 Children, what's that sound?  
 Everybody look at what's going down.

--- *For What It's Worth, Buffalo Springfield, 1967*

### Another Way of Looking At It

Twelve score and six years ago our colonial ancestors brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Twelve years later, on June 21, 1788, the U.S. Constitution was officially ratified, thereby becoming the official framework of the government of the United States of America.

Now we are engaged in an acrimonious civil conflict between forces that would overthrow the provisions of that great founding document, and it is up to all of *We the People* to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that we highly resolve that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

It has become glaringly apparent that threats from within are now forcing us to choose between either a constitutional republic democracy governed by rules of law hammered out over decades and centuries of compromise, or domineering rule by a white male minority that demands dominion over all the people and governs ruthlessly and grotesquely abuses influence and power.

These rogue factions are trying to diminish voting rights, restrict civil liberties and engage in a rashly unhinged compulsion to institute unfair policies and priorities and discriminatory state laws. These antagonistic factions impose outrageous economic, social and environmental injustices on millions of people through an authoritarian hegemony of demagogic assaults on both the popular will and common sense. They suppress opposition and promote dishonest propaganda, religious fundamentalism, political absolutism and profound unreason. And they have managed to succeed in their court capture scheme to stack the Supreme Court with political partisans who are violating long-standing precedents and making unfair rulings.

### The Plot Against America

The USA today is confronted with a stark choice in this battle between democracy and authoritarian rule. An insidious and unrelenting faction has been stealthily engaged in a brazen coup d'état against democratic fairness and democracy itself. This slow-motion coup is ironically being catalyzed against the American people by "conservatives" who are pursuing the goal of taking over the judiciary and the legislative and executive branches of government.

They have already been able to take over the federal judiciary by relentlessly pursuing a calamitous court capture scheme, as revealed by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse in his 14 Speeches about The Scheme on the floor

of the U.S. Senate in the past year.

This is actually a part of a treacherous and illicit coup d'état that is insidiously taking place right here, right now, in the USA. This is a plot against the American people to take over the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government in our democratic republic in order to do the bidding of privileged wealthy people at the excessively high cost of having a vast majority of people deprived of a fairer shake in life.

In my exposé *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts*, I explain in comprehensive detail how conservatives have succeeded in this nefarious court capture scheme to stack federal courts with activist judges who are overturning protective precedents in favor of rich people, giant corporations and the Religious Right. The consequences include radical offensives against the rights of women to have rights of self-determination in their lives, and against various jurisdictions that are trying to improve public health and safety by taking steps to reduce threats of gun violence and mass shootings.

This court capture scheme is a salient part of an unfolding bigger Coup by so-called "conservatives" who are intent on taking over the government by torpedoing the checks and balances in our constitutional system and preventing proper oversight and accountability of the guilty parties involved.

The takeover of many positions in the U.S. Senate and House has been made much easier by corrupting Supreme Court rulings that have given official sanction to influence-peddling bribery by Big Money interests. These ruses are also facilitating the takeover of the presidency by special interests and a minority of voters. These wrongful influences are a glaring instance of heavy hands being laid on the scales of justice.

A pathological side effect of this woe-filled scheme, and the discriminatory voter restrictions and extreme gerrymandering that facilitates it, is that broad unfairness and deep injustices afflict us in the supposed land of the free, and we all suffer from a rash condition of calamitous polarization of the populace, which is severely undermining highly desirable social cohesion, domestic tranquility and peaceable coexistence.

These schemes not only have a "stench" of illegitimacy, but they are being exposed as profoundly devious and treacherous instances of malfeasance.

The American people should be able to reasonably trust that their representatives would honestly try to accomplish common good goals. When, instead, they work to subvert democracy, perpetuate injustices, undermine the general welfare, deceive the people and divide them asunder, and to unreasonably restrict the blessings of liberty for women and persons in minority groups, they betray their duties and should be removed from power.

This is a sensational story of insidious intrigue, and a tragic tale of evil intentions, monomaniacal egos, anti-democratic political extremism, poorly regulated greed and unhinged hunger for domineering power.

As a result, a spectre is haunting the United States and the world -- the spectre of our diminishing democracy being replaced by an authoritarian autocracy.

### The Big Lies Are Also a Big Rip-Off

Donald Trump cunningly engaged in a devious con job after he lost the 2020 election by 7 million votes, agitating his supporters with a preposterous and on-going series of lies and cynically evidence-free lawsuits. On January 6, he incited a pro-Trump mob in an insurrection against Congress. Then he profited off this deceit by ripping off his supporters for an estimated total of \$250 million.

Con man Trump has aggressively pushed false election claims to raise this money, ironically acting as an outrageous grifter to extort money from his own supporters. Follow the money! By using diabolical misinformation about the 2020 election, the cunning cheater has ripped-off his supporters and misled donors as to the real purposes of their contributions. Trump has been a grifter throughout his entire life, and this is one of his most profitable grifts.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren presented evidence to the public that the Trump campaign solicited donations for an 'Official Election Defense Fund,' which the House committee investigating the January 6 mob found did not exist. "It's



clear that he intentionally misled his donors, asked them to donate to a fund that didn't exist and used the money raised for something other than what he said," Lofgren said after the hearing.

People don't like to be made fools of, so this scheme based on false claims and grifter intentions will likely fall hard on the deceived and cheated victims of the Trump Republican scam, when and if this information penetrates into the hardened echo chambers of those who have been ripped off. No wonder Fox News is continuing to try so hard to prevent people from finding out the details of what is being exposed by the January 6 Committee!

As a concerned citizen who "chips in" \$100 to good causes more than 30 times a month, and being rewarded for the generosity by a mounting barrage of urgent appeals for money, I can well imagine how intense the appeals have been at the merciless hands of the political party that is so adept at manipulating people's emotions and stoking their resentments and miserably twisting the truth to part them from their money.

In league with violent white nationalist extremist groups like the Proud Boys, Trump engaged in a seditious conspiracy to prevent the peaceful transfer of power, violating the oath of office he took swearing to faithfully "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Liz Cheney spoke out about the January 6 riots with these words: "President Trump summonsed the mob, assembled the mob and lit the flame of this attack." She added during the first televised hearing of the January 6 Committee, "Tonight I say this to my Republican colleagues who are defending the indefensible: there will come a day when Donald Trump is gone, but your dishonor will remain."

An observation apocryphally attributed to the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Sinclair Lewis declares, "When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." A form of modern American fascism is indeed unfolding in the USA today, and it is happening in the form of a demagogic Trumpian cult that harshly cracked down on migrants and refugees, subjecting them to indefinite detention, and cruelly separated children from their parents (until the optics of that outrage became too objectionable). This new form of right-wing hegemony over the people gains power by energizing a political base not only against immigrants but also against honest journalists, a free press, and what Trump rails against as "fake news" that is critical of his policies, methods, scandalous behaviors, money-making schemes and seditious conspiracies.

Maureen Dowd wrote in *Trump, American Monster*, that Trump promised in his dystopian inaugural speech that he would end 'American carnage,' but then after Capitol Police officer Caroline Edwards recounted the "war scene" carnage on January 6, Dowd observed, "Now he needs to be held accountable for his attempted coup -- and not just in the court of public opinion."

Michael Luttig, a former conservative judge who is retired from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, asserted in ponderous testimony to the January 6 Committee that "today, almost two years after that fateful day in January 2021, Donald Trump and his allies and supporters are still a clear and present danger to American democracy."

Luttig, along with Pence's former counsel Greg Jacob, indicated that the plan to pressure Mike Pence to single-handedly try to overturn the outcome of the 2020 election, as advanced by the conspiring lawyer John Eastman, was illegal. "Indeed, Eastman himself called it illegal, first at length in October 2020, and then in both written and verbal admissions after the election. And the committee established that Eastman, as well as others, told Trump the plan was illegal." Nonetheless, Trump pushed for his Vice President Mike Pence to commit this illegal and unconstitutional act of overturning the valid results of the 2020 election.

#### Fair-Mindedness Is the Overriding Answer

There is a "Great Divide" of growing inequality that is having a tragic impact on the length of people's lives. An article in the New York Times by Annie Lowrey explored this issue by comparing life expectancies in prosperous Fairfax County, Virginia and much poorer McDowell County, West Virginia. Males in the county of "haves" live an average of 18 years longer than males in the depressed coal area of the "have nots", and even women in the richer county have an average life span 12 years longer than in the poorer county. "Poverty is a thief," concludes

a professor of social justice. Poorer people smoke more, have less access to health care, eat worse and so suffer higher rates of obesity, and suffer the "debilitating effects of more intense and more constant stress."

This reveals that socioeconomic status is becoming an increasingly distinct factor in determining longevity, so the only fair course of action would be to propitiously change our national policies so that they do not facilitate an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. This is the right thing to do!

Fairness-oriented representative democracies are crucial to protections of freedom and our collective hopes for flourishing. Unfortunately, democracy has been diminishing in recent years, as many organizations and individuals have been warning. A report released by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance found that in 2020 "the United States, the bastion of global democracy, fell victim to authoritarian tendencies itself, and was knocked down a significant number of steps on the democratic scale." It called Donald Trump's Big Lie a "historic turning point" that "undermined fundamental trust in the electoral process" and was a causative factor in the January 6th insurrection. The Institute's Global State of Democracy report also said that Trump's efforts to overturn the election had harmful "spillover effects" on other countries.

The study, which analyzed trends from 2020 to 2021, found that more than a quarter of the world's population now lives in democratically backsliding countries, which the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance defines as nations seeing a gradual decline in the quality of their democracy.

Despite the backsliding in many democracies around the world, "it wasn't all doom and gloom"; there is one bright spot, and that is that "Protest and civic action are alive and well." This provides hope, inspiration and guidance for *We the People* to seize the day and demand greater fairness.

Democracy is beneficial from standpoints of economic and human development, protections of health and socioeconomic fairness, climate action and environmental protections, as well as international and domestic security. So intensifying "autocratization" around the world highlights needs for new programs to defend democracy.

An important way to improve prospects of democracy in the world "is to fix our democracy at home", says Professor Larry Diamond, a democracy specialist who was named "Teacher of the Year for 2007" by students of Stanford University for his excellence in teaching, which was judged to transcend political and ideological barriers. Professor Diamond has been honored for his "passion for democratization, peaceful transitions, and the idea that each of us can contribute to making the world a better place." Hallelujah for that passion!

According to the V-Dem Institute's Annual Democracy Reports, the outlook for democracy around the world is in decline in countries affecting almost one-third of the world's population. A main finding was that about 25 countries are now affected by what is a "third wave of autocratization", including populous countries such as Brazil, India and the United States, as well as several Eastern European countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Serbia. The total number of people so affected sadly surged from 415 million in 2016 to 2.6 billion in 2020.

In the previous Annual Democracy Report 2018, experts compared the United States' democracy score in 2017 with its average score over the previous 10 years, and described the pathological backsliding against liberal democracy in the USA as "precipitous and unprecedented". This has mainly been due to the weakening of constraints on the executive branch, which under "conservative" control seems to cherish the freedom to abuse authority at the expense of the liberties and well-being of the people.

When any political party in a country becomes radicalized, irresponsible, abusive of authority, uncompromising, opposed to democratic fairness, deeply dishonest, scornful of moderation, supportive of political extremists, and ruthlessly punitive of anyone who stands against them, this poses grave threats to freedoms, peaceful coexistence, civil rights, reform efforts, true progress, democratic governance and the general welfare.

No one I know likes to have tyrannical controls imposed upon them. So the vast majority of Americans should be able to readily agree that voters should not support politicians that threaten to subvert our democracy from within by acting in ways that help change it into a repressive authoritarian form of governance. And the evidence is blazingly clear that the political party that most threatens to impose such a change on us is the

"conservative" party that is becoming more radical and extreme with its dishonesty, Big Lies, conspiracism, glaring lack of responsibility, and violations of ethical norms, rules of law and the U.S. Constitution. The Republican Party is "Republican in name only" from the perspective of the party of honest Abe Lincoln and times of greater integrity, for it is throwing its lot in with extremists like violent insurrectionists and representatives that undermine the blessings of liberty and oppose reforms that would codify anti-corruption principles. This includes Marjorie Taylor Greene, Madison Cawthorn, Lauren Boebert, Matt Gaetz, Paul Gosar, Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz and cowards like House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy that shamelessly kowtow to Trump and pander to his base and take the bloviating Trumpster's side no matter how absurd his lies or how obvious his many misdeeds and arenas of malfeasance.

In a healthy democracy, citizens are safeguarded against despotism and authority abusing leaders. Timothy Snyder, the knowledgeable Yale professor of history, recognizes how dangerously radicalized the GOP has become, and has written in his book *On Tyranny* about twenty lessons from the twentieth century that could help save us from tyrannical rule. He provocatively observes, "Americans today are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism in the twentieth century. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience."

But many threats to American values and government are getting worse. Efforts to gerrymander hundreds of congressional districts have proliferated since 2010, protecting incumbents, as have laws intended to suppress voting, and cyber-threats to election security like those that benefitted Trump Republicans in 2016 continue. In addition, since the beginning of the pandemic, it has become riskier to vote in person, yet many Republicans took a stand against safe vote-by-mail plans. They have even worked to slow down the U.S. Postal Service and torpedo vote-by-mail initiatives to prevent many people from voting in the 2020 elections. As a result, overarching commitments are required to repair and defend our democracy, so that personal liberties and fairness of opportunity can be ensured, and systemic injustices can be remedied, and prospects are improved for the health and general welfare of the people. Strengthening our democracy is also necessary so that the legacy we leave to our descendants will have a much greater likelihood of being propitious and sustainable.

Gerrymandering tragically contributes to making our politics excessively polarized and uncompromising. Voting rights legislation is urgently needed to prevent extreme partisan gerrymandering and save our country from worsening effects of division and discord. One insidiously undesirable consequence of the politics of division is that it causes us to be collectively unable to solve big problems like economic inequality, institutional injustices, the destabilization of the global climate, and the ominous implications for humanity's future of our aggregate activities that are driving many species of life toward eternal extinction.

Moderation has great value, and this is one very good reason that it is wrong to allow incumbents to gerrymander voters into non-competitive congressional districts. There are many instances of extremism begetting extremism, both abroad and at home, and it is sadly true that liberal factions in politics and religions tend to counter-support reactionary factions by galvanizing the energy of strong opposition.

Checks and balances between legislative, executive and judicial branches of federal and state governments are critically important in defending democracy from factions that would deprive citizens of their civil rights, cherished liberties, general well-being, and individual and collective security.

The Fifteenth Amendment stipulates that the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race or color, and it gives Congress the power to enforce that requirement. When partisans in Congress refuse to honor this constitutional right, the federal judiciary should rule to prevent discriminatory gerrymandering.

When the legislative branch fails to do its duties to pass fair laws, enact reforms and hold the executive branch accountable, it makes it easier for abuses of power to take place. When the executive branch engages in malfeasance and stonewalls and defies subpoenas by Congress and refuses to be held accountable, it threatens our values and freedoms. When the judiciary is taken over by partisans and allows legislative and executive branches of government to get away with violations of fairness principles and laws and the Constitution, highly adverse consequences can result that undermine the general welfare, domestic tranquility and social cohesion.

Legislative redistricting contains inherent conflicts of interest, so the right thing to do is to remove authority for redistricting in every state from partisans and to make the process fair to all citizens by giving the responsibility for redistricting to non-partisan commissions. Blue states like California have taken this step to unilaterally disarm by fairly giving responsibility for redistricting to a non-partisan commission, but this gives Republicans in red states unfair advantages by allowing them to continue to aggressively cheat to win elections.

Recall the memorable scene in the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in which a fearsome man dressed in black suddenly appears in a crowded marketplace in Cairo, Egypt and confronts Indiana Jones. The scary swordsman laughs and brandishes his weapon, but then instead of engaging in a sword fight, Indiana Jones just nonchalantly pulls out a gun and shoots the menacing would-be assassin.

Democrats are basically engaging in prize-fight boxing matches with opponents who use brass knuckles, so it is as if they bring puny knives to a gunfight. Supporters of conservatives in the stands are brandishing intimidating military-style assault weapons, and unless Congress prohibits such tactics and ensures fairer election fights, partisan Supreme Court Justices apparently will not save the electorate from electoral doom, and America's future will never be rid of the scourge of cataclysmic polarization, Republican radicalism, and the on-going slide toward tyrannical domination of state and national governments by unprincipled anti-democracy factions that are irresponsibly, deceitfully, treacherously and dishonorably prepossessed with winning at any cost to get money, power and control.

Opinion columnist Paul Waldman wrote in *The Redistricting Apocalypse Is Here* that "The word 'redistricting' doesn't carry the same inherent drama as a crowd of rabid thugs breaking doors and windows to storm the Capitol. But the way it's proceeding right now, in its own way it's just as much of an assault on our democracy."

Righteously chanting "stop the steal", Republicans have been doubling down on their efforts to steal elections through gerrymandering, voting restrictions, and lately by intimidating opponents and election officials and even threatening and engaging in violence. And Trump loyalists are running for many secretary of state positions to be ready to overthrow any future election outcome that they don't like.

New voting restrictions and gerrymandering pose big threats to our democracy, along with on-going election sabotage efforts since the 2020 elections. Enemies of democratic fairness are unfortunately winning against defenders of democracy in many ways, at home as well as abroad. This situation is having tragic consequences for people, their well-being and cherished freedoms, as well as for humanity's future and prospects for survival of many species of life on Earth.

#### Another Blow to Democratic Fairness

One particularly effective assault on democracy for the next few generations is found in the Republican stacking of the federal judiciary with young, extremely partisan and sometimes even unqualified conservative judges. The speed with which Mitch McConnell ushered these judges through the Senate confirmation process "should send shockwaves across the nation," tweeted the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. One such judge was Kyle Duncan, "whose record clearly shows he's on the far-right fringe. Duncan has advanced an ideological agenda to diminish voting rights, LGBTQ equality, immigrant rights, and women's reproductive freedom. Now (as of April 2018), he's on the 5th Circuit for life." This is the court capture scheme in action.

Marge Baker of the organization People for the American Way pointed out, "Republicans are counting on these judges to dismantle reproductive rights, marriage equality, and the separation of church and state, and also to shred the New Deal and regulations that protect people from corporate power." Kristine Lucius, the executive vice president for policy and government affairs at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, issued a statement singling out Texas district court nominees Jeffrey Brown and Brantley Starr for also being "hostile to voting rights, LGBTQ equality, reproductive rights, and immigrant rights." She added, "Senate Republicans will stop at nothing to stack the courts with partisan judges who will push their radical agenda through at any cost. In doing so, they are not only degrading our courts, but also endangering our democracy."

The legitimacy of the Supreme Court has already been cast in the light of infamy by three narrowly partisan

rulings in favor of political corruption by rich people and influence-abusing giant corporations. This exceedingly unfair and undemocratic troika of rulings is shown to be consequentially wrong because it threw open floodgates for Big Money to corrupt our politics in the 50 states and in the federal government in the year 2010, and then eviscerated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and subsequently decided that the high court would do nothing about extreme partisan gerrymandering. These rulings give official injudicious sanction to corrupt politics that allows politicians to choose their voters, instead of allowing voters to choose the politicians they want to represent them. These rulings serve to disenfranchise many millions of people by depriving them of fairer representation.

Political scientist Steven Levitsky made the risks clear in his insightful book *How Democracies Die*: "This is how elected autocrats subvert democracy -- packing and "weaponizing" the courts and other neutral agencies, buying off the media and the private sector (or bullying them into silence), and rewriting the rules of politics to tilt the playing field against opponents. The tragic paradox of the electoral route to authoritarianism is that democracy's assassins use the very institutions of democracy -- gradually, subtly, and even legally -- to kill it."

These developments are astonishing in light of the fact that our colonial ancestors were incensed at British taxation without fair representation. This was the basic reason that the Boston Tea Party uprising took place, which was a protest against the Tea Act of May 1773 that allowed the British East India Company "to sell tea from China in American colonies without paying any taxes, thus undercutting local tea merchants."

"Democracies may die at the hands not of generals but of elected leaders -- presidents or prime ministers who subvert the very process that brought them to power. Some of these leaders dismantle democracy quickly, as Hitler did in the wake of the 1933 Reichstag fire in Germany. More often, though, democracies erode slowly, in barely visible steps."

--- Steven Levitsky, *How Democracies Die*

By letting anti-government ideologues grab excessive influence, extreme partisans have allowed rich people and undemocratic corporations to corruptly wield power over the people and betray their best interests. It seems as if unscrupulous con men were everywhere during Trump's time in office, especially in the highest echelons of business and government. Religious fundamentalists, for their part, generally support such malfeasance by proclaiming from the pulpit that domineering conservative influence is in accordance with the word of God.

### The Bad Guys Are Winning

As the journalist and historian Anne Applebaum writes in an article in *The Atlantic's* December 2021 cover story, *The Bad Guys Are Winning*, autocratic regimes are posing increasing threats to democracies around the world. She exposes the dangerous conditions that have allowed leaders in countries including Venezuela, Belarus, Russia, China and Turkey to thrive in recent years, in part by working together to achieve their own selfish ends, often at the expense of the people in liberal democracies. Applebaum makes a haunting observation: "If the 20th century was the story of liberal democracy's progress toward victory over other ideologies -- communism, fascism, virulent nationalism -- the 21st century is, so far, a story of the reverse."

On the home front, most politicians tend to pander to special interests to the detriment of many of their constituents, due to the excessive influence of Big Money in our elections and lobbying. Most politicians also twist the truth to some extent, and engage in dirty election tricks if they can get away with it, and try to sway voters to vote for them even when it involves deceitful spin and betraying the greater good.

But it is Republicans that pose the biggest threat to our democracy by being the most irresponsible in their zeal to gain power by any means they can get away with. They have worked relentlessly to undermine democratic fairness and erode the basic foundations of our democracy by making it harder for disadvantaged groups to vote and using unfair gerrymandering to disenfranchise tens of millions of citizens. They politicize public health measures like mask wearing and getting vaccinated during the pandemic, and often ignore scientific advice on COVID-19, causing unnecessary deaths and prolonging the mutating contagion. They also contribute to endangering public safety by staunchly opposing gun safety proposals supported by a large majority. This litany of woes is compounded by their efforts to scapegoat immigrants and refugees, stand against Dreamers and comprehensive immigration reform, spread lies about alleged fraud in the presidential election of 2020 and then

incite a MAGA mob attack on Congress on January 6, and now they are trying to obstruct and discredit the investigation into it. And they act as saboteurs against reasonable reforms and anti-corruption measures, striving to prevent efforts to fairly reduce dysfunction and economic inequalities and social injustices.

In addition to scheming factions at home posing serious threats to our democracy and the core democratic value of fairness, there are geopolitical rivals from other countries abroad, especially Russia and China. These enemies are autocrats who interfere in our domestic affairs, especially including Vladimir Putin in Russia, who worked to help get Trump elected and give power to swindling authority-abusing conservatives.

In late February 2022, Putin amassed large numbers of troops and military equipment around Ukraine and then invaded and occupied the country, creating unconscionable dangers and instability around the world.

The initial title of this essay was *The Odd Conspiracy Between Scheming Republican Politicians and Russian Subversion by Vladimir Putin*, so one focus of these ideas is on nefarious Russian influence on our society. The U.S. all but bankrupted the Soviet Union during the exceedingly costly internecine competition of the Cold War arms race in the years between 1945 and 1990. This was a dangerous hyper-militarized confrontation between nuclear superpowers, and it was colossally costly not only in terms of money, but also in lives lost and skirmish wars fought, and incalculable quantities of natural resources wasted, and the many opportunity costs associated with squandering so many resources on misdirected priorities. In 2016, Russia exacted a serious measure of revenge by interfering in our elections in a "sweeping and systematic fashion", and thereby undermined our democratic institutions, perverted our national decision-making, exacerbated racial strife, and helped enable rich people and giant corporate entities to get away with many corrupt anti-democratic schemes. This allowed abusers of power to intimidate and oppress those who oppose them, and exacerbate discord to deprive the American people of greater unity, health, tolerance, egalitarian fairness, security and personal liberties.

We should remember Abraham Lincoln's warning that a house divided against itself cannot stand. A populace divided falls victim more easily to power-abusing predations of democracy-undermining demagogues, con men, authoritarians, despots and cantankerous exploiters. Vladimir Putin knows even better than Trump Republican politicians that success in driving wedges between people is a key to imposing authoritarian control over a people, for he has used this internecine tactic extraordinarily effectively against his own people.

Russian trolls and bots have engaged in cyber-attacks in the USA, churning up antagonistic divisions between Americans. This was demonstrated once again in the aftermath of the assault weapon massacre by a teenager at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, 2018, when a surge of inflammatory social media activity bombarded millions of Americans. Quite a Valentine's Day present, Vladimir!

Revealingly, General Valery Gerasimov, the chief of staff of Russia's armed forces, published an article in 2013 that identified how Russia should engage in new methods for waging war against the United States and other Western democracies. He basically said information warfare and disinformation should be used to weaponize political divisions in other nations, so that hackers and skilled propagandists could replace riskier and much more costly head-on interventions by the army and air force against perceived enemies. In other words, Russia shifted from its main Cold War geopolitical tactics, and began planning "a wide-ranging, multifaceted campaign to attack Western institutions and undermine Western democracies. The clandestine operation was to include cyberattacks, information warfare, propaganda and social media campaigns. Here was the Gerasimov doctrine at work." This observation was made by Michael Isikoff and David Corn in their book, *Russian Roulette - The Inside Story of Putin's War on America and the Election of Donald Trump*.

Enabled by such manipulative ideas, Russian operatives weaponized social media to exploit polarizing wedge issues. Trump's digital media director and campaign manager Brad Parscale adopted similar microtargeting on social media and information warfare tactics to gain power, and in desperate attempts to cling to power.

Woe the fact that the dastardly influence of Vladimir Putin in our elections in 2016 helped give dominating control of our government to uncompromising deceitful demagogic leaders who vigorously promoted oligarchy by mortgaging the country with irresponsible debt-financed tax cuts. These regressive changes in tax law were pathetically coupled with aggressive efforts to make draconian cuts in social safety net programs and budgets

for almost every savvy aspect of civilized society, including cuts in spending related to public education, affordable health care, smart green energy initiatives, sensible social insurance plans, public service-oriented public broadcasting, protections of public lands and the environment, and even funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"Conservatives" in the United States are not only working hard to impose austerity measures on the masses, but also to bolster corporatocratic power and imperialistic militarism and authoritarian policing and deportation forces, and to sacrifice the global ecological commons and convert Earth's natural resources to cash at the fastest possible rate to goose profits. And they are rigging the de-regulated laissez-faire capitalist economy more and more unfairly, so that a grotesque preponderance of the ill-begotten and artificially maximized profits will continue to be funneled into the unprecedentedly large bank accounts of the richest 1%.

It is unconscionably irresponsible for Republican politicians to have been mainly responsible for running up the national debt by more than \$29 trillion since 1980 with their regressive debt-financed Tax Cut swindles. They rationalize this scheme by trying to sell people on believing in their Trickle-Down economic theory, but this scam is based on a Big Lie. Clearly, what has actually been trickling down since the reign of Ronald Reagan is not propitious benefits and widespread prosperity, but spiking extreme inequities, hard-nosed austerity for poor people, costly levels of debt, and poisonous divisions, in addition to poor preparedness and the harmful effects of toxic wastes, polluted air and water, environmental despoliation and depleted natural resources.

Relent, Vladimir Putin and treacherous Republicans! Dante would have consigned you all to spend your afterlives in one or another of the nine circles of his *Inferno* for your greed, abuses of power, propagated harms, deceit and treachery. Look what you have given us. As Professor Robert Reich wrote in 2018, "The GOP under Mr. Trump isn't the first political party to bend its principles to suit political expediency. But it may be the first to jettison its principles entirely, and over so short a time." Surely we should prevent this authority-abusing tribal cult from regaining power, so that we will be able to more definitively pursue greater good goals.

Robert Reich added (in 2018): "If Republicans no longer care about the federal debt, states' rights or Russian aggression, what exactly do they care about? What are the core principles of today's Republican Party?" His answer: "Winning and getting even. But as a year with Mr. Trump as president has shown, this is not a good formula for governing. Most press coverage says that the Republican Party has moved to the right, but this is not exactly accurate. The party has become increasingly sycophantish toward the mercurial Trump, who is altering modern conservatism into his more nationalistic mold and making what was historically a movement of ideas into, mostly, a cult of personality. The conservative party of Republicans is actually decreasingly conservative and increasingly reactionary." This is a decidedly ominous development.

It is stunning that a political party that has abandoned integrity, honesty, fairness, democracy and free and fair elections could possibly have the inside track on retaking power in Congress in the 2022 midterm elections merely because they are so effective at blame shifting and using divisive tactics and manipulating voters' emotions and exploiting tribal identity politics, and scurrilously scaring people, and making the opposition party fail through cynically coldly-calculated obstructionism, and by having illegitimately stacked federal courts with partisan judges who make twisted arguments contending that it is not their job to act as a check and balance on issues like discriminatory gerrymandering and Big Money in election campaigns and lobbying.

Trump treats government "as purely a tribal battle between one side and the other, and expects public servants to put loyalty to him before loyalty to country or the rule of law. Republican congressional leaders should not remain complicit in this debasement," states the Washington Post's Editorial Board.

Let's believe two of Donald Trump's relatives about the man. "He has no principles! None! None!", exclaimed his own sister, the former federal judge Maryanne Trump Barry, in a leaked recording. And his niece Mary Trump portrays his venality, toxic narcissism and general unfitness in her revealing book *Too Much and Never Enough*.

There is a long list of Trump scandals, but in the big picture they have all been part of a single mega-scam, "the corruption of the American government by the president and his associates, who are using their official power for personal and financial gain rather than for the welfare of the American people, and their attempts to shield



that corruption from political consequences, public scrutiny, or legal accountability." Trump tried to protect himself and his cronies by utilizing "an authoritarian model of law enforcement, where the president personally decides who is prosecuted and who is not, based on his own political agenda". And they strive to shield themselves and their inner circle from legal consequences.

Trump, like run-of-the-mill authoritarians, thought he could get away with deceiving and distracting the people. He regarded himself as being above the rule of law, and refused to be held accountable. He had tweeted before the election. "I will Make Our Government Honest Again -- believe me." That promise turns out to have been colossally dishonest! History will not regard this kindly.

As extreme short-termism and reactionary Trumpism wreak havoc on the world, an opening springs into the spotlight. Heightened risks and declining security for tens of millions of Americans are accompanied, most fortunately, by great opportunities for a revolutionary shift in safer and more providential directions. This new path should be guided by sensible, adaptive, inclusive, green, progressive, sustainable and ecologically sane ideas.

Here is an illuminating understanding from an article titled *Trump is finding it easier to tear down old policies than to build his own*: "After being the 'party of no' during the Obama years, Republicans are still trying to figure out what they want to achieve in this unexpected Trump era -- beyond just rolling back what Obama did. Even some Republicans have raised questions about what the party now stands for, as opposed to what it is against. When Republican Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska was asked during an interview in May 2017 for a Politico podcast what the Republican Party stands for, he responded: 'I don't know.'"

Note to Senator Sasse: Oh, come on! You meant you don't know what moral principles Republicans stand for. But, duh! -- Follow the money! It is obvious what the Republican Party stands for. The top goal of all Republican politicians is to gain and maintain power, regardless of the negative impacts of their hegemony, so that's what they stand for, and it is damnable that they pursue this priority so single-mindedly by pandering excessively to rich people and cash-supercharged corporate entities. After all, what this often means is that the majority of people will be harmed, most folks even in the Republican base will be further disadvantaged, discord will proliferate, the common good will be undermined, the unfolding climate disaster will be exacerbated, overpopulation will compound, and existentially disastrous Tragedy of the Commons outcomes will be facilitated.

Steve Benen, the award-winning producer of *The Rachel Maddow Show*, has written a book titled *The Impostors* that exposes the Republican Party as a gang of fraudsters. "*The Impostors* serves as a devastating indictment of the GOP's breakdown, identifying the culprits, the crisis, and its effects ... Republicans, in a sense, have simply quit governing." As Steve Benen charts in *The Impostors*, the contemporary GOP has become a "post-policy party." Republicans are effectively acting as a gang of impostors who have abandoned their duty to govern, gravely endangering American democracy. They present themselves as officials who are ready to take seriously the substance of problem solving, but their main focus is the pursuit and perpetuation of power by means of stoking culture war anger. "Despite having billed itself as the 'party of ideas', the Republican Party has walked away from the hard but necessary work of policymaking. It is disdainful of expertise and hostile toward evidence and arithmetic. It is tethered to few, if any, meaningful policy preferences. It does not know, and does not care, about how competing proposals should be crafted, scrutinized, or implemented."

Somehow *We the People* chose, by hook or by crook, to make a bargain with the devil, and Donald Trump milked it for all he could get. Authoritarian followers in the MAGA base have enabled this outcome, an insight made clear by Bob Altemeyer, a now-retired Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Manitoba, who outlined the basic nature of authoritarian followers in his 2006 online book *The Authoritarians*. It is sad that these authoritarian followers have been so willing to go along with Trumpism and "Art of the Bad Deal" fraud. One particularly harmful way Republicans advanced their retrogressive agenda was by getting many partisan right-wing male judges appointed to federal courts, some of whom the American Bar Association deemed "not qualified", and who will often side against poor people, women, gays, racial minorities, immigrants, progressives and environmentalists in favor of corporations, rich people and Trump sycophants. This, unfortunately for all, has proven to be a self-spiting lose-lose situation.

When the late Senator John McCain once urged his colleagues to reject the torture facilitator Gina Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA, he uttered these thought-provoking words, "as I have argued many times, the methods we employ to keep our nation safe must be as right and just as the values we aspire to live up to and promote in the world." Trump, self-centered, apparently doesn't give a damn about righteousness and justice.

We should make good use of understandings like this, because though inflammatory rhetoric is being used to divide us, we can utilize the resulting passion-stoked energy to transform feeling into remedial action and progressive positive change. Let's seize the moment and turbocharge a new cooperative energy focused on enabling us to better address the sea of troubles in which we find ourselves.

#### Russia Bolsters Plutocracy and Oligarchy in the USA

Think about the words written by the incisive investigative historian Eric Zuesse in a scientific study titled *The US Is an Oligarchy, Not a Democracy*. The study's opening question about this country was, "Who governs? Who really rules?" The study found the U.S. is no longer a true democracy, but instead a deeply corrupt oligarchy.

Zuesse wrote, "Despite the seemingly strong empirical support in previous studies for theories of majoritarian democracy, our analyses suggest that majorities of the American public actually have little influence over the policies our government adopts. Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association, and a widespread (if still contested) franchise to vote. But when policy-making is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously undermined."

Putin is a saboteur of liberal democracies who began his career as a spy. He was a foreign intelligence officer in the notorious KGB for 16 years before entering politics. But he has engaged in something more diabolical than mere espionage, counterterrorism and intelligence intrigue. He has made sustained efforts to subvert foreign governments by influencing their domestic politics, interfering in their elections, sowing discord, stoking racial antagonisms, demonizing immigrants, giving excess power to treachery by fossil fuel conglomerates, supporting reactionary political parties and schemes to divide people, and engaging in military aggression.

History tells us that Russia and the West have been practicing subversion for a long time, and Russians are said to still be angry over the "Lockhart Plot" incident. This was a big deal in 1917 when Latvian soldiers were paid by the British to launch a counter-coup against the Bolshevik government. Bolshevik revolutionaries had capitalized on the successful February Revolution of 1917 against Tsarist autocracy by staging their own armed insurrection in Petrograd. Led by Vladimir Lenin, they won a triumphant October Revolution, and then British operatives allegedly tried to assassinate Lenin in an attempt at regime change sanctioned by the British government (though this is still denied). The Bolshevik government reacted to this plot by strengthening its secret police to protect against outside interference, and by sending spies abroad to discern the plans and possibly evil intentions of others. We are paying a steep price for this totalitarian reaction in the USA today, and Russia has played a dastardly role in upsetting our domestic tranquility by helping Trump gain power and influence.

Lenin blamed the First World War on capitalism, contending rather convincingly that it was the workers who suffered the most in wars, while profiteering industrialists and weapons manufacturers and other collaborating capitalists made money at a terrible expense to the people, opportunistically profiting from the severe perils suffered by the working class. The First World War caused horrible hardships in Russia, so Lenin sued for peace and pulled Russia out of the war. As a result of the treaty that ended the war in Eastern Europe, the aggressor Germans moved men from the Eastern Front to the Western Front, and the massive influx of soldiers greatly worried the leaders of armed forces on the Western Front. That's presumed to be why they sought to get Russia back into the war through the Lockhart Plot to assassinate Lenin.

Fast forward 99 years, and the Republican reaction to Russian subversive efforts in 2016 was actually to encourage it. When offered "dirt" on Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump Jr. declared, "I love it." Republicans wanted desperately to grab power and thereby push their controlling, unjust, anti-egalitarian, progress undermining, public debt-financed tax cutting, anti-democratic and anti-environmental agenda. This subversive Russian interference was thus a conspiracy against the American people. Robert Mueller provided an elaborate view of

this intrigue. These same Republican con artists and others like Trump's third Attorney General Bill Barr deceitfully spun the Mueller investigation in denial of the many scandalous schemes that took place. They claimed Trump to be above the law and too busy, despite all the time he spends watching TV and on golfing vacations, supposedly trying to Make America Great Again, but in some perplexingly counterproductive bizarre ways. No one should be above the law in our democracy, and especially not in attempts to get elected, or when engaging in treachery or numerous instances of financial malfeasance.

While the British failed in their alleged plot to assassinate Lenin, Vladimir Putin got a measure of revenge by succeeding in imposing a ruthless Republican regime on the people of the U.S. with an illegitimate puppet leader who has "conservatives" in Congress cowed, compliant and complicit. *We the People* must stand up and reject this illegitimate influence! With the triumph of so many Democratic candidates in the House in November 2018, the bright light of honest examination of Republican skullduggery made the years since then tumultuous.

Vladimir Putin regards global geopolitical strife as a zero-sum game, according to Michael Isikoff and David Corn in *Russian Roulette*. Putin regards the United States as trying to impose a "unipolar" world on Russia and other nations, and he blamed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for turmoil in Russia after many protestors took to the streets alleging vote fraud after Russia's elections in December 2011. Putin used this occasion to crack down on dissidents and stir up nationalistic fervor to gain support -- and to engage in a somewhat low cost campaign to torpedo Hillary Clinton's candidacy and get Trump elected. And Putin has since then eliminated most of his political opponents, like Alexei Navalny, in mercilessly lawless actions many Republicans want to emulate.

### Big Money Is Having Destructive Impacts

Worse than the Russians, some say, is the nefarious influence of the "Kochtopus". This is an evocative name given to the billionaire Koch brothers and their network of cronies, "which for more than six decades has helped to finance and cultivate the ideological uprising that has now, at long last, established itself at the very heart of Republican power." Why was it, again, that God kept hardening the Pharaoh's heart?

Billionaires in the Koch network were responsible for having cunningly riled up reactive populists in 2009 to support the agenda of the rich soon after President Obama took office. They co-opted populist passions and channeled them into fervent support for an agenda that was broadly detrimental to the populists themselves. During congressional recesses in the hot summer of 2009, they seized the opportunity to fool millions of Americans into vocally protesting against the Black man in the White House and his efforts to expand healthcare coverage in the country. Protestors spouted some absurd talking points about "death panels" and socialism, and thus began a decade of vituperative attacks against expanded health insurance, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act and Planned Parenthood.

"The Tea Party was perhaps the ultimate expression of the power of a wealthy few to channel the GOP base's populist instincts and undifferentiated rage at the country's first black president toward the preferred policy outcomes of the rich -- and even to stir demands by citizens for the repeal of their own healthcare."

The Koch organization announced it would spend \$400 million to influence 2018 election outcomes, partially as a thank you for the huge tax cuts the Republican Party gave them. They stated that they want "to change the trajectory of this country." Bernie Sanders' gave an astute explanation: "The Koch brothers are the extreme right-wing 'libertarian' family. They are the third wealthiest family in the country -- worth some \$120 billion. They also, unbelievably, have more political power than either the Republican Party or the Democratic Party."

By abusing the power of their unwarranted and corrupting influence, these billionaires are gaining more than \$1 billion every year in tax breaks from the Republican tax cut bill, financed by borrowing money from every taxpayer in every future year. So the Kochs could easily have paid the entire \$400 million on the 2018 elections out of their own pockets and still came out way ahead. This is dastardly corruption incarnate, and it is made vastly worse by the degree of harm that the agenda they are pushing is having on working people, the health of the natural world, the stability of the global climate, and the survival prospects of other forms of life. Some of their specific goals are to privatize Social Security, Medicare, public education and the Department of Veterans Affairs. They even want to repeal almost every piece of major legislation designed to protect working people,

the elderly, children, the sick, the poor and the environment health that has been enacted since the 1930s.

Bernie Sanders confirmed that the U.S. is becoming an oligarchy, partly due to the Supreme Court's narrow and extremely partisan *Citizens United* ruling. He pointed out, "we see one family not only making huge campaign contributions, but establishing think tanks, appointing university chairs and creating a number of organizations in almost every sphere of American political life. Their goal: to make the very rich richer at the expense of everyone else." Their strategies inimically include holding down the pay of working people, undermining the collective bargaining rights of workers, and giving corporate entities bigger opportunities to socialize health and pollution costs, and exploit public lands. Another of their nefarious schemes is to torpedo public transportation systems in the USA as an offshoot of their longstanding national crusade for lower taxes, smaller government and maximized profits for industries like those that make vehicles and produce oil, coal, natural gas.

The early muckraking writer Frank Norris ended the first evocative chapter of his novel *The Octopus* with the sudden appearance of a lone locomotive bursting onto the scene, startling the perambulating protagonist in California's Central Valley and scaring him to attention out of a reverie. The speeding train engine was a "terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon." The observer then imagined seeing the railroad engine "as a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path (it had barreled through a herd of sheep moments earlier, crushing many of them); the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus." The Railroad monopoly!

The Kochtopus is less dramatic, but far more harmfully impactful on the lives of countless millions of people. The vast wealth and political influence of the Koch network of billionaires have been a driving force behind an influential organization of system-corrupting rich people that has worked assiduously to get politicians to cut their taxes, corrupt our democratic processes, severely skew our democratic decision making, rigidly control working people, eliminate regulations that protect the environment, and in general distort our national priorities.

Fortunately, a study of history reveals that there have been many dark moments since 1776 when the politics of fear have been prevalent in the USA, yet the "better angels of our nature" have won the day. Jon Meacham provides many examples of this trend throughout American history in his compelling book *The Soul of American: The Battle for Our Better Angels*. Now is the time to begin again to head in the right direction!

### A Riff on Inheritance Taxes

A century ago, the American people were living in a Gilded Age of ostentatious wealth and dizzying inequality. It was "wealth against commonwealth", as muckraker Henry Demarest Lloyd described it. In this context, Republican President Theodore Roosevelt recommended an estate tax as a means to keep wealth from being concentrated in dynastic fortunes. Roosevelt was an upper class patrician who used the wealth he inherited to lead a life of honorable public service rather than a life of leisure, and he always believed that the transmission of enormous wealth to heirs "does not do them any real service and is of great and genuine detriment to the community at large." What really mattered, he felt, was to have a national community based on citizens' political equality and relative economic equality and fair-dealing interdependence. Inheritance taxes were thus a moral issue for Roosevelt, as well as an economic issue.

"The really big fortune", said Roosevelt in his New Nationalism Speech (1910), "the swollen fortune, by the mere fact of its size, acquires qualities which differentiate it in kind, as well as in degree, from what is possessed by men of relatively small means. Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more effective: that is, a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate."

One main reason for the estate tax was to mitigate the grave threat posed by concentrated wealth and political power to our nation's fragile experiment in self-governing democracy. The voices calling for taxes on inherited wealth at the time ranged from rural populist farmers and urban reformers to enlightened industrialists. Rich industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie observed, "Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest."

In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt took up this crusade, striking out at great fortunes for both moral and economic reasons. "The transmission from generation to generation of vast fortunes by will, inheritance or gift is not consistent with the ideals and sentiments of the American people," he stated. "Inherited economic power is as inconsistent with the ideals of this generation as inherited political power was inconsistent with the ideals of the generation which established our Government." Let's champion a truer meritocracy!

Only two-tenths of one percent of Americans have a net worth large enough to owe any estate tax at all upon their deaths, under current tax law. This is only two out of every 1,000 people! Elitist policies that set low estate tax rates make it abundantly clear that tax laws are among *the most politically determined laws of all*, given the lavishly generous treatment of rich people after they die, and of the money their children inherit.

Since 1980, regressive changes in taxation in the U.S. have given wealthy people huge sums of money, and this unaffordable largess has been rashly financed by borrowing trillions of dollars from people in all future years. The top tax rate each and every year from 1936 to 1980 was 70% or higher. Then Ronald Reagan began a radical experiment of regressive changes in taxation in 1981, cutting the marginal tax rate from 70% to 28% by 1988. This abuse of influence has been one of the main mechanisms by which wealth has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest. Some of the worst and most socially undesirable consequences of this undemocratic concentration of wealth have been a dangerous increase in inequality in American society, and a risk-laden piling up of national debt. This is accompanied by unnecessary financing pressures and austerity measures that constrain investments in common good goals like improved public education, infrastructure, a strong social safety net, and protections of public lands, National Parks and a healthy environment.

The basic ways that our economic and political systems are corrupted to favor the wealthy are examined in *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Unfairly Rigged*. And the excessively consequential impacts of this corruption are examined in *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*.

Republicans in Congress want to not only abolish inheritance taxes but also to weaken progressive income taxes. The American people should be hearing meaningful debate on taxing vast fortunes, and voices of moral outrage at the anti-egalitarian status quo should inspire passionate reminders of the American ideal of equality.

The 105th anniversary of the estate tax occurred in September 2021. Now is a good time to assess our present inequalities, and to strive to reverse them. The persons on the Forbes 400 list of wealthiest Americans today have as much wealth as more than 60% of U.S. households. And in the first half of the 2016 presidential election, half of all campaign contributions came from only 158 wealthy families. Given this corruption of our politics by Big Money, former President Jimmy Carter declared that the U.S. was becoming an oligarchy, and studies of social mobility reveal how the excessive concentration of wealth undermines equality of opportunity.

The estate tax has been under siege since 1997, when a number of dynastically wealthy families began investing millions of dollars to save themselves billions by financing anti-tax lobbying groups and slick communications targeted to rebrand estate taxes as "death taxes." The estate tax has historically raised substantial revenue from those with the greatest capacity to pay. Even in its weakened condition today, it will raise something like \$300 billion every decade entirely from households in the top one tenth of one percent. "But revenue has always been a secondary consideration with the estate tax. Its primary purpose historically has been to put a brake on the build-up of concentrated wealth and the threat that this poses to our democratic institutions. The estate tax remains a piñata for anti-tax GOP politicians, and almost all of them want to repeal it. But we should move in the opposite direction by closing loopholes and instituting a more progressive rate structure."

#### Gerrymandering -- Let's Strengthen Our Democracy!

Gerrymandering allows Republican politicians to impose their extremist policies on the American people, skewing tax policy radically in favor of increasing the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and undermining the social safety net, and sacrificing protections of the environment to natural resource exploiters, and depriving women of reproductive rights. This trend is seriously exacerbating inequalities, inequities and injustices in American society today, making "the land of the free" into a place where laws and public policies are too often antithetical to making our nation one that has "liberty and justice for all."

When we clearly see Republicans striving to win elections by tortuously gerrymandering congressional districts and passing state laws to restrict voting rights, it would be reasonable to conclude that a basic reason they do this is because they cannot win based on the force of the reasonableness of their ideas and national plans.

Gerrymandering involves "packing and cracking" people into contorted congressional districts in ways that make an increasing number of House districts uncompetitive. This causes trends toward political extremism to become more entrenched. As a result, threats to incumbents are greater from opponents in primary elections that are even more radical or reactionary to the left or right, rather than from opposition party candidates in general elections. There are highly negative consequences as the populace becomes increasingly polarized. Bipartisan problem solving is made more difficult, and the ability of honest and responsible representatives to enact needed reforms is reduced, along with efforts to root out political corruption. And collegial collaboration is torpedoed, with deceitful abusers of authority given more sway, and there are subversive impacts against all the positive purposes that the framers of the U.S. Constitution aspired to, as set forth in its Preamble.

Republicans more than doubled their control of state legislatures in the U.S. between 2010 and 2018, allowing them to control both legislative chambers in a record 32 states. Using this influence, they are gerrymandering congressional districts after the 2020 Census in such a biased and contorted manner as to give decidedly unfair over-representation to partisans who control redistricting processes. This has resulted in under-representation of the interests of many people, especially progressives, liberals and people in racial minorities. Such exercises of extreme partisanship in drawing gerrymandered districts constitute an egregious abuse of power, especially because it is done to effectively disenfranchise the majority of Americans.

The House of Representatives and the federal government have been corrupted by this practice of partisan gerrymandering to give an overwhelming preference to "conservatives" and their excessively narrowly-focused agenda. The evidence of this is convincing. In Wisconsin, after Republicans redrew electoral maps of the state in 2011 using "the most precise technology available to dissect new Census Bureau data and convert it into reliably Republican districts", Republicans captured a 60-to-39 seat advantage in the State Assembly -- even though they got less than 50% of the vote statewide.

Federal courts have declared extreme partisan gerrymanders unconstitutional in states like North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and Florida. This makes it wrong for partisan conservatives on the Supreme Court to have found narrow technical grounds to allow the corrupted status quo to continue when they ruled in 2019 that it is the responsibility of Congress to pass laws that constrain extreme unfairness in gerrymandering. While Congress definitely should do this, Republicans in both the House and Senate are inalterably opposed to such fair reforms, so it is a cynical Catch-22 under current circumstances for the legislative branch of the federal government to be expected to thwart unfair representation because it is so corrupted by politicians who win mainly due to gerrymandering and voter restrictions that violate provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which prohibited state legislatures with demonstrated histories of discrimination against Black and other oppressed minority groups from passing state laws that disadvantage such groups.

This is a compelling reason why new legislation must be passed to make representation fairer in all states, like that passed by Democrats in 2021 that would properly reform voting rights. This legislation is staunchly opposed by Republicans in the Senate who have repeatedly used the filibuster to prevent this anti-corruption legislation from even being debated. Time is running out for Democrats in Congress to pass such needed reforms to make representation fairer. This should be done now by eliminating the filibuster for voting rights. The Supreme Court should have honored the crucial importance of checks and balances in the government by rightly ruling that it is unconstitutionally unfair for state legislatures to engage in extreme partisanship by drawing contorted congressional districts for political advantages. A fair-minded ruling would strengthen voting rights and make our democracy fairer by forcing politicians to compete more honestly for votes, rather than illegitimately winning elections and having a dominating influence in a gerrymandered Congress.

A three-judge District Court had unanimously found that the Republican-controlled state of Texas had drawn district maps in 2018 with the intent to preserve racial discrimination, but then the Supreme Court overruled this decision in a ruling tainted by a 5-4 vote that featured the politically partisan Neil Gorsuch as the deciding

vote. This meant that, "after years of litigation and undeniable proof of intentional discrimination, minority voters in Texas -- despite constituting a majority of the population of the State -- will continue to be underrepresented in the political process." In 2021, the Justice Department sued the state of Texas for its latest outrageously discriminatory redistricting.

Following a playbook similar to the one they used after the 2010 Census, Republicans are gerrymandering congressional districts after the 2020 Census to gain unfair influence. Some of the worst instances of this corrupt influence that diminishes democratic fairness are taking place in Alabama, North Carolina and Texas. Republicans in Alabama are cheating Black people out of fair representation by drawing districts so that they have majority influence in only one of seven districts, despite the fact that they are 27% of the population. The Supreme Court took up a shadow docket case in February 2022 in which the illegitimately constituted majority of conservatives on the court ruled that Republicans could continue engaging in disenfranchisement until the political partisans on the court decide at a later date on the merits of this brazen discrimination.

In North Carolina, the Republican-controlled state legislature passed congressional maps for the next decade that are blatant gerrymanders targeted to silence the voices of millions. These redistricting boundaries were drawn with surgical precision to give Republicans an advantage in 10 of 14 total congressional seats, despite party registration in North Carolina being basically split 50-50. The state Supreme Court struck down the maps on 2/4/22 because they were "unconstitutional beyond a reasonable doubt." In Texas, Republicans are engaging in corruption incarnate not only by creating extreme gerrymanders but also by passing restrictive new voting laws. The state now has 29 million residents, an increase of almost 4 million since 2010 -- and of this increase in population, 95% are Hispanic, Black and Asian. Yet Republicans in the Texas House gerrymandered to REDUCE the number of districts in which these groups of minority voters will be the majority from 40 to 36 districts, while the number of districts in which Anglo voters will be the majority will be increased to 89 districts from 83. This packing of minority groups into a minimum number of districts and creating a maximum number of White districts constitutes a racist disenfranchisement of minority voters. Again, this contributes to increasing polarization and extremism, and has negative consequences for most Texans -- and Americans.

#### A Collateral Overview - Economics for a Sustainable World

John Fowles once made it trenchantly clear how necessary it is for capitalist economic systems to auspiciously adapt as rapid change occurs. In *The Aristos*, he succinctly wrote, "Capitalism contains the seeds of its own transformation. And it is high time it started to nurture those seeds." He was thinking of such things as harsh injustices and inequities, spiritually bankrupt excessive materialism, wastefulness and myopic ecological harms.

Perhaps "solidarity economics" is an idea whose time has come. This may have started with an idea expressed at the World Social Forum that "another world is possible". Applying this concept to economics, the idea posits that it is possible to organize economies around fairer principles that are much different from those that characterize global capitalism today. We must reform disaster capitalism to save it from itself!

The fact of the matter is that even admired companies are excessively obsessed with profits at the expense of the greater good. Facebook, for instance, for big fees, helped optimize its platform for Republicans in 2016, and the company gets billions of dollars of advertising income by facilitating the propagation of falsehoods, "fake news", disinformation, fear mongering, conspiracy theories and defamatory attacks. And Apple has evaded huge sums of taxes for years, hiding them abroad from 2005 through 2018 like countless other corporate entities, waiting for the next time Republicans would gain control and allow them to repatriate the money at cheap tax rates to primarily benefit CEOs and the biggest shareholders.

The former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, an expert in economics, asserts that capitalism is going to make itself obsolete through an increased prevalence of robotics, artificial intelligence and mechanization. He warned that Karl Marx "will have his revenge", saying technology is going to "destroy a lot more jobs than it creates", and that capitalism will undermine itself as technology companies make other businesses obsolete.

The pandemic drastically accelerated this jobs crisis. Professor Varoufakis said current systems will prove to be unsustainable due to the stunning fact that all the developed nations on Earth will experience high rates of



job losses in many industries within the next 20 years due to technological advances in automation, artificial intelligence, the use of robots and other labor-eliminating practices, according to an assessment made in 2013 by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne of Oxford University. Since more than 40 percent of jobs in many industries could be eliminated in the next two decades, Varoufakis says governments must deal with the extremely destabilizing impacts of this transformation by enacting serious redistributive policies. One good way they could do this, says the economist, is to put 10% of all future issues of shares into a "common welfare fund", which would be owned by the people. From this fund a "universal basic dividend" could be paid to every citizen. This idea, remarkably, is similar in intent and impact to a global wealth tax recommended by Thomas Piketty in his incisive tome, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*." Let's give serious consideration to such ideas.

### The Shrewd Exploitation of Political Dishonesty

The unfolding "news cycle" is practically overwhelming, buffeted by a cyclone of tweets, inflammatory rhetoric, manipulative spin, conflicting viewpoints, propagated disinformation and "fake news". Competing news networks on TV and online are interpreting scandalous developments to suit partisan agendas, but the astonishing tsunami of revelations and distractions are beginning to clarify into a tangible thread that should make it clear what needs to be done to remedy the threats that face the American people, and all of humanity.

Honest journalism is a great strength of democratic self-governance, and is crucial to the greater good. Trump made blatantly self-serving efforts to discredit those who revealed the widespread malfeasance of his regime. Journalists are the true patriots, NOT "the enemy of the people", despite what Trump has repeatedly asserted, echoing many dictators and autocrats over the course of the last century who have used such deceitful charges to delegitimize opposing voices and cripple the power of dissenters.

Meanwhile, Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity and others on Fox News coddle the maniacally narcissistic dishonest rogue, helping advance his agenda, no matter how rationally indefensible -- and possibly increase the chances he could return to power. So a thoughtful degree of objectivity and Big Picture perspective is needed to sort out the competing narratives, and I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, aspire to provide such perspective in this manifesto.

Fake news is false information that has three main characteristics: It is factually inaccurate, is often framed in demagogic ways that are emotionally manipulative, and is optimized to be insidiously propagated by being shared on Facebook or other social media websites. Trump frequently tweeted about FAKE NEWS, before he was banned from the Twitter platform for violating rules, but what he meant is real different. He co-opted the term to apply to any news that reflects negatively on him, his self-serving motives, his dishonesty, his character flaws or the anti-democratic nature of his unjust policies and manipulative behaviors.

Many Republican politicians win their election contests partially by exploiting fears, stoking prejudices and propagating false narratives, deceitful spin and conspiracy theories forwarded on Facebook and other social media sites to millions of people. Trump ironically charges that news stories are fake just because he doesn't like what they say, no matter how valid. Contrary to his claims, a news story is not fake simply because it is critical or inconvenient. It is not fake news merely because it calls into question a set of beliefs that some people cling to with fervent conviction. "It is not fake just because it's rejected by those in power. In fact, many of these are signs that the reporter is onto something."

The lies Trump tells are unbelievable. The Washington Post Fact Checker identified more than 30,000 false or misleading claims -- lies or distortions of truth -- during his tenure in office. One of the most preposterous lies Trump told was in regard to Robert Mueller and his fellow Special Counsel investigators: "TOTAL WITCH HUNT", he repeatedly proclaimed, despite the number of cronies found guilty around him. Right, right, right -- Trump is as innocent as driven snow. And say, what a sensational turn-around it would be, if this were actually true, from the decidedly sordid details of his entire conniving career. Read more about it in the book *Dark Towers: Deutsche Bank, Donald Trump, and an Epic Trail of Destruction*.

Tim O'Brien, the Executive Editor of Bloomberg Opinion, provocatively tweeted, "Worth noting the obvious: President Trump is using the same tactics against law enforcement, intelligence agencies, civil service and the judiciary that he deploys against the media -- trying to discredit all of them so institutions that question or

check his power are undermined." To more fully understand this, see *The 15 Warning Signs of Tyranny* that Professor Robert Reich articulated just before Trump took office.

According to John Feeley, a former Ambassador to Panama, Trump has "warped and betrayed the traditional core values of the United States." John Feeley indicated that he was dismayed by the Trump administration's hostility to diplomacy, so he resigned and wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* titled *Why I Could No Longer Serve This President*. Something like 60% of the highest ranking diplomats in the State Department left their positions, and the void was so notable that when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was fired in March 2018, eight of the ten most senior positions at the State Department still had not been filled, "leaving no one in charge of arms control, human rights, trade policy, or the environment." John Feeley had been a Foreign Service officer for 27 years, and like his peers, he advocates an ethos of non-partisan service. Yet he saw it as too dangerous for the U.S. to cede its diplomatic leadership in the world, saying, "We're not just walking off the field. We're taking the ball and throwing a finger at the rest of the world."

Additionally, Trump offended U.S. allies with his bans on travelers from Muslim-majority countries, political bait-and-switch schemes with regard to the young immigrant Dreamers, strident calls for a wall on the Mexican border, withdrawals from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, and his offensive attacks on allies like Justin Trudeau in Canada, as well as his cozying up to repressive authoritarians in many countries abroad. In addition, his heartless policy of separating children from their parents caused widespread moral indignation, because as the UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein declared, it is "government-sanctioned child abuse" that will cause "irreparable harm." Al-Hussein added, "I am deeply concerned by recently adopted policies which punish children for their parents' actions. The thought that any state would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable."

Feeley sensed that Trump saw every critic as a threat, and that his first instinct was to annihilate such perceived threats. "He's like a velociraptor," he said. "He has to be boss, and if you don't show him deference, he kills you." The emotionally impaired Trumpster seems to regard every opponent as an enemy, so his narcissistically hyper-insecure reaction is to try to vanquish and humiliate anyone who objects to his tirades or criticizes his rash or immoral actions. No one should be so brainwashed or blindly loyal to cultish tribal identity with Trump as to go along with the ruses he engaged in, and continues to manifest.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke in June 2018 in Fort Wayne, Indiana to a group that included many law enforcement officers and others in the community. He directly addressed "religious leaders" and "church friends", and stated, "Illegal entry into the United States is a crime -- as it should be. Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution. I would cite you to the apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order." Wow, really -- God supports the government, right or wrong?!

This tortured reading of the biblical passage in Romans 13 to justify "zero-tolerance" policies that separate children from their parents as families seek to enter the United States "is exactly the strained interpretation that others have used before to justify slavery, segregation, apartheid and Nazism. The same interpretation could be used to justify Joseph Stalin, or Kim Jong Un." One observer wrote, "A more complete reading and understanding of Romans 13 -- and the Bible more broadly -- reveals more love and care for neighbors and immigrants than Attorney General Jeff Sessions would have us believe."

The White House press secretary at the time, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, was asked about these remarks. She said: "It is very biblical to enforce the law." A sensible observer noted, "This isn't religion. It's perversion. It is not the creed of a democratic government or political party, but of an authoritarian cult."

Here's what we should do. Let's flatter the Trumpster by giving him a Special Oscar for his Outstanding Performance in the role of deceitful narcissistic hard-nosed immigrant-scapegoating blame-shifting demagogic con man who triumphantly manipulated the populace with surreal evil genius and ruled with deviousness, cunning swindles, scandalous malfeasance, blatant cronyism, unprecedented eagerness to cozy up to ruthless dictators, corrupt nepotism, unfair policies and retrograde anti-environmental priorities. Let's give recognition to his

success in his larger-than-life arrogance and impressive toxic avalanche of twittering madness and the chaotic administration of the government to which he subjected the American people.

And then let's declare him disqualified from ever again holding public office for his having incited thousands of insurrectionists against Congress on January 6, in accordance with the stipulations of the 14th Amendment.

Consider this illuminating thing. The Grifter-in-Chief brazenly used his charitable Trump Foundation for purposes that were both improper and illicit. Under the pretense of raising money for organizations that were tax-exempt like veterans groups, Trump collected millions of dollars and then engaged in what the then Solicitor General of New York Barbara Underwood called, in a civil suit against him, "persistent illegal conduct, occurring over more than a decade, that includes extensive unlawful political coordination with the Trump presidential campaign, repeated and willful self-dealing transactions to benefit Mr. Trump's personal and business interests, and violations of basic legal obligations for non-profit foundations." Barbara Underwood also sent referral letters to the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Election Commission in June 2018 for them to make an investigation of violations of federal law, and for legal action by those agencies. Trump as usual deceitfully attacked back, falsely claiming that "sleazy New York Democrats" were suing him without any good reason.

The Trump Foundation was a private charitable organization started by Donald Trump in 1987 with money he made from his best-selling book, *The Art of the Deal*. Up until about 2005, the foundation was primarily funded by Trump himself, but after that it was bankrolled almost exclusively by donations from his associates and friends. Unethical and illegal uses of the fund resulted in a \$2 million fine and a court order for it to cease operations in 2019. Ten years earlier, in 2009, the Trump Foundation gave \$100,000 to the Clinton Foundation, hoping to curry favor. The Clinton Foundation, despite right-wing attacks on it, is a more reputable charitable foundation that has done a lot of real good in the world, including having reportedly saved millions of lives.

The Trump family has been involved in bigger schemes than cheating on their charity. Special Counsel Robert Mueller assembled a formidable all-star team of expert investigators and lawyers to get to the bottom of Russian interference in our elections and other malfeasance. These lawyers, combined, possess a vast array of experience investigating financial fraud, corruption, money laundering, foreign bribery and organized crime, and they secured many indictments or guilty pleas. And Trump's ex-campaign chairman Paul Manafort was sent to jail for witness tampering. This makes it clear that Republican assertions that the investigation was a "Witch Hunt" are patently preposterous, and their obstruction of justice and refusals to honor subpoenas are wrong.

The whole "witch hunt" assertions are part of Republican attempts to protect Trump and his minions from being found guilty of wrongdoing. As "60 Minutes" correspondent Lesley Stahl has said, Trump admitted to her that he attacks the press as part of a strategy to discredit reporters and news organizations so that he will be shielded from negative coverage. This negative coverage, which he inaccurately calls "fake news", is earned and richly deserved, and journalists should be commended for striving to protect our democracy by shedding light on these compulsive schemes and efforts to distract the people from the malfeasance that he indulges in..

The rest of this essay examines the legacy being left to the American people by the treacherous subversion of our politics by the likes of Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell and Vladimir Putin.

#### One Dastardly Result of Politicians Pandering to Giant Corporations

The Republican Party has become "dangerously extreme" in its denials of climate science. This ideological denial is both cowardly and highly risky. Economist Paul Krugman assessed the ramifications in a December 2015 article: "I'd urge everyone outside the climate-denial bubble to frankly acknowledge the awesome and terrifying reality. We're looking at a party -- the Republican Party -- that has turned its back on science at a time when doing so puts the very future of civilization at risk. That's the truth, and it needs to be faced head-on."

According to Nathaniel Rich, the climate crisis is an unfolding tragedy, but it is also a crime, "a thing bad people knowingly made worse, for their personal gain. That, I suspect, is one of the many aspects to the climate change battle that posterity will find it hard to believe, and impossible to forgive."

Consider this in the context of the Know Nothing attitude Trump Republicans display when slashing funding for

NASA's Carbon Monitoring System and other valuable scientific understandings, and of the anti-intellectual scams of people like former Florida Governor Rick Scott and their efforts to suppress knowledge by prohibiting mention of the words climate change in official state business.

Trump's arrogant and extraordinarily myopic renunciation of the Paris Climate Agreement is a blatant refusal to responsibly work together with leaders in all other nations on Earth to address one of the biggest existential challenges ever faced by human beings. Bold climate action and true climate justice are needed now!

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who upset a prominent Democratic incumbent in a June 2018 primary when she was just 28 years old, easily defeated her Republican opponent in that November's elections in an overwhelmingly Democratic district. Alexandria has a degree in economics, and progressive sensibilities, and she has outlined plans to lead the United States in a transition to a 100% renewable energy system by the year 2035. "It's a goal hailed by environmentalists as the last best hope of staving off the most catastrophic effects of human-caused planetary warming, and it's one already adopted by a coalition of mayors representing 42 percent of U.S. electricity use and representing major cities such as Atlanta and St. Louis."

What sets Ocasio-Cortez's proposal apart was her plan to meet the target by implementing what she called a "Green New Deal," a federal plan to spur "the investment of trillions of dollars and the creation of millions of high-wage jobs." This slogan harks back to President Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal program of labor reforms and infrastructure spending. Alexandria compared the program she envisions to the tens of billions of dollars spent on the rebuilding of Europe after World War II.

"The Green New Deal we are proposing will be similar in scale to the mobilization efforts seen in World War II or the Marshall Plan," she told HuffPost by email. "We must again invest in the development, manufacturing, deployment, and distribution of energy, but this time green energy." She has suggested that storm-ravaged Puerto Rico, still struggling to regain reliable electricity long after the deadliest hurricane in modern U.S. history, could be a testing ground for such a policy. She indicated, "Our fellow Americans on the island have suffered horrendous losses and need investment at a scale that only the American government can provide."

Since the top Republican goal is to gain power no matter what means they have to use, Republicans show little concern for the negative consequences. The bottom line of their objective is to get control and money, no matter how harmful the impacts of their abuses of power, no matter how deceitful their tactics, and no matter how seriously they hurt people and undermine the common good. The proof of this contention is found in their shrewd double-crossing of their blue-collar supporters, their zeal to cut food stamps and social security safety net programs while giving tax breaks to the highest income earners and the wealthiest people, and their ready willingness to betray the best interests of the American people and their healthcare and economic security and the decidedly providential soundness of the environmental underpinnings of our overall well-being.

Trump as a candidate made the preposterous assertion that he alone could fix the problems afflicting our country. He bombastically promised over and over again at emotion-whipped rallies that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C. He claimed he had plans to make sweeping ethics reforms, and he declared he would get rid of corrupt political insiders, and eliminate government waste of public funds, and he actually did pledge to "make our government honest once again." This "charade of shenanigans" was an epic farce!

Donald Trump is the last person to trust to fix the problems we face. Take immigration issues. In June 2018, the Trump administration refused to take responsibility for outrage-provoking "zero tolerance" policies that separate children from their parents, and Trump said Congress should fix the problem. He not only used vulnerable children as bargaining chips to try to get Congress to authorize spending billions of dollars to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, but he also embraced immigration policies driven by his chief policy advisor Stephen Miller, who demonstrated "instance after instance of bigotry, xenophobia and homophobia" during his time as a student at Santa Monica High School. One student said Miller had "an intense hatred toward people of color, especially toward Latinos." Another student who had attended elementary through high school with Miller called him "an unabashed racist", and said that "he was constantly making disparaging remarks about the African American, Latino, and Asian students at our school."

And Trump would "make our government honest once again"? That cynical assertion was part of a colossal Big Lie, for all along and indeed throughout his career, he has been the antichrist of rectitude, a cheater and pathological liar, and his egomaniacal greed for money and power made it clear that he would engage in crass self-dealing and fill his Cabinet with schemers, Wall Street robber barons and other insiders who have blatant unmitigated conflicts of interest in personal enrichment and the advancement of their own careers.

Let's demand that our representatives implement common good solutions to all the big problems we face! Good solutions abound, and they would be simple, though not easy to implement. Why are our representatives not taking honorable steps to help solve the biggest of our national and international challenges? Ah, yes, of course: such progress is being blocked by corrupt pandering politicians because their top priorities are to get financial support, advance their own self-interest, satisfy their ambitions and enhance their own fortunes.

The reason that solutions are not easy to put into effect is because the hubris-filled domineering few refuse to compromise, and they insist on imposing their wills upon the masses. They are making out like bandits from the Tax Cuts scam, excessive profiteering and cost externalizing gambits. Too, they are grabbing excessively unfair political representation in their favor, and using deceit, demagoguery, fear mongering, divisive ploys, huge sums of advertising money, and the exploitation of workers' insecurities and vulnerabilities to impose anti-egalitarian national priorities. And they are staunchly opposing fair-minded collective bargaining rights and environmental protections by making anti-democratic efforts to torpedo progressive plans and politicians.

As American politics has become unreasonably dominated by the reactionary right, it is provoking more powerful passions for honest and effective solutions to the big problems that affect us all. When governmental control in the U.S. was seized by Trump Republicans kowtowing to wealthy people and corporate interests, our national policies lurched backwards, making our country less fair, more discriminatory, more disdainful of public health and safety, and more favorable to excess profiteering, especially by fossil fuel exploiters, health insurance companies, drug manufacturers and corporations involved in gun sales and the military-industrial complex.

A much better prescription for our overall health and well-being would be for all voters to demand more honest representatives, less corruption, and more honorable politicians who really demonstrate an overarching concern for the greater good. We need national policies that place higher values on precautionary principles, conservation and sustainability, and that are not opposed to conserving resources and generating clean energy.

Knowledge, not ignorance, is the key to human well-being and long-term prosperity. Unfortunately, conservative politicians try to slash funding for accurate knowledge on consequential issues like climate science, gun safety, environmental protections, and research and development in many government agencies.

Deceit by climate change deniers does not override the laws of physics and probability, and the truth of scientific evidence is not diminished by denial. Neil deGrasse Tyson gives us a valid point: "The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it." Demagoguery cannot indefinitely triumph over reason, and the Age of Enlightenment cannot long be suspended by cultivating fear and division and abusing power. "Expertise, personal integrity and public service have all been debased and devalued in our dominant culture. That's how we wound up, for the first time in American history, with a president who had no prior governing or military experience but lots of liabilities that would have crippled previous candidates."

The Trump administration systematically rolled back consumer protections that could affect most aspects of Americans' spending habits. According to Washington Post reporters, "At the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, for example, enforcement actions have dropped from an average of three-to-five each month during the past four years down to zero since a Trump appointee took charge of the agency in late November 2017. The Labor Department has delayed full implementation of a rule requiring financial advisers to act in their clients' best interest. And the Department of Education has withdrawn Obama-era regulations meant to strengthen protections for student borrowers. The new approach -- welcomed by banks and business leaders -- has alarmed consumer advocates who fear it gives an advantage to Wall Street and other powerful industries while leaving ordinary Americans more susceptible to fraud, discrimination and predatory lending."

These schemes are part of a big con job being enabled with help from many anti-conservation conservatives in

Congress, for their own benefit and that of corporate beneficiaries. One of the sneakiest methods that Trump Republicans used to impose their scams on the country is the Congressional Review Act. This law empowers Congress to make expedited reviews of federal regulations and overrule them. Republicans in Congress under Trump used this law to nullify more than a dozen rules enacted by the Obama administration. Prior to 2017, this Act had only been used once in 20 years. "If Trump and Republicans had not reversed these rules, then companies applying for federal contracts would have had to disclose their labor violations; coal mines would have had to reduce the huge amounts of debris dumped into streams; telecommunications companies would have had to take 'reasonable measures' to protect their customers' personal information; individuals receiving Social Security payments for disabling mental illnesses would have been added to a list of those not allowed to buy guns; states would have been limited in the drug-testing they could perform on those receiving unemployment insurance benefits; certain hunting practices would not have been allowed on national wildlife refuges in Alaska; and states could have set up retirement savings plans for those who don't have the option at work."

The precedent has been set, and the need is great for Joe Biden to reverse many of Trump's wrongful executive orders. Only by coming together to reject the manipulative dividers and exploiters, and their dastardly self-serving agenda, will we be able to adequately address the challenges of environmental despoliation, reckless fiscal irresponsibility and rash efforts to undermine the general welfare. We can no longer afford to neglect extremes of inequality, desperate insecurity and gender discrimination, and we must deal farsightedly with big issues like shortages of fresh water, homelessness, inflation, gun violence and conditions that contribute to opioid addiction and overdoses.

May urgency and passion unite with peaceful revolutionary fervor to drive dramatic positive change for all Americans, and all peoples in other countries, and all life on Earth. To achieve greater prospects of peaceable coexistence, we should allow ourselves to be guided by reason, justice and moral Right Understanding.

Meanwhile, partially masked by an obfuscating avalanche of tweets, fake news, hype, lies, scandals, malfeasance and incessant efforts to distract and misdirect attention from critical issues, Trump engaged in Wag-the-Dog-like scenarios. "For Trump, each bold stroke is like a spritz of Febreze on his narrative of domestic scandal, momentarily masking" investigations into his treacherous ploys with Russia and other aspects of his illegitimate electoral victory, including his efforts to conceal information about his involvement with porn star Stormy Daniels and other women. Philip Rucker, White House Bureau Chief at the Washington Post, observed: "By making brash and risky moves on the world stage -- from shredding the Iran nuclear deal to negotiating nuclear disarmament with the North Koreans to imposing tariffs on Chinese imports -- Trump has a chance to change the way voters evaluate his presidency." He tried to fool the majority, and should never again be eligible.

"My whole life I've been greedy, greedy, greedy," said Trump in 2016. "I've grabbed all the money I could get. I'm so greedy. But now I want to be greedy for the United States." It turns out that being greedy is one of the few things Trump has been honest about -- but always for himself. In a New York Magazine article *It's the Corruption, Stupid*, which featured Trump's face on the cover with a grotesque pig's nose, Jonathan Chait wrote: "Since Trump took office, his pledge to ignore his own interests has been almost forgotten, lost in a disorienting hurricane of endless news. It is not just a morbid joke but a legitimate problem for the opposition that all the bad news about Trump keeps getting obscured by other bad news about Trump."

Jonathan Chait also made it clear that self-dealing and corruption, rather than Russia, may be the "Greatest Political Liability" for Trump. Chait's cover story in New York Magazine was accompanied by a separate piece, *501 Days in Swampland*, which was promoted online with the headline "501 Days of Trump & Co. Stealing America Blind." Obviously, Trump needed "a fixer" like Michael Cohen more than ever, but unfortunately for him, Cohen was convicted on numerous felonies for the fixing he did for Trump (and other crimes).

Trump made a lofty promise in his inaugural address. "The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer," he vowed. "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished -- but the people did not share in its wealth." But then Trump has delivered another message, without saying it out loud, which was aimed at a much smaller, but very wealthy, audience. "The very first place Trump headed after being sworn in -- his true

destination all along, in a sense -- was the Old Post Office and Clock Tower, which only 12 days before the election had been repurposed as the Trump International Hotel Washington. The elegant granite structure, whose architectural character Trump had promised to preserve, was now besmirched by a gaudy, faux-gold sign bearing his name. The carefully choreographed stop sent a clear signal to the foreign governments, lobbyists and corporate interests keen on currying favor in Washington: The rewards of government would now be reaped by a single man -- and the people would bear the cost." Forced to reveal financial information, Trump's May 2018 financial disclosure showed a \$5 million profit on \$40 million in revenues on this property. It also showed that dozens of political and business groups and 7 foreign governments have paid for events or visits there.

"More than at any time in history, the president of the U.S. is actively using the power and prestige of his office to line his own pockets: landing loans for his businesses, steering wealthy buyers to his condos, securing cheap foreign labor for his resorts, preserving federal subsidies for his housing projects, easing regulations on his golf courses, licensing his name to overseas projects, even peddling coffee mugs and shot glasses bearing the presidential seal. For Trump, whose business revolves around the marketability of his name, there has proved to be no public policy too big, and no private opportunity too crass, to exploit for personal profit."

### Conclusion

Here's what's happening right now. Common good goals are being broadly undermined. This is being done to serve the top priority of our political representatives to further concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few. We are sacrificing the primary postulates of sane governance by acquiescing to the desires of rich people, corrupt politicians, Big Money donors and giant corporations squeezing out excessive profits. Republican leaders have given debt-financed tax cuts to corporations and rich people, and allow corporate entities to externalize more costs onto society. These gambits adversely affect countless numbers of people, prominently including the vast majority of working people in the Trump base, which has been duped by his misdirection, lies and misrepresentations. Until the pandemic began, "In connection with these schemes and priorities, spending is being slashed on public health, fairness of opportunity initiatives, public education, research and development, scientific understandings, the criminal justice system, public broadcasting, family planning, protections of the environment, foreign aid, clean air and clean water, protected public lands, green energy and climate justice."

We must come together and diminish the influence of wealthy people like those in the Koch network, and by corrupt politicians bought by special interests involved in the profit-prepossessed military-industrial-banking-corporate-congressional complex. We should limit Big Money in politics with effective campaign finance legislation and a Constitutional Amendment, as proposed by the organization Move to Amend, that would sensibly take personhood rights away from corporations "to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights."

Drain the Swamp! Let's demand that a Tax Remedy law be passed that will effectively eliminate every penny gained by all persons in the top 1% of taxpayers in connection with the debt-financed tax cuts that Republicans in Congress enacted in December 2017. Better yet, we should institute a progressively graduated Excess Profits Tax, so as to interrupt the expediency of foisting gargantuan debt burdens on every taxpayer in every future year to finance so many swindles and the recovery efforts from the pandemic.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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## A Fusillade of Philosophy

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
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"A healthy and wholesome cheerfulness is not necessarily impossible to any occupation."

--- Mark Twain

Welcome to the Earth Manifesto. Let's all emerge from our echo chambers and "Don't Believe Everything You Think" -- and strive to see clearly. And let's undertake trying to understand comprehensively and expansively, and remember to feel with our hearts, not just think with our easily emotionally-hijacked brains.

The great philosopher Plato lived in Athens from 424 BCE to 348 BCE in the times of Classical Greece. A wise man, he was an aristocrat who became disillusioned with politics. He did not particularly like democracy, because it was periodically prone to violent revolution against injustices. Plato also saw that oligarchic rule by wealthy elites often became excessively unjust, and rich people generally demonstrate a propensity to jealously protect their wealth, privileges and power, and harshly control and repress perceived threats to their dominance.

Plato reckoned that the best situation for human societies would be to have rule by a benevolent philosopher king. This is a great idea! Unfortunately, fair-minded philosopher kings are exceedingly hard to find among the ranks of aspirants who seek money, power, glory and satisfaction of their ambitions through "public service". Yep, that sure would be better than having self-serving demagogues who tell manipulative lies to the people about the purposes and desirability of their radically ruthless agenda and authoritarian priorities and scheming activities.

Plato established an extraordinary Academy in Athens in ancient times, and dedicated it to Athena, Greek Goddess of Wisdom. Located in a large grove of olive trees, the Academy was founded to educate people and direct their minds toward a knowledge of true goodness and virtue. Plato asserted in his Socratic dialogues in *The Republic* that truly just dealings are the most important thing for a government in its rule.

This ideal underlies our own Enlightenment Era aspirations. In light of this ideal, how have we allowed ourselves to be subjected to governance by politicians whose actions, objectively measured, are detrimental to most Americans? Our leaders certainly seem drastically more selfish or even greedily malicious than auspiciously beneficent. We must rise up as one, and honor our colonial ancestors' honorable opposition to despotism, and declare we want our representatives to honestly and effectively represent the greater good. If we had fairer representation, then the rich and CEOs and rewarded investors would not be able to prevail so triumphantly over workers and the general public at every turn.

Remember the wry rascal Mark Twain's satirical observation that we have the best government money can buy, and see that it behooves us to look closely at the implications of this sly assertion, for we are paying a high price for our government every year, and it sure seems like the majority of Americans are getting a Bad Deal in return.

It is a tautological truth that everybody will do better only when everybody does better. We should demand that our representatives honestly create a fairer society that is characterized by a more broadly inclusive prosperity and public safety in these perilous times. It is a wrong approach to put top priority on further enriching the

already rich while imposing increasing hardships on the many, just as it is undesirable to wantonly deplete resources and rain havoc down on the ecological commons.

The right thing for us to do collectively would be to "pay forward" a more auspicious legacy to our heirs in the future by contributing to leaving a stronger democracy and better protections of people's rights, expansively assured. And to leave an economy that works better for the vast majority of the people, not just the wealthy, and responsibly prevent politicians from burdening all taxpayers in the future with excessive amounts of public debt, corruptly incurred. And surely, we should strive to collectively leave a more sustainable natural world.

Most people validly see how harsh it is for our leaders to push policies that make economic inequalities ever more extreme, and that rig the tax system more and more favorably for the few. Most people also see the ominous writing on the wall related to unleashed capitalist predations, and to externalized liabilities for medical care and costs of pollution, toxins, exacerbated weather extremes, insidious sea level rise, ocean acidification and the devastation of the richest biotic habitats on Earth found in tropical rainforests and coral reef communities around our beautiful home planet. Let's act to protect Mother Earth!

### A Moral Evaluation

The United States of America is a great nation, as seen through such disparate things as top-notch universities and the establishment of many beautiful National Parks and protected Wilderness Areas. It's a marvelous place of opportunity and ingenuity that produces a remarkable cornucopia of material goods, and it is a colossal historic success in democratic governance, assuring liberties to the people and championing a reasonable respect for human rights. But our democracy has been seriously "backsliding" in recent years, and our American liberties and egalitarian ideals are under furious and unrelenting assault by the top dogs in our society, who stubbornly refuse to compromise and pay more tax. This makes their dominating hegemony illegitimate.

Here we find ourselves, a little more than 2,000 years after the Lord was supposedly born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem in fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, and many faithful folks in the USA are in effect collaborating with the government to impose strict moralizing control over the people. Authorities of the Religious Right are complicit with the right-wing in Republican politics in efforts to impose reactionary control. They are crudely contorting the deeply humanitarian message that Jesus Christ preached, thereby taking his name in vain by rationalizing actions taken by abusers of authority who are treacherously violating the compassion Jesus preached. Jesus was a poor peasant who notably became a social revolutionary in the Holy Land, and spoke out in favor of poor people and the marginalized, and against Roman abusers of power and the shenanigans that went on with moneychangers in Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was opposed to religious authorities in the Temple who collaborated with ruthless Romans and their oppressive tax collectors and idolatrous religion. Today, the true spirituality of America's current Zeitgeist has been deeply distorted by the politicization of religious establishments by conservatives, and our national priorities are being perverted by dishonestly deceitful propaganda, elitist abuses of authority and wasteful materialism.

Issues like this are contentious and confusing, but clarity of understanding should motivate us to come together in solidarity with common cause. Let's adopt a philosophic attitude. Breathe deep, and let go. Visualize again the great political cartoon by David Sipress that was widely shared as the tumultuous Trumpian tenure in office began, in which a woman is saying to a man, "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." Seeing things the way they are, in reality, from a well-informed and comprehensive perspective, and supporting the right causes, are among our most important responsibilities as citizens.

The true moral good encompasses virtue and rightness in intentions, decisions or actions. In essence, the moral good is like the Golden Rule, best for human social groups as a whole. Things that are most propitious for human flourishing and survival are thus the ultimate moral good. The status of social cohesion is a good gauge for evaluating the moral good, for it helps us see beyond the confusing fray of contested concepts of it.

Right and wrong are somewhat relative. The best way to judge the rightness or wrongness of any action is to accurately assess the overall consequences the action has on other people -- and how beneficial or harmful it is.

This line of thought is reminiscent of a provocative understanding John Steinbeck expressed in *Cannery Row*: "It has always seemed strange to me -- the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest -- sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest -- are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second."

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution outlines the primary goals for which the Constitution was ordained and established. These noble purposes were informed by Enlightenment Era principles, and include striving to form a more perfect union, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Mark Twain would have guffawed with wry and sardonic amusement at the onward trajectory from his astute observation that "we have the best government that money can buy." Charles Ferguson succinctly noted, "Unless America reverses course, things will end badly, at least for the bottom 90% of Americans, and possibly for the wealthy who consider themselves safe." The proverbial pitchforks will eventually come out if we fail to enact smart and far-reaching fair-minded reforms. Let's take smart steps to fix this -- and sooner rather than later!

We should invest more money in what are, in reality, reasonably priced propitious social insurance policies like those that involve improved healthcare, better schools, more affordable medical insurance, less costly prescription drugs, and stronger protections of forests, wetlands, farmlands, public lands, coral reefs, ocean habitats, a stable climate and a safe gaseous composition of Earth's atmosphere. This is why there were many good ideas in "Build Back Better" plans that the Biden administration proposed, and Republicans staunchly opposed, during the early stages of the global pandemic.

Consider the current state of the large-scale decline in democracy that has been taking place in all-too-many countries around the globe over the course of the past decade. This backsliding is an ethically bankrupt and sadly retrograde trajectory, following as it does many marvelous years of colonial independence movements and the advance of Enlightenment Era ideals. Think of the amazing and laudatory forward strides that have been made since 1776 toward more fairly representative governance of peoples in fortunate nations whose leaders acted more honorably than those in despotic colonial regimes or harsh dictatorships, authoritarian religious-ruled theocracies, regimes led by tyrannical demagogic Strong Man types, or corporatocratic oligarchies.

### A Commanding View from On High

There is great wisdom in the proverbial saying, "moderation in all things". This adage suggests a justly balanced way of living. It is an essential thought that was found in the work of the Greek poet Hesiod 2,700 years ago. He recommended, "observe due measure; moderation is best in all things." The edifice of the temple of Apollo at Delphi bore a similar inscription, translated as "Nothing in excess". Public policy should embrace such wisdom.

Professor Garrett Hardin insightfully wrote about the *Tragedy of the Commons* in 1968, and this tragedy has morphed into a global catastrophe of assaults against public health and safety, the environment and the common good today. This terrible imbalance involves rich people and giant corporate entities exerting a destructive and excessively domineering hegemony of rapacious control over people in communities worldwide. This is a socially unacceptable imbalance that features not only dangerous extremes of inequality, but also a sad state of spiritual affairs in which established religions form an unholy alliance with economic elites by supporting abusers of authority who all too often engage in divisive and discriminatory drives for dominion at the expense of fairness, peaceable coexistence and greater good goals.

I appeal to all evangelicals with respect to proper stewardship of creation, which is a consequentially crucial obligation of our kind. I applaud the evangelical organization Interfaith Power and Light for representing Right Action and Right Understanding with regard to energy efficiency, resource conservation, and addressing climate change. They importantly say the same thing as Pope Francis: that caring for creation is a basic human duty.

As in many arenas, conservative fundamentalists in evangelizing religions are too fanatic to be allowed to grab and abuse power. This is why the revelatory 5-part Netflix documentary series *The Family* is so scary and

ominous in implication. Released in 2019, it tells the story of a secretive initiative by Christians who, in the name of Jesus, insinuate themselves into the halls of power and exert insidious influence and domineering, often unjust control over the populace. These fundamentalists may seem like innocent acolytes of Jesus, but they were led for decades by Douglas Coe, "the stealth Billy Graham." They have gained insider access in the halls of power and exerted outsized influence with powerful political leaders in the U.S. government, and in countries around the world. In this intrigue, powerful men exhibit missionary-like zeal to wield overarching power over the fates of billions of people, sometimes for good purposes but just as often to take unfair advantage of people and undermine democratic fairness, betraying people's trust in fair-minded governance.

These fundamentalists have been siding with the rich and powerful on economic issues, to the detriment of the poor and downtrodden, despite the Bible saying Jesus loved such people. It is supremely ironic that devotees of Jesus are spreading a gospel so at odds with conventional understandings of Jesus, and that "The Family" so zealously supports officials like Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell, who take advantage of faithful religious folks by pushing a corrupt agenda that involves dividing people and perpetuating abuses of power and acting in bad faith on a wide range of crucial issues. (Kudos to filmmaker Jesse Moss for his skill in telling this story.)

Writer Jeff Sharlet criticizes the theology of The Family in his book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. He says this "elite fundamentalism" fetishizes political power and wealth, and opposes labor movements in the U.S. and abroad. The Family essentially teaches that laissez-faire deregulatory economic policy is "God's will." Sharlet also criticized their theology that gave instant forgiveness to powerful men who commit sins, as many of them happen to do, pointing out that this leniency conveniently excuses elites who commit misdeeds or crimes, and allows them to avoid being held accountable for their actions.

Sharlet's book *The Family*, with its revelations about secret fundamentalism, was published in 2008. Just a year later, sensational news stories broke about sex scandals involving prominent members of the Family. The Nevada Senator John Ensign (at the time) and South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, thrust the odd secretive organization into the national spotlight. Accusations were made that the Family was illegally subsidizing the rent of members of Congress on C Street in Washington D.C. -- and the Family was involved in trying to get an Anti-Homosexuality Bill passed in Uganda, which would have imposed a death penalty for homosexual acts there.

These evangelicals have used the annual National Prayer Breakfast since the days of Dwight Eisenhower for much more than a religious gathering. The National Prayer Breakfast, which involves a series of meetings, luncheons and dinners, has taken place every year since 1953, and is typically attended by something like 3,500 guests that include invitees from over 100 countries. These "prayer meetings" are designed to be a forum for political, social and business elites to assemble and peddle influence. As such, these shrewd schemers insert religion into politics and offer foreign leaders and lobbyists opportunities to "pay to play" in the USA. That's the lowdown. This is corruption incarnate. Jesus would likely have advised taking a higher road.

#### What's Happening Here Ought to Be Increasingly Clear

Look what's happening here. Great wealth is being generated in the world today through business activities that emphasize the maximum achievable exploitation of natural resources and working people. The benefits of these cash cow activities should be shared much more broadly, in the interest of promoting the general welfare and the common good and more inclusive well-being. We simply must drastically alter the rules and policy priorities that are the basic enabling characteristics of *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*. See that essay linked to the Earth Manifesto website in Part One, essay (31).

Look what else is happening here. We are pumping more and more money into profit-propagating pursuits like a lavishly wastefully military, and into police forces, the FBI, the CIA, incarcerations in a costly prison system, and immigrant internment camps for families and children seeking economic opportunity, refuge or asylum from dangers. We're running up risky levels of national debt to pay for these things, and we are idiotically borrowing more money due to the 2017 Republican Tax Cuts Act to give most of the benefits to the richest Americans.

Increasingly exacerbated social inequities are ultimately bad for everyone. Refer to the story about the lawgiver Solon back in the city-state of Athens during ancient times, more than 2,500 years ago -- a story told

repeatedly throughout this manifesto. The eminently wise Solon succeeded in forging reasonable and responsible compromises between elite factions and the masses during a tumultuous time in ancient Greece, thereby saving the republic from revolution. Surely, it would be best even for rich people to not push their luck so hard, due to the real risks of adversities, revolutionary unrest and violent conflicts caused by unbelievable extremes of inequality, unconscionable overreach and outrageous abuses of money, influence and power.

Here's a basic problem with this whole deal. As David Klion pointed out in an incisive article titled *Russiagate Is Far Wider Than Trump and His Inner Circle* (in July 2018), Russia interfered in U.S. elections to help Donald Trump grab power, and this "isn't just the narrow story of a few corrupt officials, or even the story of a corrupt president. It's the story of a corrupt political party, the one (that was) currently holding all the levers of power in Washington." The malfeasance in Washington D.C. made the "culture of corruption" surreally wrong.

Self-dealing is among the worst forms of political corruption. This is why a large majority of Americans told pollsters that they regard it as "serious" or "very serious" that more than 50 Republicans in Congress would "get an average tax cut of over \$200,000 each from a single loophole" that was sneakily added to the December 2017 tax bill at the last minute, just before passing it without a single vote from the opposition political party. Revelatory investigative books intrigue the imagination, with titles telling the story, like *It's Even Worse Than You Think*, by the brilliant tax expert David Cay Johnston.

A laser focus on the Trump regime's corruption, and on Republican rash schemes in general, rightly helped give a powerful boost to Democrats in gaining a majority in the House of Representatives during the 2018 midterm elections. Honestly patriotic citizens voted to help make this happen. Support progressives!

We can no longer afford to allow Dividers to grab power and rule so ruthlessly. The trickle-down Big Lie has become too successful a con job. Complicit in this state of affairs, Fox News beams brainwashing broadcasts to the populace, serving as a misguiding corporate State Propaganda Machine that helped perpetuate distorted understandings and enable corrupt dealings by MAGA Republicans. Fox also stokes antagonism and creates harshly harmful divisions and fears and hatred of others. Check out *The Brainwashing of My Dad*, Jen Senko's documentary, to better understand how Fox News can negatively affect people, as it did when it transformed Jen Senko's father from being a nonpolitical life-long Democrat to a fanatically angry and intolerant old man.

Let's stop kowtowing to Dividers, and come together to propitiously promote the greater common good. Let's actualize a vastly improved general welfare. This will help us improve fairness and social cohesion.

We the People are losing faith in our dominant institutions -- governmental, corporate and religious -- and for good reasons. First, the government is increasingly corrupted by wealthy super-elites who are eager to impose an inimical agenda on a freedom-loving people, as can be understood in detail throughout *See Clearly - Sanity During Insane Times*. Second, corporations are acting like psychopaths, as made clear by Joel Bakan in *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. Joel Bakan gauges this as defined in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. And third, authorities in established religions are often incestuously siding with reactionary authority-abusing politicians, and too many are compounding this sin by molesting children or acting in ways that foment conflict, intolerance and violence.

#### A Big Picture Perspective

Throughout the incomprehensibly long sweep of geologic history, big changes in the natural environment have subjected many species to conditions of existential stress. Many have perished, and at rapid rates during some impressive mass extinction events, like the Permian Extinction 250 million years ago, and the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago. Similar mass extinctions are tragically happening again today, during the unfolding Anthropocene Extinction. The individuals and groups best suited to adapt are the ones that survive to reproduce. Whatever animal could adapt best is able to continue on. This is natural selection, in a nutshell.

Charles Darwin once observed: "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too), those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed." He also said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

We are at a juncture in world history where flexibility in adapting is a key to our survival. For 10,000 years, humans have been parlaying subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry into today's astonishingly successful global civilization. Our population has increased from maybe 300 million at the time of Jesus to one billion in the year 1800 -- to over 8 billion now. But the writing is on the wall. The damages that our huge and growing population is inflicting on our beautiful home planet are surpassingly foolish, and they are without a shred of doubt unsustainable. Precautionary principles counsel wiser decision-making, smarter planning and fairer courses of action. See the link to *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated - Holy Cow!*, on the Home Page of the Earth Manifesto to gain a fuller understanding of these ideas.

We have built amazing economies to provide an extraordinary array of food and consumer products through advancements in exploitive technologies. This has been coupled with a bizarre overarching lack of mindfulness, so we find that our activities in aggregate are insidiously destroying the natural world. The main propulsive force for this folly is to satisfy a zealous preoccupation with monetary wealth and social status. This is a shortsightedness that is putting the health of our home planet's biosphere at risk, as well as its ability to sustain life for all of its creatures -- ominously including ourselves.

What we humans need to survive here in the 21st century is greater adaptive ability. We need to honestly face the problems troubling our planet and our species, and create real, lasting and auspicious solutions, aimed both locally for our families and friends and communities, and globally for all of humanity and life on Earth.

Pope Francis has called for urgent collective action to repair the planet. He gave his blessing to activist "citizen pressure groups" to organize ahead of a Global Climate Action Summit that took place in San Francisco in 2018, when thousands of people came together for the largest climate march the West Coast had ever seen. In advance, activists stated: "We will demand Governor Jerry Brown and other California leaders take bold action on climate change and commit to a Fossil Free world."

Republican politicians seem to be strongly opposed to efforts to leave a more secure and auspicious legacy to our children and grandchildren, judging from their scurrilous political activities. The League of Conservation Voters sounded an alarm in July 2018, revealing that Republican leaders in Congress had just "moved to backdoor a series of anti-environment provisions into law. Their plan included a policy to weaken protections of public lands without public review or input." These schemers pushed for expansions of mining operations, and tried to gut the Endangered Species Act and undermine protections for wolves, whales and other mammals. They added these provisions to the National Defense Authorization Act bill, a must-pass military bill that rightly shouldn't include riders that reduce environmental protections. And they failed to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund for many months, despite the fact that it is a smart program that uses a small portion of fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas for the good purpose of acquiring and protecting lands for all Americans.

A petition at change.org opposed Republican efforts to go to almost any length to maintain their narrow majority power. They even try to ban books and distort history to preserve domineering power. The petition read, "The Michigan State Board of Education is considering revisions to K-12 social studies standards that endanger not only our past, but our future. By altering the standards for teaching history in Michigan, they cut many people out of history — and silence the work of those who have worked to fulfill the American promise of liberty and justice for all. The changes would severely cut references to the movement for civil rights, the women's movement, and the movement for LGBT equality. They would eliminate references to climate change, and remove discussion of America's core democratic values." This was a rogue undertaking.

Let's emerge from behind our tribal barricades, my fellow Americans, and viscerally recognize and acknowledge the profoundly pernicious threat that Republican abuses of influence represent for current and future well-being, and to the general welfare of the citizenry. Another reason why it is pathological for "conservatives" to wield excessive power and broadly abuse this authority is because, in the process, they oppose fairer representation in our democracy and sabotage core values that democracy represents. Let's repudiate Machiavellian masters of manipulative misguidance and scandalous malfeasance, and don't let them get away with their schemes by believing all the obfuscating fusillades of mass distraction on Facebook and Twitter.

Passions have been running high in the past seven years, and with propulsive reason. The naked immorality of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" family separation policies and anti-immigrant actions caused mass protests to break out during the summer of 2018. Almost 600 protesters were arrested on Capitol Hill on June 28, and then more than 700 protests were held on June 30, taking place in all 50 states in opposition to Trump's empathy-deficient border policies. We should not need to engage in such mass protests against authority-abusing men who are pushing a regressive and repressive agenda that is antithetical to the liberties, overall well-being and true security of the people. Sadly, numbness to outrage gives exploiters advantages.

Here we stand, hands on our hips, elbows akimbo, with a quizzical expression on our faces. In 2019, powerful images and disturbing sound recordings came to light of terrified children and their anguished parents in detention facilities near the border with Mexico. Authorities in government were attempting to prevent these affective images from surfacing, knowing that outraged protests intensify when the dire dimensions of these heartless happenings become more viscerally clear.

This unfortunately was only the tip of the iceberg of a multitude of nefarious actions that were perpetrated by authority-abusing conservatives in the Homeland. These acts exacerbate social inequities, oppress Blacks and others in racial minorities, undermine the common good, cause social cohesion to fray, rashly erode the liberties of freedom-loving people, and discriminate against almost everyone that is not a white male. Meanwhile, these cunning folks are insensibly wreaking tragic damages on the providential commons, upon which all of humanity relies for sustenance and survival.

During many protest marches around the United States in recent years, crowds almost good-naturedly revealed their simmering outrage, with some chanting "No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA!" A swelling number of courageous resisters stood up and in effect declared that the emperor has no clothes, that Trump's rule was corrupt, that his emotion-exploiting blame-shifting tactics are immoral, that Republicans are making accomplices and fools of their supporters, that the wrongdoing of their debt-financed Tax Cuts scam is woefully fiscally irresponsible, and that their anti-environmental policies are treacherous to everyone in the future -- and to most forms of life on Earth. In this, they are profoundly betraying truly honest pro-life stances.

The biggest street protests in U.S. history broke out after a video of white police officers killing George Floyd, a black man, went viral at the end of May 2020. In incredible contrast to this public outrage, the Trump base stayed in a reactive crouch, pretending their leader was as innocent as the driven snow in all matters. The demagogue was so intent on cozying up to authoritarians abroad that he didn't seem have been bothered by this "total fabrication" stuff. Many Republicans are Trump loyalists who tell pollsters they support him despite his big lies, invective, wrongdoing, sins and his inciting of political violence, and despite the danger he created by allying himself with a new Axis of dictator-types in countries around the world who treat their people terribly. At the same time, Trump tried to undermine our NATO allies who defend democracy and personal liberties.

The former self-proclaimed Party of the Moral Majority has astonishingly abdicated its moral compass, and done so for the sake of naked expediency. These folks are triumphantly pleased to finally get some respect -- POWER! Never mind that this power was illicitly obtained and was abused with discriminatory disgrace and authoritarian zeal. They want us to ignore the long litany of illegitimate means that were used to grab power and achieve this domineering end in the first place, as set forth in detail in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy: Is the Pen Mightier than Illegitimate Authority?*

The esteem-worthy President Obama promised young Dreamers who were brought to the U.S. as children that they would be protected, for they know no other home. But cunning MAGA Republicans are using these vulnerable young people as another bargaining chip to help them impose their hard-right agenda on the populace.

What a fate! Let's laugh ruefully -- and come together to champion broadly fairer and better governance. The eminently respect-worthy Dalai Lama delivered a compelling observation during the 2009 Vancouver Peace Summit, asserting that, "The world will be saved by the western woman." With the election of a record number of Democratic women in November 2018, the prospects for this seemed to have dramatically improved. Let it be! Positive change must come. John Lennon and Paul McCartney sang their inspiring lyrics, recommending the idea, "Come together right now, over me." -- "One thing I can tell you is you got to be free."



## The Titanic Struggle between Liberals and Conservatives

In *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, the insightful linguist George Lakoff explains how the competing influences of Strict Father worldviews contrast to the worldviews of Nurturant Parents (especially of good mothers). Whole constellations of propensities are associated with the conflicting political camps of those who adhere to Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models. Sensible parents see that being too permissive can ruin a child, but that excessive discipline and harshness in Strict Father ideologies may be worse for the family and the child, and society as a whole. Lakoff points out that the politics of both conservatives and liberals are deeply influenced by different ideas of the family, and that these two contrasting models of the family "give rise to different moral systems and different discourse forms, that is, different choices of words and different modes of reasoning." And they involve starkly contrasting levels of compulsion to impose control.

One important thing to understand is that propensities of conservative folks just happen to be favorable to authoritarians who like to assert dominating control and abuse the power of ill-begotten authority. Conservative worldviews lionize discipline, self-control and loyalty, so they tend to attract what Bob Altemeyer calls "authoritarian followers". Altemeyer, a now-retired Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, once wrote that these folks tend to be loyal to tribal allegiances that can get in the way of the desires of freedom-cherishing Americans to properly balance individual liberties and the greater social good. In so doing, they prevent true greater good goals from coming to fruition. Authoritarian followers submit too much to authoritarian leaders, and trust them too much, and give them too much leeway to do whatever they want -- "which often is something undemocratic, tyrannical and brutal."

Both despotic demagogues and submissive authoritarian followers that abjectly kowtow to them are revealing an excessive fervor for dictating an absolutist morality onto society, condemning gay people and judging women harshly for wanting to have the right to get a legal and safe abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy.

Republicans win many election contests not by proposing effective plans to improve the common good of the American people, but by scaring people, stoking cultural resentments, hijacking people's emotions, twisting the truth, demonizing others, fostering division, promoting deceptive ideological dogmas, using negative attack ads, exploiting hot-button wedge issues and cultural biases, using microtargeted fake news and conspiracies on social media, and raising huge sums of contributions from rich conservatives and Big Oil, Big Coal and giant corporations that seek lower taxes, fewer regulations and more opportunities to foist the costs of pollution, healthcare, natural disasters and environmental damages onto the public. It is a deplorable fact that conservative politicians exert excessive influence in government only because they gain this overbearing position by seizing power through this litany of illegitimate means. And they critically abuse this power.

It is exceedingly odd how willing conservatives seem to be, despite being generally averse to change, to go along with extreme risk-taking in national policies. This is the case with their opposition to democracy-enhancing reforms, as well as in many other issues like denying the apocalyptic risks of the climate crisis, allowing building in flood plains, promoting profligate depletionary uses of natural resources, supporting policies that sacrifice the greater good, and depriving tens of millions of people of healthcare in order to reduce taxes on rich people. Tens of millions of them voted for a leader who is a smugly duplicitous plutocrat who abuses privilege, violates trust and is dangerously self-centered and reactively vitriolic -- and who even risks revolutionary conflict by facilitating the predations of wealthy elites who keep driving inequality and inequities to worse extremes.

In *Strangers in Their Own Land*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild tells the story of five years she spent in arch-conservative Louisiana bayou country, where she listened to Tea Party folks to find out why they support policies that seem to liberals to be so cantankerously contrary to the common good. She found that people in red states have been indoctrinated to feel it is government, not giant corporations, which has been responsible for their woes, because they perceive government as having helped people like immigrants, refugees, women, gay people and others to cut ahead of them in line in their hopes of achieving the American Dream.

We need a much healthier two-party system. Severe imbalances like those that existed after Trump and Pence came to power are not only unhealthy, but exceedingly dangerous to the general welfare and the national

security and peaceful coexistence. Trump has played his supporters as suckers, and has played to a "T" the role of being a divisive emotion-manipulating deceiving demagogic dictator-wannabe male chauvinist who plunged the world into unknown but not wholly uncharted paths. Let's stand up, oppose tyranny, and not go along!

Here's a better idea: Let's compromise on a whole raft of win-win solutions to problems. There are plenty to choose from. For some of the best, see *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

### Smart Strategic Initiatives

Linguist George Lakoff wrote about "strategic initiatives" in his enlightening book *Don't Think of an Elephant*. He pointed out how ideological conservatives use such strategies in which changes in one issue have automatic effects over many other issues. For example, tax cuts leave less money for social programs that conservatives disapprove of anyway. Or think about legal tort reforms designed to limit future lawsuits that enforce environmental regulations, thus rewarding business cronies with bigger profits while depriving lawyers who tend to support progressive politicians of money and reducing campaign funding for Democratic politicians.

Note that there are contrasting good examples of strategic initiatives that advance progressive causes. The Endangered Species Act, for instance. Or legislative requirements that environmental impact reports must be completed before real estate developments are approved, so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how all stakeholders will be affected. One such truly transcendent plan would be to make a sane overarching commitment to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. This farsighted initiative would serve to reduce inter-generational treachery and protect the prospects of people in the future from valuable resources being foolishly squandered at the fastest possible pace, and from the predatory behaviors of wealthy people who are abusing their ill-gotten power and driving up the national debt by means of a public borrowing/tax cut swindle.

There is one clear distinction between strategic initiatives promoted by conservatives and those advocated by liberals. Conservatives have a primary goal of maximizing profits and getting and wielding power and control, so their strategies are oriented toward pandering to rich people who push a selfish right-wing agenda, while strategic initiatives promoted by liberals tend to more honestly reflect greater concerns for the common good.

Another of the main strategic initiatives employed by Republicans is to hyper-stimulate military spending. This is a spending arena that is notoriously hard to control, or even to properly account for, because national urgency and secrecy provide a good cover for hiding waste and fraud. Such profligate spending serves to inject a big shot of adrenaline into the bloodstream of profiteers. It is easy to get people to go along with this plan by scaring them with repeated assertions of threats from abroad. This strategy allows a government to shift resources from domestic spending priorities into profit-engendering preparations for war. Similarly, parallel efforts are made to build up domestic police forces, prisons and detention facilities that may prove to be necessary to be used against the people when revolutionary turmoil arises against power-abusing authorities and the malfeasance they are perpetrating against the masses. These deceptions and deceivers distracted the public's attention from cascading scandals during Trump's time in office, making it easier for Republicans to eviscerate regulatory agencies that should protect people against financial chicanery and corporate abuses of influence and cost externalizing schemes that harm people's health and despoil the environment.

Military Keynesian ideological arguments are easy to peddle to the people, as made clear by Herman Goering, the head of Adolf Hitler's storm troopers and later of the German Air Force during World War II. Goering told a psychologist after the war, during the Nuremburg War Crime trials, that a nation's people can always be manipulated by their leaders into supporting and fighting wars, famously declaring, "Naturally the common people don't want war. But after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and for exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country."

Proof that this is a top Republican strategic initiative can be seen by a look at the "hard-power budgets" pushed during the Trump administration. Sure enough, they contained huge increases in military spending, combined

with draconian cuts to funding for regulatory agencies and State Department diplomacy. These budgets not only stimulated spending on the military and Homeland Security, but also slashed funding for conservation, oversight of federal regulatory agencies and the Executive Branch, and enforcement of accountability.

Think more deeply about the nature of these Crony Capitalist scams. First, we allow moneyed interests to have undue influence in determining our national policies and priorities, with the result that top tax rates on the highest incomes are reduced to unaffordably low levels. This contributes to spiking increases in inequality, which are stoking deep discord in the USA today, especially as the pandemic has caused horrific hardships for millions of people. Second, we allow huge corporate entities to maximize profits by squeezing employees, refusing to pay employees for overtime or sick leave, and often foisting costs of their medical care onto taxpayers. We also allow big corporations to prevent American workers from gaining any meaningful portion of increases in their productivity that have been realized in the economy since 1980. And we finance these swindles in an inter-generational debt scam that is far reaching in its unjust, unethical and risk-laden impacts. All considered, this is a consequentially serious fraud. Revealingly, this scam is facilitated by shrewd corporate executives and politicians and spinmeisters who propagate devious rationalizations and ideological dogma.

These scams constitute a betrayal of the people by the top dogs in our society, and especially by the top 1% of Americans who excessively monopolize the spoils of resource extraction and the exploitation of working people. And these swindles have an even more deplorable angle. Vested interest groups indulge in the rash ruse of cost externalizing, or "the socializing of costs". The rigged rules that govern corporate entities allow Big Businesses to foist a variety of costs onto society, with the overriding goal of artificially boosting profits. These externalized costs include polluted air and water, respiratory afflictions and other negative impacts on human health, environmental damages and destabilizing effects of greenhouse gas emissions on the global climate.

More than two-thirds of the capital gains that result from these corporate scams are received, tellingly, by the top 1%. And guess what! -- these folks pay really low capital gains tax rates on these ill-begotten profits. And even more outrageously, their heirs may pay zero percent tax on these gains after a rich person dies, because the "cost basis" of all investments is revised to their actual value at the date of death, allowing these gains to be transmitted indefinitely forward to every person who inherits any of these investments.

In the course of these swindles, humankind is brutally hacking away, dangerously and irresponsibly, at the trunk and many branches of the tree of life, severely pruning its limbs by obtusely failing to take global action to protect wildlife habitats. Sensationally, the World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report 2022* revealed that the population sizes of 10,000 representative species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish have seen an alarming average decrease of almost 70% since 1970. Some 84% of populations of freshwater species have astoundingly been lost in this short period of time, along with something like 40% of the populations of both marine species and terrestrial species. The main factors that have contributed to this dire development are mankind's reckless damaging of vital habitats in connection with our voracious exploitation of natural resources and inadequate commitment to preserving the health of natural ecosystems.

An earlier *Living Planet Report*, which is updated every two years, stated: "Our current global situation is that since the 1970s, humanity has been in ecological overshoot, with annual demand on resources exceeding what Earth can regenerate each year. It now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year. We maintain this overshoot by liquidating the Earth's resources." We must come together and say, "Enough is enough." As Utah Phillips once declared, "The Earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses."

#### An Aside on the Supreme Court

A provocative political cartoon by the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Tom Toles showed an imposing facade of the GOP SUPREME COURT with a democratic rabble in front hoisting an indignant protest sign reading NO TO TRUMP TAKEOVER OF U.S. DEMOCRACY. A protestor remarks, TRUMP GOT HIS WALL. In small editorial print at the bottom, Toles pointedly observed: EVERYBODY IS GOING TO PAY FOR THIS.

The Supreme Court failed to take a stand against the far-reaching structural corruption inherent in extreme

gerrymandering when it sided, in effect, with manipulative Big Money interests near the end of their 2018-2019 term. The court system should rightly provide stronger checks and balances against abuses of power perpetrated by state legislatures and the executive branch of government. Instead, the high court ducked this difficult issue on technical grounds and let red states create grotesquely unfair maps. In addition, the final rulings of the Supreme Court before the "swing vote" Justice Anthony Kennedy retired at the end of June 2018 were decisions to uphold the Trump travel ban, and to deal major blows to labor unions and women's reproductive rights. These were narrow 5-4 rulings that made it clear there are serious implications for our civil liberties to have the Supreme Court dominated by a narrow majority of ideologically conservative partisan judges. Congress must rightly pass new rules against partisan gerrymandering and the Big Money domination of politics.

Mitch McConnell and his Republican co-conspirators in the U.S. Senate wielded the illegitimate power-abusing tactic of denying President Obama's choice to replace Antonin Scalia with the eminently qualified Merrick Garland in 2016. They instead managed a year later to get the far right judge Neil Gorsuch appointed to a lifelong position of judicial power. The organization EarthJustice observed that the Trump administration, "through its agenda of corporate greed, its divisive and hateful rhetoric, and its inhumane policies ... has made it crystal clear that it seeks to undo the very rights and liberties we've fought so hard to achieve and defend."

When it came to replacing Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker set the tone for elected Democrats by saying outright that Trump was the subject of a criminal investigation and had conflicts of interest in choosing a new Supreme Court Justice. A new Justice should not have been chosen until after the investigation was concluded, said Booker, for the high court will be involved in issues deciding the power of the Executive Branch with respect to subpoenas, presidential pardons and other aspects of suspected collaboration by members of the Trump campaign with Russian operatives interfering in our elections, and other matters of financial malfeasance, election misdeeds, insurrectionary coup, and environmental treachery.

Anthony Kennedy was a conservative, but in some cases he sided with more liberal justices to check the zeal of social conservatives. When he retired, an already right-leaning Supreme Court was then "poised to become the most conservative institution in the entire history of America's government." That was bad news! The legitimacy of the Supreme Court is now up in the air with Trump having marched lockstep with reactionary social conservatives to cement in place extreme right-wing judicial rulings for generations. Trump nominees outside the mainstream will likely "lead to a Supreme Court that sacrifices the rights of the most marginalized people in favor of the wealthiest and most powerful Americans. Of the greatest concern are the implications for workers and consumers, a woman's right to choose, and the LGBTQ community's right to marry and live freely."

A Blue Wave in the 2018 midterm elections was a first necessary step in efforts to help curb despotic abuses of power that Trump's instincts told him he could get away with, because he had an adequate number of unprincipled loyalists and legislative and judicial collaborators to help enable his authoritarian agenda. Hearteningly, a majority of voters demonstrated in November 2018 that they prefer Congress to be a check on Trump rather than a booster for his policy priorities, and only about a third said they believed Trump deserved to be re-elected, according to polls taken before the midterm elections in Arizona, Florida and Ohio by NBC News and Marist College. "In Arizona, 52 percent of registered voters say they'll use their vote to send a message that the country needs more Democrats to serve as a check on Trump, while 36 percent said the nation needs more Republicans to pass his agenda." This was good cause for hope.

Lincoln Project Republicans forcefully advocated the defeat of Trump and Trumpism in the 2020 elections, due to the fact that they pose "a clear and present danger to the Constitution and our Republic. Only defeating so polarizing a character as Trump will allow the country to heal its political and psychological wounds and allow for a new, better path forward for all Americans." The Lincoln Project is supported by respectable Republicans like Steve Schmidt, George Conway and Rick Wilson, whose powerful voices are dedicated to protecting democracy and holding accountable those who violate their oaths to the Constitution.

#### Another Big Picture Perspective

In 1949, the English novelist and political philosopher George Orwell famously imagined a dystopian future in

London in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this epic novel, a repulsive and pervasively controlling authority-abusing Big Brother government ruled ruthlessly by brainwashing, deceiving, misinforming, exploiting and repressing the people. Fast forward to 2017 through 2021, and who would have guessed we would have an oppressive 21st century form of Big Brother government in the USA, and that it would have been led by a greedily self-serving and empathy-deficient con man Strict Father bad dad. Compounding this brutal indignity is the fact that this demagogue was a diabolically cunning master manipulator of people's emotions -- for power, money and self-aggrandizement.

Trump has made desperate efforts to distract people from the misdeeds of his self-dealing and the widespread corruption and foreign intrigue manifest during his administration. In John Bolton's book *The Room Where It Happened*, Bolton makes clear how nakedly transactional Trump's actions were, behind closed doors, and he adduced two instances of treachery in particular that involved the autocratic leaders of Turkey and China.

Trump can be seen as a manipulative charlatan who spins the news with a bizarre plethora of exorbitant lies, preposterous propaganda, diversionary claims and scandalous behaviors. He foments anger at reporters and journalists, especially on TV and social media, and during his zealous demagogic political rallies, where he blatantly tries to discredit a tremendous amount of factual reporting by repetitiously claiming that all criticisms are "fake news", and that they are promoted by a media that is "the enemy of the people." This is exactly wrong! Repetition may reinforce the "illusory truth effect", but does not make falsehoods true!

John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan both saw freedom and the welcoming of immigrants and refugees to the U.S. as core American values. They both expressed admiration for John Winthrop, a Puritan who led the first large wave of immigrants from England to North America in 1630. Winthrop referred to the first American colonies in biblical terms as being like "a city on a hill". As President-elect in 1961, JFK declared "we shall be as a city upon a hill -- the eyes of all people are upon us. ... For, of those to whom much is given, much is required ...".

And Ronald Reagan said in his farewell speech to the nation in 1989, "I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still." A great image!

Then along came Trump, and his MAGA spawn, who cunningly realized that they could gain personal power and influence -- and money! -- by acting as fear-mongering white nationalists who could ruthlessly exploit divisive strategies by blaming immigrants for our problems and using them as scapegoats.

*We the People*, in honesty, understand that this power-abusing narcissist seized the reins of power through an unbelievable litany of illegitimate means, and that he imposed upon us his own bizarrely selfish form of oppressive, outrage-engendering Big Brother authoritarian governance. This self-dealing authority figure is being propped up by rich people and a cowardly phalanx of self-serving and devious sycophants in Congress who collaborate with the hair-trigger anger, emotion-exploiting despot to take advantage of people's passions by provoking their hostility, fear, feelings of grievance and stoked resentments, and demonizing and scapegoating vulnerable asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and Muslims. Moreover, his agenda discriminated against women, children, the poor and most Americans in non-white racial minorities. In a pathologically grandiose irony, the leader of this Big Brother government was a crass celebrity who is impulsive and has a long history of being promiscuous, and who has generally treated women shabbily, to boot.

I fancy these words as representing plain truths and *Common Sense*. See the plethora of fair-minded assessments of eminent common sense contained in *Common Sense Revival, Book One of the Earth Manifesto*.

Truly,  
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
April 1, 2023



## Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy: Is the Pen Mightier than Illegitimate Authority?

October 2017, with modifications several times through March 21, 2022

We should all chuckle together at the perceptive insight contained in the wry cartoon that appeared in the New Yorker magazine right after the 2016 elections: "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." An existential Ha! Humor is good for the soul, but make no mistake about it, these are trying times for our souls, and the information and perspective in this essay could change the world, and do so in intelligent ways that could positively and providentially resolve our unfolding national political nightmare and set our nation onto a more star-spangled course than the direction in which it seems to be headed right now. At this crucial juncture in history, American citizens cannot afford to shrink from participating and engaging in our democratic decision-making. So please read on for context, in advance of a radically good common sense proposal.

Hope springs eternal, and it can be a beautiful thing. Let's seriously acknowledge that helping actualize the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the American people is strongly correlated to honest efforts to make our country fairer and more inclusive, and to share prosperity and security more broadly.

Remember, as you read these words, the perspective that Mark Twain expressed about an honorable sense of patriotism, when he wrote, "My kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders." True patriots believe that "liberty and justice for all" are not merely words for us to mindlessly recite in a pledge of allegiance to the flag, but are, in truth, basic commitments to our fellow citizens that we all desire to live together in an inclusive nation, governed by the Constitution and respect for assurances contained in the Bill of Rights and rules of law that have evolved throughout the 245 years since our colonial ancestors had the courage to declare independence from despotic rule.

Right now, we face a stark national crisis in our democracy. When wise Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the Founders had created, after the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787, he replied, "A Republic, if you can keep it." Here we are today with our democratic republic under serious threat. Please read these words carefully, and think about these ideas. This threat has arisen from faction within our society that illegitimately wield excessive influence -- wealthy persons, giant corporate entities, partisan conservatives in Congress and on the Supreme Court, social media platforms that profit by stoking people's emotions and resentments, and reactionary religious fundamentalists.

There is a valid cause for the American people to have wide-ranging concerns that crucial fairness-oriented aspects of our democratic republic are being sabotaged, and here's why. A demagogue became president of the United States in January 2017. A demagogue, according to Wikipedia, is a leader in a democracy "who gains popularity by exploiting prejudice and ignorance among the common people, whipping up the passions of the crowd and shutting down reasoned deliberation." Ominously, many demagogues throughout history had been elected to office and then "changed their democracy into some form of dictatorship." This concern is not mere hyperbole.

Alert! Ponder this idea, and understand what it is about. Democracies have one basic weakness: "because ultimate power is held by the people, nothing stops the people from giving that power to someone who appeals to the lowest common denominator of a large segment of the population." Nothing prevents them from giving power to

someone who whips up people's passions and prejudices, and takes advantage of their fears to gain support, or appeals to exclusionary tribal in-group fundamentalism, or deceives them by stimulating resentments and pandering to the basest psychological motivations of the citizenry.

"Good grief, Charlie Brown!" Our American norms and values are under concerted assault in the wake of two of the longest and most viscous campaign seasons in history in 2016 and 2020, so perhaps we all should go to Lucy's booth: *Psychiatric Help 5¢ -- The Doctor Is In*. Charlie Brown was a "lovable loser", and an ultimate survivor in overcoming being bullied, and today we all need help in healing. Let's steel ourselves against the polarization and chaotic turbulence in domestic affairs that we are experiencing, and take courageous steps to expand opportunity and reduce inequalities and injustices in our society.

Think about the possibility that the USA could become a type of authoritarian dictatorship. Donald Trump has acted like a demagogue by channeling each and every one of the twelve main methods used by demagogues throughout history, in many times and places, to gain popularity, support, loyalty and power. These techniques used by demagogues are described at length in the Wikipedia entry for "Methods of demagogues", under the general entry for Demagogue. Consider these manipulative methods in light of your own scrupulously honest impressions of exactly how Trump acted in his campaign to win elections, and what he has done in the years since he assumed power and then lost it. The twelve main tactics used by demagogues are:

- (1) Blaming the in-group's troubles on an out-group by demonizing and scapegoating others.
- (2) Hijacking people's emotions by evoking their fears to stir support and subvert rational deliberation.
- (3) Lying with little regard for facts or evidence, and wildly distorting the relative severity of dangers faced.
- (4) Rabble rousing by a cult-like force of personality who use emotional oratory at rallies to, deceive, distract, entertain and enthrall, and to inflame the passions of fanatic supporters and question the legitimacy of those who oppose them, and to provoke suspicions and even hatred of people in opposing factions.
- (5) Accusing rivals of weakness and disloyalty, and even advocating brutal violence to demonstrate strength, arguing that empathetic understanding and compassion are signs of weakness that enemies will exploit.
- (6) Promising nebulous, deceitful or impossible things to spark an emotionally motivating effect on audiences without being concerned for how such populist promises could be accomplished, and without any real intention to honor empty promises or greater good goals once in office, and secretly scheming to cheat the people.
- (7) Hurling insults and ridicule at others to intimidate them and shut down reasoned deliberation of competing ideas and plans, and make it seem reasonable to ignore the voices, needs and valid concerns of others.
- (8) Using vulgarity and demeaning nicknames, and acting with outrageous and abusive behaviors.
- (9) Engaging in folksy posturing and pretending to be like ordinary people whose support they seek.
- (10) Grossly oversimplifying issues and using deceptive slogans in election campaigns and in governing.
- (11) Bullying and intimidating critics, whistleblowers and opponents, and encouraging supporters to do the same.
- (12) Intemperately and disingenuously attacking anyone in the news media, and on social media today, that is critical of their rhetoric, strategies, policies, agenda, abuses of power or character.

Demagogues have appeared in democracies ever since classical antiquity in ancient Athens, where the idea of democratic governance was born more than 25 centuries ago. And throughout all of history, shrewd demagogues have periodically made many promises and broken them, and fooled the masses to gain power, and abused power for often self-serving or nefarious and generally socially harmful purposes.

Eric Posner, a distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Chicago, has written a book that will undoubtedly provide a valuably enlightening analysis of the tactics that demagogic leaders use to subvert the institutions that stand between democracy and dictatorship. The book, published in June 2020, is titled *The Demagogue's Playbook*. It explained the nature and dangers of demagoguery and gives readers incisive insights



into the pernicious techniques used by manipulative power-abusing demagogues to subvert democracy and change it into an authoritarian form of governing.

Posner identifies the main tenets of demagoguery, and writes. "The most tried and true method of becoming a dictator in the 20th century has been to rely on extralegal methods, typically involving a mob of supporters who use violence to intimidate opponents, whether they are journalists, bureaucrats, judges, politicians or ordinary citizens."

Mark Twain once reputedly made a relevant interesting observation: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme." The repetitious rhyme of Trump's extremely divisive, inflammatory and danger-engendering tactics should cause every American to snap to alert attention. Actions and deeds, not words and rhetoric, are what really determine the true nature of a person's character. Since many of Trump's electioneering ruses violated the public trust and came home to roost in the form of policies that are further dividing us, instead of uniting us, and are increasing the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few, the people must come together to decide what course of action to take. And they should give special attention to unconstitutional abuses of power and a blatant excess of malfeasance in the Trump administration.

"The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few is the death knell of democracy."

--- Garrison Keillor, *We're Not in Lake Wobegon Anymore*

The right thing for a president to do is to responsibly govern in the interests of all Americans. The right thing to do is to govern from the middle, with Golden Rule fairness for all, and not from an anti-democratic extreme. The right thing to do is to govern with moral rectitude and respectful concern for the interests of all the American people, and all in future generations. The right thing to do is to govern with vision and honor. In truth, our top priority should be to build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. So the right thing to do is to act to improve the economic security and well-being of more people, not just to promote and defend the privileges and financial interests of insiders who have corrupted our democracy and made it into a pathetic form of plutocracy ruled by the few, of the few, and for the few. The right thing to do is to prevent the wealth generated by working people and the exploitation of natural resources from being concentrated more and more and more narrowly into bank accounts of millionaires and billionaires.

The American people are suffering the damaging impacts of Trump's demagogic reign, and his subsequent seditious conspiracy to cling to power. The majority of Americans are concerned that he has gotten away with consequentially harmful abuses of power and the perpetuation of a crooked economic and political Crony Capitalist Con.

Make no mistake about it: Trump has acted as a Trojan horse for the top 1%, and he ran a government of, by, and for the economic elites he campaigned against. He is a con man and a conniving deceiver. His choices for his Cabinet were billionaires, hard right ideologues, anti-immigrant firebrands, anti-environmentalists, conservative military generals and anti-choice zealots, confirming this characterization of corruption. Trump supporters have been taken in by a fraud, and a shameless one, and almost everyone is destined to regret it.

As Trump proceeds with transforming his demagogic deceit and emotional manipulation into negative outcomes for the populace, it appears that he never intended to fix our rigged system, but to rig it even more unfairly.

Think about this! Politicians should try to win elections by honestly offering people good plans for improving their prospects and overall security. Instead, here is how Republicans won. Trump brazenly used devious cajolery, dishonest bait-and-switch trickery, hard-times swindles, demagogic emotional hijacking, fear-mongering, and the exploitation of racial prejudices. He hid revealing information contained in his tax returns and engaged in other insidious intrigues. Add to this the fact that the election was thrown to a Republican advantage by the intervention by FBI Director James Comey in the last 11 days before the election, and that there was treacherous Russian cyber-hacking interference in American politics and suspicious collaboration by the Trump campaign with Russian operatives, and a drumbeat of hacked private emails leaked by WikiLeaks that gave Republicans unwarranted support. A proliferation of micro-targeted "fake news", conspiracy theories and character assassinations occurred on social media platforms like Facebook that helped Republican politicians.

And Trump's rich friend David Pecker had his hands all over Trump's 2016 victory, glorifying Trump in the *National Enquirer* and persistently demonizing Hillary Clinton in screaming supermarket tabloid headlines and stories filled with gossip, character attacks and conspiracy theory propaganda. There is also the scurrilous fact that Republicans gained unfair advantages from rigging our election system through extremely partisan gerrymandering, purges of voter rolls, and voter suppression laws that Republican legislatures passed in many states after a narrow 5-4 majority of ideological conservatives on the Supreme Court chose to eviscerate key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And Trump scurrilously set fire, like a scheming firefighter who has secretly become a flagrantly unscrupulous arsonist, to the dry tinder of tribal in-group fundamentalist white identity resentments and insecurities in bid to command attention and grab power.

It seems clear that Trump won only technically, and by a tiny margin of less than a total of 78,000 votes in the three decisive states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, while losing the popular vote by three million votes. He did NOT exactly win "fair and square", and he did not win ethically, morally, or socially responsibly. And his ego-driven triumph proved to bode ill for the prospects of all our heirs in future generations.

President Thomas Jefferson set forth, in his First Inaugural Address in early 1801, the things he deemed to be "the essential principles of our Government, and consequently those which ought to shape its Administration." These importantly included "equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political," along with respect for "the decisions of the majority, the vital principle of republics, from which there is no appeal but to force," which is "the immediate parent of despotism."

Jefferson called the preservation of public faith in his stated principles sacred, and then sensibly concluded: "should we wander from these principles in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety." Let's choose fairer, more honest leaders!

### Trump Republican Follies

In the words that follow, nine primary Constellations of Reasons are adduced and examined in deliberative detail to highlight why it is so important to the American people to reject the excessive influence of Republican politicians on our national decision-making. These constellations of understandings fall into the following general categories: Fomented National Insecurity, the Biggest Financial Scam in World History, Risks Related to "the Disastrous Rise of Misplaced Power", Ideologically Twisted Perspectives on the Supreme Court, Overarching Ecological Perspectives, Harms Associated with Public Graft and Diversionary Tactics, Subsidiary Themes, *It Can't Happen Here*, A Brief History of Truth and Lies, and True American Values.

"It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do; but what humanity, reason and justice tell me I ought to do."

--- The statesman Edmund Burke

All Americans find themselves in a classic Bet Situation. We are in this situation because a consequential decision must be made that has profound practical implications regarding the future. We are confronted with this Bet Situation because (1) we are inextricably involved in the game, (2) there are many uncertainties, and (3) it is important to us in our own lives, and in the lives of our fellow citizens, that we make the most conscious, conscientious and socially responsible decisions related to the bets we are collectively making.

Let's all keep in mind the excellent guidance given to Thomas Paine by Giacinto Dragonetti. He said that our political representatives should "fix the true point of happiness and freedom" by seeking to create "the greatest sum of individual happiness, with the least national expense." LET'S TRY IT! Let's generously and reasonably enlarge our views beyond the present, and work together to usher in a golden age of greater good.

Big Picture assessments were conveyed in the *Global Risks Report 2019*, which was presented to influential members of the World Economic Forum in the beautiful Swiss mountain resort of Davos in January 2019. The top 3 risks the world faces in terms of likelihood are extreme weather events, the failure to mitigate climate change and adapt to it, and natural disasters. Also included in the top 10 risks were cyber-attacks, data fraud, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, severe water shortages, man-made environmental disasters, large-scale involuntary migration, and asset bubbles in major economies. The report also assessed the worst global risks

from the standpoint of the seriousness of their impacts, and included most of the likeliest problems along with the dangers of weapons of mass destruction, critical information infrastructure breakdown and the spread of infectious diseases. Clearly, leaders worldwide should give top priority to dealing with these risks, rather than focusing on cutting taxes and other corrupt goals of politicians and rich people. Since the most consequential set of *Global Risks* revolves around the failure to adapt to changing climate conditions caused by global warming and fueled by the emissions of greenhouse gases, this must become a top focus. A report of research done by the banking giant Citigroup in 2015 put the costs of climate change, without mitigation, at a colossal \$44 trillion by 2060. This is a compelling reason why we should demand that conservative politicians in Congress stop pursuing misguided priorities and corrupted goals, and promoting misleading propaganda, and cease denying the climate crisis and opposing remedial action, as discussed below in *Overarching Ecological Perspectives*.

Republicans, despite presumably knowing of the overarching risks we face, put their top priorities on cutting taxes, repealing the Affordable Care Act, reducing budgets that help the poor, building walls, eviscerating protections of the environment, eliminating common good regulations, and reversing many sensible health and safety rules. And they rashly oppose many of the smart things that the black man (and now Joe Biden) accomplished while in the White House. They are simultaneously amplifying the propaganda and distractions that they have been catapulting into the minds of the American people in order to rationalize this hopelessly misbegotten set of retrogressive plans and stress-exacerbating priorities.

Remember the passionate sentiments that our courageous ancestors expressed back in 1776 when they made their bold Declaration of Independence from a long train of usurpations and despotic abuses of power. They declared that it is our right, it is indeed our duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new safeguards for our future security. Today, the need is growing urgent for similar courage.

The American people should rise up together, including Trump supporters acting with a modicum of integrity, and declare that they now want strengthened checks and balances on excessive power, and broader awareness of the Republican court capture scheme that has led to appointments of ideological "originalism"-embracing conservatives to federal courts and the Supreme Court, properly directed.

The time for these important ideas has come; they are NOT, as Thomas Paine put it in his incendiary pamphlet *Common Sense*, "not yet sufficiently fashionable." When Paine advocated a new form of fairly representative government that would be virtuous because it would honestly serve the interests of all the people, he wisely focused on ideas, not specific individuals. He did this to establish his objectivity in his analysis of the "absurdity" of despotic rule. And he cleverly justified the vehemence of his arguments -- and lent his work significant gravity -- by referring to the "cause of America" as "the cause of all mankind."

--- Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, *Common Sense Revival*

### Fomented National Insecurity

"Be careless in your dress if you must, but keep a tidy soul.

--- Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar

Just five days after the 2016 national elections, Donald Trump reassured the American people on *60 Minutes* that they have nothing to be afraid of. "Don't be afraid," he said. The American people have nothing at all to be afraid of, "absolutely", he proclaimed.

Oh, really? The fact-checking organization PolitiFact assessed a large number of Trump's statements during his campaign and found that an astonishing 70% of them were either "mostly false, false or pants on fire". But this nothing-to-fear proclamation was one of his biggest deceptions of all. Consider the long litany of valid reasons that some folks have for deep concern. Since the first day of his campaign, Trump threatened millions of undocumented immigrants with deportation, and repeatedly tried to ban Muslims from the country or create a system of surveillance specifically targeting Muslim Americans and their places of worship. Trump's rhetoric and angry tweets contributed to spikes in hate crimes against Muslim Americans, Jews, Asian Americans and others. He belligerently built miles of walls on the border with Mexico, and made the American people pay for it. He endorsed torture tactics and advocated what would be war crimes under the Geneva Conventions, and his

inflammatory rhetoric boosted recruiting efforts by Islamic terrorist groups, feeding into religious prophecies of pitched battles and superstitious unreason in "End Times" beliefs.

Further, Trump declared during the campaign that he would revise libel laws, with an apparent intent of intimidating journalists and other critics, and he made concerted efforts to suppress dissent and criticize protestors who oppose his actions. His tirades against NFL football players who protest racial injustices and police brutality were especially devious. During his campaign, he threatened women who get an abortion with some form of punishment, and he unrepentantly threatened to take away rights of any woman who gets pregnant to get a safe abortion, no matter what the circumstances, despite the fact that this would cause thousands of women to die from unsafe abortions. He chose Mike Pence as his running mate, a man who is one of the most anti-choice and anti-gay politicians in America. He pushed to give gigantic debt-financed tax cuts to rich people, financed by borrowing trillions of dollars from taxpayers in every future year. This action is causing inequalities to increase and irresponsibly driving up the national debt, and undermining the hopes for personal security, prosperity and well-being of all people in the future. By championing greed-rewarding causes like this, bolstered by the Big Lie deception of the trickle-down theory, he weakened the true personal security of the vast majority of Americans -- especially the two-thirds or so of adults who have a net worth of less than \$100,000, and their families, who are already pretty darned financially insecure.

When the majority of people are made more insecure, it is easier for the ruling class to control them. Millions of Americans, of all races, genders, religions and national origin are living in economic fear and distress. More than half of all American workers are living paycheck to paycheck, and would have trouble meeting a financial emergency that cost \$1,000 or more. The type of economy that has created this highly inequitable state of affairs is a breeding ground for expanded opportunities for swindling. Studies like those conducted by Boston College's Center for Retirement Research confirm what professional con artists have always known: it is easier to take advantage of people in financial distress, so they are easier marks than more secure workers.

When people are subjected to excessive amounts of stress, they are less capable of making good choices or engaging in fair-minded rational thought. The engineers of austerity know this, and thus see a two-for-one benefit in fomenting increased inequalities and keeping the citizenry financially insecure and afraid. Reflect on this: retrogressive policies not only allow the maximization of private profits, but also force workers to feel fearful so that they will be meek in their demands for higher pay or better working conditions, or expansive rights as employees and human beings.

Trump Republicans did not do anything substantial to help students who have been burdened with huge amounts of debt. This debt has spiked in recent years, partially due to cuts in funding for public education. These cuts have forced millions of young people to work like indentured servants, struggling for decades to pay off burdensome levels of student debt incurred at excessively high interest rates on loans with overly strict terms. And Republican politicians rolled back protections of the environment, accelerating the extraction and burning of oil, coal and natural gas from public lands, and encouraging drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and offshore in the oceans off America's coasts. They gutted the Environmental Protection Agency and embarked on crusades against science and scientists. They revoked protections of National Monuments and public lands, and renounced American participation in the Paris Climate Accords, despite the fact that almost every other nation in the world made historic agreements to take steps to mitigate the disastrous impacts of extreme weather events and an altered global climate. These rashly anti-environmental actions will wreak extremely costly harms on billions of people and a large proportion of other species of life on Earth. Resistance must strengthen! Don't allow the bums to remain in power.

Donald Trump has repeatedly acted like a tinhorn dictator, as he did during the campaign by threatening to jail his opponent Hillary Clinton. He threatened the Cuban people with a hardening of the 60-year-long embargo against Cuba, which has contributed to them having suffered much unnecessary hardship. His belligerence on the international stage toward allies, and his overly friendly collaboration with authoritarian leaders in Russia, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Turkey, India, the Philippines and other countries, are stances that make the world much less safe and less free.

Trump once said, "We gotta maybe do something about the Internet ... We have to talk about, maybe in certain areas, closing that Internet up in some way." Huh? The surveillance state that George W. Bush unleashed, and that Barack Obama allowed to proliferate, is getting even more pervasively invasive, and we Americans should express our concern about this, in no uncertain terms, while we still have a democratic form of government that allows us to express our opinions.

And Trump had the temerity to disingenuously and preposterously pretend that he poses no threat to anyone. Yeah, right. "Don't be afraid," he cajoled. Ronald Reagan, faced with a questionably trustworthy geostrategic opponent, counseled "Trust, but verify." It is bizarre that Trump asserted that nobody had anything to fear after he strived so assiduously to flood the fear-alert emotional control centers of our brains with an ugly and sustained torrent of hyped up fears, taunts, suspicions, conspiracy theories, antagonisms and solipsistic tweets. Fast forward to June 2022, and all sensible citizens should reject a return of his chaotic rule, grave uncertainties, and the spiking risks that accompanied Trumpian rule.

"O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!

--- Thomas Paine

In the simplistic symbolism of old-time cowboy Western movies, the good guys often wore white hats, and the bad guys wore black hats. This visually symbolized the contrast between good heroes and evil villains. Today, it is less clear who the real good guys are. The restless citizenry, dressed in relative tatters, looks up at the nearby ridges and sees an intimidating line of men mounted on white horses, their outsized American flags streaming, all wearing the most absurdly conspicuous white hats and sitting on snorting steeds with their prominently displayed rifles cocked and having an aura of threatening authority. One of them even holds aloft a huge banner that streams in a stiff breeze, reading "Faithful and True", just like the rider in the Bible's Book of Revelation who judges and wages war.

### The Biggest Financial Scam in World History

"We have the best government that money can buy."

--- Mark Twain

Listen, Trump supporters. You have been heard, loud and clear! Almost every reasonable person would readily acknowledge that the best interests of working people have been betrayed in our political duopoly system in the past few decades. Both establishment Republicans and establishment Democrats are culpable. American workers have not been allowed to share in any meaningful portion of the big increases in productivity realized in our economy since 1980. That is a starkly pathetic contrast to the period from 1945 to 1980, when American workers received increases in their pay of about 100%, on average, as productivity roughly doubled. Obviously, the power-abusing Few have been succeeding in ripping off the Many. They are being assisted in this swindle by pandering politicians and shrewdly greedy CEOs who strive to maximize profits by squeezing employees -- and by conservative Supreme Court Justices who wrongly rendered the *Citizens United* ruling using the ridiculous rationalization that they see no corrupting influence in our campaign financing rules and the role of Big Money and Dark Money in our politics, and in lobbyist-skewed national decision making.

Revealingly, the top tax rate on the highest incomes -- those earned by only the top 1% of Americans -- ranged from 70% to over 90% each and every year from 1936 to 1980, but this rate was slashed by power-abusing rich people to 28% under Ronald Reagan. That was a radical reduction, and it has hugely contributed to the spiking increase in inequality that is understandably stoking revolutionary discontent and unrest in the USA today.

Since the days of Reagan's presidency, tax battles have been intense, and the American people have managed to nudge the top marginal tax rate back up from 28% to 37% in 2021, which is not much of a compromising move back toward 70%. Meanwhile, the net worth of the top 1% of American people has increased by somewhere in the range of \$30 or \$40 trillion -- and they have achieved this boon at the same time that the national debt has increased from less than \$1 trillion to over \$30.5 trillion in June 2022. This is all but a crime, an inter-generational scam in its consequentially unjust and highly unethical impacts. This is arguably the biggest

financial fraud in world history, and it is revealingly facilitated by ideological propagandists and media outlets like Fox News, Inc., as well as by "conservative" politicians and corporate executives.

This über-betrayal of the people by the top 1% of Americans who are excessively monopolizing the spoils of labor and resource extraction has an even more astonishingly deplorable angle. Vested interest groups are indulging in another rash ruse: cost externalizing, or "the socializing of costs". Our rigged rules that govern corporate entities allow Big Business to foist a variety of costs onto society to artificially boost profits. More than two-thirds of the resulting capital gains are received by the top 1%, and of course, they pay really low capital gains tax rates of only 15% on these spoils. Even more outrageously, their heirs pay zero percent after a person dies because the "cost basis" of all investments is revised to the asset value at the date of death, allowing these boons to be transmitted indefinitely forward to every person who inherits any of these assets.

See what's happening here. These basic facts about how our economic and political systems are rigged urge us to exit our echo chambers and seek to better understand -- and to demand much more fair-minded leadership and smart reforms. See *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways the System is Unfairly Rigged* for some enlightening understandings of the true nature of how our system works against the interests of the majority of the people.

"Truth-teller" Trump once declared, "We can't fix a rigged system by relying on the people who rigged it in the first place." He milked people's populist anger at being left behind by attacking Wall Street banks in his TV ads and campaign speeches, but then he gave his supporters a slap in the face by choosing Steve Mnuchin to be his Treasury Secretary. Mnuchin is a former Goldman Sachs executive and ruthless "foreclosure king" and believer in the Republican orthodoxy of reversing the consumer protections enacted after the 2008 credit crisis in the Dodd-Frank law governing Wall Street. He is a powerful advocate for, in effect, exacerbating inequalities and causing the national debt to spike by helping implement new tax cuts that give the lion's share of the benefits to giant corporations and the wealthiest 1%. In other words, Trump and Mnuchin are staunch defenders of provisions that will serve to perpetuate the biggest financial scam in world history.

Trump chose Wilbur Ross, a billionaire, as his Secretary of Commerce. Wilbur Ross is known as "the king of bankruptcy" due to his "legendary knack for buying troubled companies on the cheap and selling them for billions of dollars in profit." He first dealt with Trump when he was head of Rothschild's bankruptcy advisory practice and he helped Trump, in league with billionaire investor Carl Icahn, to save his Trump Taj Mahal casino hotel from financial collapse in the early 1990s.

Mnuchin and Ross pushed for the types of Bush-era economic policies that almost drove us to ruin in the 2008 economic recession, the worst since the Depression of the 1930s. Let's be real. What are the chances that these titans of our plutocracy would really adopt a laser-like focus on implementing policies that would improve the lot of the 99%? Answer: None! They deny this, but the devil is in the details -- they lie!

Mayer Amschel Rothschild, the long-ago founder of the extraordinarily wealthy Rothschild banking dynasty, once purportedly made this thought-provoking observation: "Permit me to issue and control the money of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws."

Make no mistake about it. Wall Street insiders in effect infiltrated the executive branch of the U.S. government even more than they had done in the last few decades. The stock price of Goldman Sachs zoomed up more than 35% in the first four months after election day in 2016, so Wall Street was giving a strong signal that it fully expected the Trump administration to represent windfall profits for this bank's bottom line. Wall Street effectively rejoiced, and the spike in the power of Big Banks and Big Business is reducing the influence of working class folks even more than it had been in the three decades prior to this revolting development. This was consequentially bad news for the masses. And, ominously, volatility will inevitably spike as risks skyrocket.

Trump has never been an ally to working people in his business dealings, so he was deceiving people to have claimed that he planned to stand up for working class folks. He initially chose Andrew Puzder to fill the Cabinet position of Secretary of Labor. Puzder is a wealthy businessman and big political donor to Trump who had been chief executive of a company that franchises fast-food outlets, and he was an outspoken critic of higher minimum wages and expanded eligibility for overtime pay and the worker protections enacted by the Obama

administration. Trump's nomination of Puzder was a clear indication that he wanted to facilitate the maximizing of private profits for the few at the expense of the many by wrapping the ruse in the ideological cloak of deregulation and anti-union dogma. Puzder proved to be so involved in scandals that he was forced to bow out from the prospective Secretary of Labor position in soon after he was nominated.

Jim Hightower of Texas evaluated "Trump's bizarre cabinet", and stated: "the key qualification he seeks for public service is a nominee's commitment to serving the private interests of corporate power over workers and the environment and local communities and everyone else."

#### Risks Related to "the Disastrous Rise of Misplaced Power"

Remember President Dwight Eisenhower's famous words when he warned the American people in his honorable Military-Industrial Complex speech as he left office in January 1961. He warned about "the disastrous rise of misplaced power", and strongly emphasized the importance of "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" who strive to make sure "that security and liberty may prosper together." This idea is crucial to our personal freedoms and overall well-being, especially with hard-right Republicans exerting too much influence in government today.

Bernie Sanders wrote these compelling words just after the 2016 election: "President-elect Trump is right: the American people voted for change. But what kind of change will he be offering them? Will he have the courage to stand up to the most powerful people in the country who are responsible for the economic pain that so many working families feel, or will he turn the anger of the majority against minorities, immigrants, the poor and the helpless?" The answer is clear. He sided with corporations against working people, and gave more money and privileges to the powerful. Revelations since the 2016 elections provided the American people with compelling reasons for insistently demanding that we reverse course against misguided policies. Deep conflicts of interest were exposed with Trump's far-flung business interests and lack of an asset "blind trust", and with his family's nepotistic involvement in governing. He has continued ever since to conceal his tax return information, preventing people from understanding the unscrupulous extent to which his cunning business dealings are full of conflicts of interest and malfeasance, both at home and in nations abroad. He committed fraud with his Charitable Foundation, and violated the Constitution's Emoluments Clause. His smug, stubbornly absolutist and authority-abusing stances made it clear that public graft was spiking, and this was only the tip of the iceberg.

Additionally, micro-targeting of fake news and misleading emotion-manipulating information on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter without doubt helped swing many votes to Trump Republicans. Less than 60% of Americans eligible to vote actually cast ballots in the 2016 elections, partially due to gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts undertaken by Republicans in many states over the years since the Supreme Court's narrow majority of conservatives rolled back basic protections that had been contained in the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The sad saga of Trump's Cabinet picks and chaotic mode of governing reveal that scheming politicians who controlled and defined our national direction during the period from 2017 through 2021 were nowhere near what the American people had been led to expect. The partisans elevated to power reveal that Trump would govern from the extreme hard-right and alt-right fringe, not from a position of moderation and intelligence and good plans for reform.

Some observers say that Trump assembled a crony capitalist "kakistocracy" -- domineering rule by the worst and most poorly qualified and most dishonest and unscrupulous citizens. More on this below, when Trump's Cabinet members are evaluated in greater detail.

Trump seems to be determined to fan the flames of an astonishing set of extreme inequities that has been generated since 1980 by making huge tax cuts to primarily benefits corporations and the wealthy. At the same time, he imposed a variety of austerity measures on the masses. Trump and Republicans in Congress are clearly trying to pull the wool over our eyes with one of the most egregious bait-and-switch betrayals of the American people ever. The point man on Social Security for Trump's transition team was a longtime advocate of privatization of the program, which would violate Trump's promises made that he would protect people's Social Security retirement incomes. And Republicans made concerted efforts to reduce health insurance coverage for many millions of Americans. First they tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and failing that, they resorted



to sabotaging it in five main ways, as Robert Reich made clear in his video, *Who's Trying to Kill the Affordable Care Act?* They also tried to slash spending on Medicare and Medicaid, and sneakily attempted to replace these federal programs with vouchers or block grants to states. Trump initially put Tom Price in charge of the Department of Health and Human Services, a man who was a stalwart Georgia Republican congressman who wanted to privatize Medicare. Trump thus brazenly violated his campaign promises to defend these social safety net programs.

Tom Price acted as a sexist in his opposition to a 2015 Washington, D.C. non-discrimination law that would have prevented employers from firing workers for using birth control or having an abortion. He also wanted to eliminate funding that helps provide poor women with healthcare in Planned Parenthood clinics. In an article by Richard Eskow titled *This Trump Hire is Hazardous to Your Health (And Not Just Your Medicare)*, Eskow indicated that, "If Price and Trump succeed, Medicare will no longer need to (or be able to) slow the rate of healthcare cost growth. That will hurt all ordinary Americans, regardless of age, by making their medical care more expensive." Eskow went on to point out that, under Price's plan, vouchers would cover less and less of the cost of healthcare each year, "until seniors' insurance premiums finally exceed older Americans' total Social Security income. That's why retiree and disability advocates are shocked and dismayed by this nomination."

The Alliance for Retired Americans described Price's plan as "a declaration of war on seniors, retirees and anyone who is counting on having guaranteed health care benefits when they retire after a lifetime of hard work." Nancy Altman, co-director of Social Security Works, called it "classic bait and switch," adding: "Trump ran on a promise, repeatedly made, not to cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. Price has spent years working to destroy all of these vital programs. This nomination is a betrayal of the American people." After months of trying to get rid of Obamacare, Tom Price was forced to resign due to the bad optics of his lavish use of charter flights at taxpayer's expense. Sensible folks proclaimed, "Good riddance!"

"Personnel is policy," as they say, and we should watch what they do, not what they say. Bernie Sanders, seeing the high probability that Trump would take steps to reduce Medicare benefits that provide healthcare at reasonable prices for more than 50 million Americans, asked if Trump "has any intention of keeping the promise that he made, or has he played the American people for suckers?" Note to these scheming politicians: the American people really resent being played for suckers.

Trump further blatantly betrayed the trust placed in him by millions of voters who gave him their support by initially choosing Steve Bannon, an extreme "alt-right" propagandist, to be his chief strategist and senior advisor in the White House. The alt-right pushes a reactionary strain of conservatism, so Trump was showing his true colors in this choice. Bannon is the former head of Breitbart "News", an ultra-right-wing exploiter of tensions between whites and minority groups that engages in constant fear mongering against minorities. Many reports indicate that Bannon has been an outspoken proponent of white nationalism and racist, anti-Semitic and misogynistic views, and he has cold-heartedly exploited "white identity grievance politics". It is revealing that many people who believe in the inflammatory propaganda of Breitbart "News" consider the already excessively conservative and unfairly unbalanced Fox News to be "too wimpy". Note that when demagogues scapegoat certain groups of people, like the Nazis did with Jews, it creates greater danger for all.

White nationalists have ominously been among Donald Trump's strongest supporters. In a post-election rally in Washington D.C., the "alt-right" extremist and white supremacist Richard Spencer harangued the assembled with rousing words: "We are not meant to live in shame and weakness and disgrace. We were not meant to beg for moral validation from some of the most despicable creatures to ever populate the planet." Then he shouted, "Hail, Trump! Hail, our people! Hail, victory!" And then, according to a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, "a scattered half-dozen men stood and raised their arms in Nazi salutes."

Not only have hate crimes surged across the USA in the past five years, but threats by Trump supporters have proliferated against African Americans, Latinos, Jews and gay people. Asked about such issues by Lesley Stahl on "60 Minutes" on the Sunday after the 2016 election, Trump turned to the camera and sternly said, "Stop it." But as Aasif Mandvi, the author of *No Land's Man* succinctly pointed out in an article in the New York Times, if

Trump really sincerely wanted to disavow and condemn acts like this and organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, he would do it the way he does when he feels strongly about an issue -- by spewing forth on Twitter:

"When the president-elect wants to unleash his disapproval, or his thin skin has been ever so slightly bruised, the people responsible can be sure to find themselves on the receiving end of a Twitter barrage like none other. That's what I want to see now, and I won't settle for less. The American people deserve to see Mr. Trump attack these hate groups and the people perpetrating hate crimes in his name the way he attacked the cast of the Broadway hit *Hamilton*, the cast of *Saturday Night Live*, the television personality Rosie O'Donnell, Gold Star families, the New York Times, Miss USA, the Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly, women accusing him of sexual misconduct, protesters and the I.R.S."

"We don't want a pro forma apology extracted out of him reluctantly by a reporter. We want him to feel so hurt and angry about Nazis using his name that he is up tweeting at 3 a.m."

"So let me ask you, Mr. Trump -- the cast of "Hamilton" are worth a tweet storm, but you can't muster even one tweet against neo-Nazis yelling "Hail Trump"? Nothing? Come on, I'll write you a couple of options:

"Neo-Nazis are haters and losers. Nasty people. #smallhands #lowenergy."

"White supremacists are a threat to our nation #bigleague. Worse than the #NYTimes. Only I can stop them."

"Time to retire the boring and unfunny Hitler salute, highly overrated."

Steve Bannon was finally driven from his influential position in the White House, and returned to Breitbart, where he worked to get extreme right-wing candidates to challenge Republican moderates in order to drive the USA even further toward the domineering hegemony of extreme conservatives over the American people.

Trump also betrayed his once stated intention to be a president for "all Americans" by having chosen Senator Jeff Sessions as Attorney General, for Sessions has a long history of opposing civil rights. The attorney general is the chief law enforcement officer of the U.S. government, and is in charge of the Department of Justice, which has a main mission of ensuring a "fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans." Since Sessions was not a fair-minded champion of civil rights for all, he was the wrong person for this office. Trump fired Sessions after the 2018 midterm elections, and eventually replaced him with Bill Barr, a man who acted like he was Trump's personal lawyer, rather than honestly representing the American people.

It was clear after Trump selected Bannon as his chief strategist and Sessions as his attorney general that he was not really going to try to "Make America Great Again", but more like "Make America a White, Racist, Misogynistic Patriarchy Again", as columnist Charles Blow observed. While Trump may still get strong support from many groups like angry white folks in rural areas and white supremacist organizations, he would lose majority support in a just and rational world on account of his divisively anti-worker agenda and many misdeeds. And he wouldn't have had a hope in hell of maintaining his dominating influence over the Republican Party.

"If he governs as he campaigned," presciently observed Michael Gerson, an op-ed columnist for The Washington Post just after the 2016 election, "Trump will smash the unity of our country into a thousand shards of bitterness." That seems to be coming to a pass.

Trump put the billionaire Betsy DeVos in the position of Secretary of Education. She is a proponent for private school vouchers. This was a clear sign that Trump intended to direct public funds to private and charter schools. According to Douglas Harris, a professor of economics at Tulane University, "... this is more than just a political or financial loss for traditional public schools. It will also most likely be a loss for students."

"The choice of Ms. DeVos might not seem surprising. Mr. Trump has, after all, proposed \$20 billion to finance 'school choice' initiatives, and Ms. DeVos supports these ideas. Yet of all the candidates the transition team was apparently considering, Ms. DeVos has easily the worst record, because she is one of the architects of Detroit's charter school system, so she is partly responsible for what even charter advocates acknowledge is the biggest school reform disaster in the country."

One of Trump's bizarre Cabinet picks was Rick Perry -- "Oops!" -- the folksy fossil fuel promoter who was put in charge of the Department of Energy, even though he favored dismantling it. Before leaving office, he became one of the "three amigos" who tried to help Trump in his Constitution-violating solicitation of officials in Ukraine to interfere in the 2020 election to give him a political advantage. Another pathetic member of the Trump administration was Ryan Zinke, Trump's first head of the Department of the Interior in charge of public lands. During his short stint as a congressman from Montana, Zinke had voted against protecting endangered species 100 percent of the time, and he appeared to have a particular dislike for wolves, having sent out a cartoonish Christmas card with a dead wolf and him holding a military rifle. Maybe that's normal in macho Big Sky Country? While Zinke may not have wanted to sell our public lands like many other Republicans, he voted to turn control of them over to the states, an action that would have similar damaging end results. Zinke tried to roll back protections of many National Monuments and wanted to end Barack Obama's moratorium on leasing public lands for coal extraction, and he supported more oil and gas drilling on public lands and in risk-vulnerable offshore locations, including the Arctic. And he favored stripping the authority from every future president to designate national monuments for protection. This was wrongheadedness incarnate. Good riddance!

"The worst." The pathetic kakistocracy came together, and stumbled onward, and then the ranks thinned out remarkably as the chaos president and many in his chosen staff parted company. Amarosa sang an incriminating song, and John Bolton whispered about what went on in *The Room Where It Happened*. Let's find out!

### Ideologically Twisted Perspectives on the Supreme Court

The 2016 elections were significantly influenced by one major issue: who would have the power to appoint a Supreme Court Justice to replace Antonin Scalia, who had died in February 2016, and other Justices in future years. When Anthony Kennedy retired in 2018, it set up real political fireworks because an extreme partisan Republican Brett Kavanaugh was nominated and narrowly won a terribly ugly confirmation battle, despite much information being suppressed by Republicans (and apparently by the FBI).

Consider the incisive words of the former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who served honorably on the high court for 24 years in a distinguished tenure of fair-minded service and balanced decision-making, after Ronald Reagan appointed her in 1981. Soon after she retired from the Supreme Court to care for her Alzheimer-stricken husband, O'Connor expressed how important it is for our courts to remain independent from politics, stating: "... some political attacks on the independence of the courts pose a direct threat to the constitutional freedoms of Americans." She pointed out that judicial independence is under serious attack at both the federal and state level, and astutely added, **"it takes a lot of degeneration before a country falls into dictatorship, but we should avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings."**

Think about these important words. It can be argued convincingly that conservative judges are mainly concerned with two sets of ideological stances. First, to reduce the limitations on power of big corporations and moneyed interest groups and wealthy people, often at the expense of power for the people and citizen class-action influence and rights of working people to bargain collectively for higher pay, better benefits or safer working conditions. And second, to rule in favor of Christian fundamentalists or other groups like white males at the expense of groups like women who become pregnant with a fertilized embryo in the first trimester of a pregnancy and want to be able to have a safe and legal abortion. Conservatives do not seem to be committed to the greater good or more inclusive fairness in our society.

Every person who wants our American judicial system to be dominated by conservative judges is unwittingly making a Faustian bargain with the devil. This is both a personal mistake and a national error, because it is an excess of enthusiasm for depriving others of some part of their personal freedoms while unwittingly sacrificing more expansive rights and opportunities and liberties for all. Fairer jurisprudence is needed that gives greater respect to the voice of the American people.

What Republican politicians want is ideological judges, not impartial ones. They want persons in the mold of Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas or Antonin Scalia, for they can't stand the thought of having a more progressive Supreme Court. After all, they have wealthy patrons who have big expectations in return for political donations.

Republicans want judges who will side with ideologues who say that government has no place in determining whether large political expenditures prevent corruption or "the appearance of corruption," so that no limits will be imposed on Big Money spent in our elections to purchase influence. According to OpenSecrets.org, a record \$1.4 billion of Dark Money and SuperPAC money was spent in the 2016 elections, much of it in secret. This moneyed influence has clearly distorted and corrupted our democracy. A record \$600 million flooded Senate and House races, with voters rarely knowing who contributed the money. And 94% of national House races and an astounding 96% of Senate races were won by the candidate that spent the most money. Republicans hypocritically oppose reforms that would fairly address the problems posed by our country being corrupted by Big Money in politics. The 2020 elections interestingly involved even larger sums of dark money, but they benefitted Democrats more than Republicans, so reforms in this arena should be given bipartisan support.

The Supreme Court, under a 6-3 domination by conservative Justices, severely compounds the injustices that spawned Ian Millhiser's book, *INJUSTICES: The Supreme Court's History of Comforting the Comfortable and Afflicting the Afflicted*. It is socially reactionary and morally wrong to structure our political system ever more unjustly against the afflicted in favor of comforting the comfortable! Such priorities are wrong, for they foolishly ramp up the risks of a surge in destabilizing revolutionary unrest and a doubling down on repression.

The trajectory of evolutionary change from time immemorial demonstrates that natural selection favors in-group cohesion and cooperation in human social groups, rather than excessively ruthless competition. Here is another excellent reason to reject abuses of power. It is evolutionary Right Action to seek unity in social cohesion, rather than engaging in cruel and ruthlessly anti-social exploitation of others. The principal factors that contribute to positive social cohesion are fairness, inclusivity and broadly shared well-being.

*The Lessons of History*, as summarized by Pulitzer Prize-winning historians Will and Ariel Durant, reveal that when societies have reached a tinderbox condition by having too extreme a degree of inequality, it historically has been met either with "legislation redistributing wealth or by revolution distributing poverty." In such a dangerous state, often exacerbated by corrupted courts deciding issues against the people, the risk of violent revolt increases, and such challenges to authority have generally resulted in harsh repression by police state-type forces that defend the interests and privileges of the rich. In similar straits back in Athens in 594 BCE, "Good sense prevailed; moderate elements secured the election of Solon, a businessman of aristocratic lineage", and he honorably instituted many progressive reforms that included reducing all personal debts and establishing "a graduated income tax that made the rich pay at a rate twelve times that required of the poor." The wealthy protested profusely, and riled-up radicals also complained, but in time everyone agreed that Solon's wise and fair reforms had saved Athens from revolution by the desperate poor against the jealous greedy rich.

In a starkly contrasting episode in history, the Roman Senate back in the second century BCE "adopted an uncompromising course when the concentration of wealth approached an explosive point in Italy, and the result was a hundred years of class and civil war." It seems likely that the vast majority of Americans would agree that wise and fair-minded reforms are a better plan than retrogressive policies that risk causing a long period of internecine class and civil warfare.

Solon is known as "the Father of Democracy" because of the many progressive reforms he implemented to reduce conflicts between the privilege-protecting Few and the angry frustrated Many. This wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker's historic efforts to intelligently fix the Greek economy and politics some 2,500 years ago made his penchant for wise compromise legendary, and we should honor his wisdom -- by emulating it.

Having used the words "police state" a few times, let me clarify, lest this sound like some wild conspiracy theory. Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. has lurched toward more widespread surveillance of citizens and fewer checks on law enforcement power. One protection that has been in place since 1878 is the Posse Comitatus Act, a law designed to limit the powers of the federal government so that it cannot use military personnel to enforce domestic policies within the U.S. This law is often relied on to prevent the Department of Defense from interfering in domestic law enforcement. In the annual National Defense Authorization Act signed into law at the end of December 2011, a controversial provision was included that authorized the indefinite military detention of persons that the government suspected of involvement in

terrorism, without giving the arrested person the right of being charged or being given a fair trial. This treatment could be used on U.S. citizens arrested on American soil, and one source has claimed that this provision "is tantamount to the militarization of law enforcement and the repeal of the Posse Comitatus Act."

Ever since 9/11, provisions like the Patriot Act and various new claims to power of Executive Privilege have moved us towards the establishment of a more totalitarian state, resembling an authoritarian government by the military dressed in civilian clothes. Disturbingly similar to Germany in the 1930s, basic rights and personal freedoms are being infringed upon, under pretexts that democracy is threatened and must be protected. Trust in our leaders generally assuages this concern, but now that political polarization has become so extreme and Trump proved himself to be exceedingly unworthy of trust, this threat is being seen as much more real.

The need for true positive change continues to increase, especially because our leaders have been so stubbornly unwilling to work together for the *Common Good, Properly Understood*, as evaluated from the perspective of consequential ethics and the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time.

I feel strongly that the majority of Americans have an underlying sense of decency, and that they can be persuaded with the force of reason when they are not being flooded with emotionally manipulative messaging and deceptive information. Who stands in the way? Mainly Mitch McConnell and Trump Republicans in Congress.

Note that the original purpose of this essay was to set forth broadly convincing reasons for a groundswell of grassroots energy to rise up in opposition to the unscrupulous and illegitimate authority that was being abused by the demagogic master manipulator Trump and his loyalists. My hope at the time was to thereby resoundingly convince Electoral College electors not to choose Donald Trump when they met on December 19th, 2016. After this fateful date came and went without Electors having taken an expansive view of their important Constitutional responsibilities, my revised purpose was to seek to have Vice President Joe Biden get the U.S. Senate to confirm the moderate and exceptionally well qualified judge Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court on January 3, 2017 during the transition of power from the last Congress to the next one. This action would have served as a last bulwark against demagogic abuses of power that threatened our cherished freedoms, as clearly set forth in my *Open Letter to Vice President Joe Biden* at the time.

Republicans owed all Americans this one fair-minded reassurance to establish a last "check and balance" that would have served to protect our personal liberties and general well-being. They owed us this because of the rudely illegitimate litany of ways that they used to gain domineering power and to steal a Supreme Court seat, at the long-term expense of fairer jurisprudence for the people.

Here was a powerful reason to maintain an independent judiciary -- the American Civil Liberties Union stated before the 2016 election that Trump represented "a one man Constitutional crisis". According to the ACLU analysis, all of Trump's rhetorical proposals taken together would violate the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution in the Bill of Rights, so Trump in many respects appeared to be part of a devious plot against the best interests of the vast majority of the American people, and he presented a clear and present danger to our personal freedoms and democracy. The potential for tyranny is palpable, and his budget proposals and tax cut priorities confirmed the fears of many people that he would govern in favor of the 1%, not the 99%. And since losing the 2020 election, as revealed by the bipartisan January 6 House Committee.

Political authority depends on legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, and Trump's loss of the popular vote by almost 3 million votes, coupled with other pathological aspects of his character, means that his legitimacy hung by a thread. In far too many ways, the use of demagogic tactics to gain power renders illegitimate the authority that Trump and his cabal of cronies imposed over the American people.

### Overarching Ecological Perspectives

Professor Jared Diamond made a valuable observation in his insightful book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. He contended that a paradigm shift is needed in how our leaders think and act, that we need leaders with "the courage to practice long-term thinking and make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions." Hallelujah - the time is now!

One thing we need to do to save ourselves is to try harder to save the planet. A false dichotomy exists "between economic prosperity on the one hand and environmental protection on the other", as Robert Kennedy once observed. He noted ruefully how foolish it is for us to treat our home planet like a business in liquidation by striving to convert natural resources to cash as quickly as possible. "Environmental injury is deficit spending", he said. "It's a way of loading the cost of our generation's prosperity onto the backs of our children."

The Trump family's stances against taking actions to prevent climate disruptions are extremely irresponsible and contrary to these understandings. Recall that Donald Trump and his three adult children all signed an open letter printed in the New York Times in 2009 that urged President Obama and world leaders who were headed to international climate negotiations in Copenhagen to act on climate change. Get this! The letter stated, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." But once the Trump family realized they could gain great political advantages by aggressively siding with polluting fossil fuel industries, it began to reprehensibly pander to such companies by appointing climate change deniers to positions of power. This pathologically contributed to probabilities that we will suffer "catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet". Grotesque greed!

These understandings were given glaring emphasis when Trump named Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt had been a leader in the fight AGAINST efforts by the EPA to rein in carbon pollution and protect clean drinking water. Like his fellow Oklahoman Jim Inhofe, he is a climate change denier and was a close ally of fossil fuel industries, defending their interests in order to obtain big political contributions, and then subverting fair representation of the best interests of the people. Scott Pruitt's turbulent tenure at the EPA was a disaster for our hopes of maintaining a safe home planet for our children and our grandchildren, and for all persons to be born in the future. Good riddance to him.

Crony capitalism seemed to get worse than ever before, with so many rich people in Trump's Cabinet. His choice of Exxon Mobil Corporation Chief Executive Officer Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State confirmed this concern, and set up "a confirmation battle with U.S. lawmakers who have questioned the oilman's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin." Trump made the announcement hours after he unexpectedly delayed a planned statement on how he would separate himself as president from the far-reaching conflicts of interests associated with his business activities. There were deep conflicts of interest related to having the chief executive of a giant oil company act as the top diplomat and architect of foreign policy. It is chilling to realize that Tillerson "favored doing business in countries that offer political stability, even if this stability was achieved through authoritarian rule," as Steve Coll, author of *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power*, once wrote. Good riddance to him. His replacement, Mike Pompeo, was a hawkish hard-liner, and a co-conspirator in the Ukraine Plot that resulted in Donald Trump being impeached in the House the first time.

Trump also stoked concerns in his choice of Rick Perry of Texas as his Secretary of Energy, putting the former oil-state governor atop the agency that helps chart the nation's energy future. Rick Perry was the presidential candidate who stammered 'Oops!' after famously failing to remember one of three federal government agencies he proposed to eliminate during a Republican presidential debate in 2011. Later he realized that it was the Department of Energy he wanted to eliminate, ostensibly to get rid of any limits on his profit-maximizing cronies in Big Oil and other fossil fuel industries. He appeared to have fallen under the spell of the Goddess of Irony, as well as the thrall of Russia's autocratic leader Vladimir Putin. "Oops!" might be an exceptionally appropriate exclamation for the American people to utter in the glaring spotlight of the consequential implications of Trump's chaotic and power-abusing rule -- and his subsequent post-election lies about election fraud and his political rallies and deceitful proclamations.

We should find much better ways to make our government dramatically more trustworthy by making it more fairly representative of all Americans, rather than letting fat, greedy foxes rule the roost in the henhouse. Yet Trump named agency heads who were ideologically opposed to the purposes and mission statements of the agencies they were given responsibility to lead. This was simply wrong.

The most important premises of the Earth Manifesto involve ecological issues. Trump is dangerous in this arena because his positions on environmental issues reveal that he will go down as the most anti-environmental

American leader in history. A leading climate change denier, Myron Ebell, ran the Environmental Protection Agency transition team for Trump. Ebell is a professional climate change denier with no scientific experience. Intense suspicion was cast on his "integrity", due to the fact that an organization he led took millions of dollars from Exxon and other giant fossil fuel conglomerates to promote doubts and deceptions about climate change.

Insidiously destabilizing environmental damages are being caused by the effects of billions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions that are being spewed into the atmosphere each year. This will cost trillions of dollars in coming years, and wreak widespread harms on Earth's biosphere. Allowing these costs and associated mounting risks to be externalized onto society, instead of being included in the prices of products and services that generate these emissions, is a consequential swindle that can no longer be accepted. This is why an impressive coalition of prominent economists advocates sensible Pigouvian taxes -- like a fee on carbon -- that would internalize the costs of emissions and thereby reduce the amount of them generated.

In light of such big picture understandings, it was unconscionable for Republicans to roll back President Obama's Clean Power Plan, which was a laudable effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to try to scrap a litany of other "unnecessary" rules imposed on the oil, gas and coal sectors. Trump Republicans instead pushed to open more federal lands for logging, coal mining and drilling for oil and natural gas. These plans foolishly violated the realization by an overwhelming consensus of scientists and experts that 80% of fossil fuel reserves should be left in the ground during the remainder of this century to preserve a habitable world and prevent ocean acidification and costly rises in sea levels that will flood tens of millions of people out of their homes, and gosh even inundate some of Donald Trump's coastal golf courses.

One of the most dangerous of Trump's actions was to make the USA a rogue nation on the international stage. He vowed to cancel billions of dollars in U.S. commitments to the UN Green Climate Fund, which is helping people in countries adversely affected by global warming to deal with adversities caused by the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This stance was belligerently lacking in empathy, in light of the fact that the U.S. has contributed the most of any country on Earth in driving the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from under 300 ppm in pre-industrial times to over 420 ppm in 2022. While Trump thundered on about making America First, he was being harshly and arrogantly unjust to vulnerable people in other nations in doing so. This is particularly true with regard to climate injustices. It is clear that the United States should pay a proportionally larger amount of the costs required to cope with the impacts of extreme weather events around the world, so that poorer countries that disproportionately suffer climate-related hardships will be covered by those who contributed the most to causing these hardships.

As of November 2016, the Green Climate Fund had raised more than \$10 billion in pledges from 43 national governments to address some of the big challenges highlighted by the "climate justice" movement. Then Trump figuratively gave the finger to everyone in other countries by reneging on the U.S. portion of this already inadequate commitment to help mitigate the on-rushing adversities associated with climate disasters.

Trump recklessly emulated the Captain of the Titanic, who steamed full speed ahead in treacherous waters on the Titanic's maiden voyage. Unfortunately for the majority of the American people, we are trapped below in lowly third class, and we will be among the ones at the greatest risk when disaster strikes. Ironically, the Titanic was powered by burning coal, and Trump bucks scientific better sense by pandering to coal producers and other big fossil fuel mega-corporations, and he doesn't seem to give a damn about the consequences.

The *RMS Titanic* carried some of the wealthiest people in the world, along with hundreds of immigrants seeking a new life in North America. The lives of all aboard were endangered by the Captain's hubris. The Titanic did not have enough lifeboats to accommodate all the passengers and crew, due to outdated regulations on maritime safety. Trump was ironically eager to eliminate regulations on Big Business and rich tycoons that run huge corporations in order to create bigger private profits in the short run. This is a brazen plan that unfortunately rashly put the health and security and well-being of everyone in jeopardy.

Feeling helpless in the face of a powerful adversary can be discouraging, but when we see that there is a good course of action we can take to dramatically improve the world, it can inspire us to positivity and resolve. There



would be poetic justice if the strengthening movement to challenge the legitimacy and rightness of excessive influence by Trump Republicans actually became an overwhelming force in peaceably preventing them from getting elected and staying in office.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to throw off the yoke of established interests that have betrayed them, and to stand up against the scheming cadre of oppressors who seek to further deprive them of a fair voice in national planning and a fair share of the profits engendered by the fruits of their labors, and even to deprive them of some of the civil liberties that have been guaranteed to all Americans in our Bill of Rights, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to their demands to be heard and to have their opinions respected, and to have their best interests and the general welfare taken into account as the highest priority of those who govern.

In honor of the Rights that should be unalienable to all Americans, including the rights to liberty, justice and the reasonable opportunity to pursue happiness and share in the aspirational dream of a better future, strong efforts must be made by our representatives to secure these rights. Recognizing that our government was instituted by our Founders to derive its legitimacy and just powers from the consent of the governed, let us now declare our unity and inter-dependence with the vast majority of Americans by demanding that our national priorities be altered so that 99% of the people have much more power, and the power-abusing 1% have less power. Let us lay the foundations of this new agreement with the American people on golden rule reciprocity principles and time-honored values that we share, and let us make sure these new provisions are ones that the vast majority will regard as honestly most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Let's make it abundantly clear that we will no longer suffer the evils of despotism, and set forth exactly why we reject the long train of abuses and usurpations that have served to undermine our common cause in the greater good. This is our right, and it is indeed our duty to establish new safeguards for the general welfare and our mutual security, and the best interests of our descendants in future generations.

#### The Harms Associated with Public Graft and Diversionary Tactics

For decades, giant corporations, particularly including tobacco, coal, oil, chemical and biotech companies "have poured billions of dollars into an international misinformation machine composed of think tanks, bloggers and fake citizens' groups," according to George Monbiot in *Frightened by Donald Trump? You Don't Know the Half of It*. The purpose of all this spin was to portray the interests of the common people as being the same as the interests of billionaires, and to wage war against unions and beat down attempts to regulate businesses and tax the very rich. "Now the people who helped run this machine are shaping the government" in 2017 thru 2021.

Trump's strategy of blaming the woes of American workers on immigrants and bad trade deals with other countries was cunning, but this is another plank in the scam that prevents people from understanding that the main culprits in the hardships endured by working people are giant corporations abusing their power and depriving workers of better compensation for their work and profit-enhancing increases in their productivity. Conniving rich people are conspiring with big business executives in this effort to control our country and dictate our national policies. And they are contributing to drive up inflation in 2022.

A classic example of how political corruption is adversely affecting the American people through the lobbyist-driven formulation of bad laws can be found in a "21st Century Cures" bill, which a lame-duck Congress passed in the waning days of the Obama administration. It was a reasonably good bipartisan medical innovation law that would invest in medical research, deal with mental health issues, protect genetic privacy for patients, improve foster care and provide funding for efforts to fight cancer. But it was hijacked by Big Pharma and moneyed Republican donors. According to details provided by Senator Elizabeth Warren, lobbyists for these business interests inserted provisions in the law that would make it easier for big drug companies to give kickbacks, commit fraud and put patient's lives at higher risk. This is just another example of corporate abuses of power, similar to provisions contained in the Medicare Prescription Drug Act entitlement that Republicans created in 2003, which has cost American taxpayers more than \$1 trillion and prevented the Medicare program from negotiating volume discounts or favorable pricing for prescription drugs, or to choose much less expensive generic drug alternatives. The obvious intent of this socially foolish provision was to give bigger profits to Big

Pharma, even though this was accomplished by foisting higher costs on taxpayers and driving up public obligations for the national debt.

"It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress."

--- Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar

The heated anti-establishment mood of the American people stunned many observers during the long 2016 election process, and it sure makes one wonder how incumbent politicians could have gotten re-elected at such an incredibly high rate despite Congress being regarded with nearly the lowest approval ratings in all of American history. The unwarranted influence of Big Money is transparently responsible.

It is helpful to cultivate a healthy awareness of the largest possible context of big picture understandings in these matters. The most persistent ideological conflict in modern history is the struggle between Capital and Labor. It was this mega conflict that sparked the philosophies set forth in Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, which in turn became a source of the dominating ideological and political conflict during the incalculably costly Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Capital had been roaring until 1929, when its excessive speculative risk resulted in the severe economic depression of the 1930s. This crash forced capitalists to face the necessity of going along with the creation of a New Deal safety net to help cope with the terrible economic adversities that resulted. Capital then had to bide its time after World War II until a new champion in the person of Ronald Reagan came along to help it reassert its domineering hegemony over working people.

Democracy has this weakness of being susceptible to an insidious domination by rich people, who transform it into a plutocracy in which the Few are the primary beneficiaries of the economy, and the Many are relegated to the ranks of the oppressed. When this state of affairs prevails and becomes too extreme, increasing inequalities and injustices create justified anger. This is a good time to remember the words of Plutarch, a Roman historian and philosopher, who warned that an "imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all Republics." Let's positively improve our collective prospects!

The Republican Party has gained dominance by cunningly stoking hot button culture war issues while single-mindedly betraying the best interests of the people. They have given top priority to interests of rich people, conservatives and the rights of big corporations and banks to abuse the power of their moneyed influence. After these interest groups gained almost unchecked power by fooling people into thinking Trump would drain this particular swamp, we should now remember that domineering power always tends to corrupt, and our unfairly rigged system is too corrupt, and risks are spiking that even worse revolutionary unrest will stalk the land in reaction.

A united country would be nearly impossible to hijack into supporting the financial and social scams described in this essay. This is why extremely divisive tactics are used to keep people from uniting on common ground. In addition to stoking hot button wedge issues, another even more unconscionable ploy is used to divide people and divert their attentions from domestic woes -- waging preemptive wars and engaging in aggressive military exploits and scaring people into supporting arms buildups and intelligence agency intrigues to thwart hyped up fears of threats from abroad. This strategy has the additional benefit for those who gain from a hyper-divided populace of stimulating opportunities for profiteering, and rationalizing military Keynesian federal spending that drives up the national debt to finance such intrigues.

The top national priority of Republicans for decades has been to gain power by reducing taxes on people at the top. This is an extraordinarily wrongheaded highest priority. This is a cold calculus that benefits politicians who push this agenda by engendering lavish financial support for their careers. But this bribery corruption is a tragedy that undermines the common good. The Trump administration made a huge mistake by continuing to march to the drumbeat of scheming orthodoxies like this, and it led toward disaster. The American people want positive change, not crippling reactionary change.

Robert Reich made a surprising revelation in an article he wrote in December 2015 titled *The Revolt of the Anxious Class*: "Last year two highly-respected political scientists took a close look at 1,799 policy decisions

Congress made over the course of over twenty years, and who influenced those decisions. Their conclusion: "The preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." We must change this to preserve our democracy. Let's "drain the swamp"!

Tens of millions of Americans justifiably feel that our political system is rigged, and that they are personally shut out of the political process due to the unfair influence of Big Money in our elections, and of lobbyists in our national decision making. Everyone should recognize that our great experiment in democracy has become "a sham equality of votes nullified by a gaping inequality of wealth." But it need not stay this way. All Americans should strongly support democracy reforms such as public financing of elections, the restoration of voting rights for all citizens, and new laws that overturn the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling that allows undue influence of money in our elections and law-making, and in determining our national priorities. Move to Amend!

I seriously doubt that even a few percent of Americans would claim that they intended to give a mandate to Trump to enact a tax plan that would give families earning less than \$50,000 a tax break of under \$1,000 while giving the average millionaire a tax cut of over \$300,000. The fact of the matter is that such tax cuts are being financed by borrowing money, rapidly increasing our dangerously large national debt. And I seriously doubt that there are many Americans who favor eliminating Estate Taxes levied on the 2 out of every 1,000 Americans who are rich enough under current law to owe any tax at all on the inheritances their families will receive after they die.

Republicans rationalize their priority of giving debt-financed tax breaks to rich people by claiming that the action will create jobs and stimulate the economy so much that they might even pay for themselves. But in reality, borrowing to enrich the already rich has the opposite effect from creating jobs. What really creates jobs is when the majority of people are better off, not the 1%, because demand for products and services creates economic expansion, rather than falling demand caused by the relative destitution of the masses. By slashing taxes and reducing government revenues, pressure builds to reduce government spending, so jobs are eliminated and suppliers of goods and services experience declines in demand, and the economy falters. As the insightful billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer made clear in *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, this ratchets up the risks of widespread social unrest and violent revolution. Not good!

Another fact is that when the federal government borrows a huge sum of money like another \$1 trillion to finance tax cuts, it will cost taxpayers in future years \$1 trillion in interest expenses every 15 or 20 years or so, over and over and over and over again, even without paying back a penny of the principal borrowed. So it is a very shortsighted scam that is treacherous to all people in the future. It is a sad form of intergenerational betrayal of taxpayers forever hereafter to cut taxes today merely to pad the bank accounts of the wealthy.

What really happens when taxes are cut to primarily benefit the wealthy is that wealth becomes more highly concentrated in the hands of the few, and power becomes more narrowly concentrated, and inequalities and social injustices increase, and the risks of revolutionary fervor become more intense, and the government takes steps toward repressive measures to enforce the spiraling unfairness associated with this outcome. This makes such plans dangerously wrongheaded.

Investors in U.S. equities have driven the U.S. stock market to record highs in the past five years, temporarily blind to the increasing risks associated with the profit maximizing, cost socializing, anti-regulatory, climate action eschewing, resource plundering green light that they see shining with an illusory and phony patina before their eyes. But this giddy fervor will turn to anxiety, doused by the cold reality of what these actions really portend. This does not bode well for our country.

Barack Obama managed to preside over the economy during a period from February 2010 to the end of his respect-worthy tenure in office in which there was a net increase in private sector jobs for an all-time record 84 months in a row, with something like 15 million jobs created. One contributing factor to this great record was a moderately more progressively structured tax system that was put into effect in 2014 when tax rates on all earnings over \$450,000 for a married couple were increased from 35% to 39.6%. Trump Republicans

regressively cut this rate to 37%, which is having the opposite effect, and may eventually lead to another economic downturn or disastrous debt crisis.

There is a deep element of truth in the O'Rourke observation that Republicans are "the party that says government doesn't work, and then they get elected and prove it." But the 2016 and 2020 elections were no ordinary ones, due to their consequential implications for the future of humanity. Early anti-capitalist critics like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context, and that social justice should be accorded higher priority than maximizing private profits at the expense of the public. Today we are seeing that both economics and ethics must rightly take into account ecological values. Trump Republicans threaten to brashly torpedo these understandings, violating most decent codes of ethics and sacrificing the environment to goose profits in the short-term. This may bring democratic fairness to an ignominious end.

Corporate entities are amoral by design. The two primary purposes of corporate entities are to maximize private profits and shield management and owners from liability and social responsibility for their actions. To augment these narrow purposes, taxes on corporate entities were slashed by 40% in December 2017, helping increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Many of the rules that limit big businesses from abusing their influence were eliminated. Protections of the health of corporate employees were reduced, and workers' collective bargaining rights were undermined. Excessive exploitation and depletion of natural resources was encouraged, and toxins and pollutants were allowed to be more easily dumped into the environment, wreaking unreasonable damages on the ecological commons. Fossil fuel industries benefitted by opposition to climate action.

Joel Bakan, in his insightful book *The Corporation - The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, provides a compelling understanding of the sometimes psychopathic character of corporations in their dealings with people and their employees and the environment. In *The Corporation*, a film based on the book, a psychologist and FBI criminal profiler named Dr. Robert Hare describes the many ways corporate behavior closely corresponds to a checklist of characteristics that the World Health Organization uses to define psychopathic personalities in individuals. These characteristics include a callous lack of concern for the feelings of others and a reckless disregard for public safety, and acting in deceitful ways, distorting facts repeatedly, conning others for profit, exhibiting an inability to experience guilt or remorse, and failing to conform to social norms regarding lawful behavior. Trump Republicans seem to want to remake Americans in this sordid image.

Humankind is at a critical crossroads where concerns about the ecological underpinnings of all prosperity and sustainable well-being are mounting, and we need leaders who acknowledge the crucial importance of giving higher priority to issues like social justice and protections of the environment. Instead of choosing leaders most likely to lead us in the right direction on big issues like this, we have been railroaded into choosing the opposite, i.e. industry apologists who want no limits on their power to exploit workers and natural resources. Such ideological extremists act as puppets of the rich. They resemble dastardly deceivers who promise one thing but are loyal mainly to their own career ambitions. These *Conservatives without Conscience*, as John Dean has provocatively written, tend to be believers in uncompassionate and repressive Strict Father paradigms, and radical opponents to the more socially responsible constellation of attitudes and values emblematic of honorable Nurturing Parent worldviews, as insightfully articulated by linguist George Lakoff.

Republican politicians have been the main ones responsible for the current catastrophic status of the American electorate. Not only have they stoked inequality with their huge regressive tax breaks in favor of the rich and worked tirelessly to decimate the collective bargaining rights of working people, but they have also been the biggest boosters of trade deals that have sent millions of jobs abroad and reduced real wages and driven illegal immigration. They were the anti-regulatory engineers of the financial crisis of 2008, and of resulting impulses of austerity that have made millions of Americans more insecure and saddled students with huge debt obligations. They spent 8 years undermining every effort President Obama made to improve the prospects of working people and Americans citizens in general. They have contributed mightily to the creation of the class of American voters who distrust their federal government and are antagonistic to it.

Trump supporters who feel left behind by the events of the last several decades, and particularly since the recession of 2008, were roundly betrayed by Trump and his administration. What really trickles down to them is more hard times swindles and austerity, and a risk-laden spike in the national debt, and stoked antagonisms and a more grievous repression required to enforce the increasing inequities and injustices associated with the poorly constrained agenda of "conservative" wealthy people.

Consequentialist ethics would say that despotism is deplorable in degrees, depending on how many people a tyrant adversely affects and the severity of the oppression and the exact nature of the injustices perpetrated.

In perusing these words, I encourage readers to maintain a bigger perspective. Consider every issue from the fair perspective of consequential ethics, and evaluate the merits of any decision or course of action by an honest assessment of the most likely impacts it will have on the most number of people over the longest period of time. This is common sense. It is a respect-worthy utilitarian philosophy that values decisions made in the interests of what is most likely to be the greatest good. This was a guiding philosophy of Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, who applied this honorable principle to the management of American public forests soon after Theodore Roosevelt created the Forest Service in 1905. This perspective was an early translation of the golden rule ethic of reciprocity into a visionary guiding principle of precautionary action.

In French, the noun *trompeur* has a meaning of "one who deceives or misleads." Trump has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that he is, in both word and in deed, a *trompeur*. One is tempted to mildly swear, "You're Joshing me", as some have said in reference to a deaf mute counterfeiter named Josh Tatum during the Gilded Age in 1883. Trump peddles a phony patina of honest rectitude -- "I'm a truth teller. All I do is tell the truth." But this assertion is belied by the nonpartisan fact-checking organization PolitiFact's assessment of a large number of Trump's statements during his campaign, in which it found that an astonishing 70% of them were either "mostly false, false or pants on fire" lies. Seventy percent! And during his time in office, he made more than 30,000 false or misleading claims. What this really means is Trump actually "tells it like it isn't."

"Thou shalt not be dishonest" may not be one of the Ten Commandments, but it is crucially valuable to evaluate important issues from the viewpoint of honestly understanding the consequence of a course of action. The worst aspect of Trump's leadership was that he undermined the common good, properly understood. His backward stance on environmental issues was especially anti-democratic because he favored allowing despoliation of the environment merely so that private profits could be maximized by allowing large amounts of costs to be socialized onto other Americans, and onto billions of folks around the world, and inevitably onto countless of our descendants forevermore. Need resources, anyone? Appreciate clean air and clean water? Care about coral reefs? Love untrammelled wilderness areas? Enjoy peaceful coexistence? Or even just want to help preserve coastal property values from draconian declines?

Let us eat the fine fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and see with startling clarity the true nature of right and wrong. The Bible tells us in the Ten Commandments that two of the most important ethical principles are to not commit adultery and to not covet thy neighbor's wife. While there may be some wisdom in these prohibitions, a much more important understanding of Right Conduct can be found in consequential ethics, because the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of any conduct is found in how broadly beneficial or negative the consequences of one's actions are on the lives of others. Actions that wreak widespread hardships on tens of millions of Americans and undermine the well-being of all of humanity in the future are a lot worse than a petty crime like stealing or coveting thy neighbor's sexy wife. It is far worse than coveting one's neighbor's wife to covet money and power so much that one ruthlessly uses a devious bait-and-switch scheme to rip off untold numbers of people by going all-in to ramp up financial swindles like those outlined above as "the Biggest Financial Scam in World History".

Let's think like a business person for a moment, and one who sees a bigger picture than just making money no matter what the costs or harms. It is just wrong to allow rich people to continue to engage in this historic financial scam of abusing the power of their moneyed influence to get politicians to rig our tax system to give them low tax rates, financed by borrowings from the public, as they have been doing since Ronald Reagan. It is wrong because the bottom line result of this scam has been to add almost \$30 trillion to the national debt since

1980, and to constrain spending on public education, opportunity, healthcare and other provisions of our social safety net that provide a modicum of security to the two-thirds of Americans who live paycheck to paycheck.

Thomas Paine lent perspective to a juncture like this when he wrote, "'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of Continental union, faith and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read in it full grown characters."

### Subsidiary Themes

We live in a shallow short-attention-span "sound-bite society" where impulsive tweets helped get a brash real estate developer and reality TV celebrity anointed as president. The renowned feminist Gloria Steinem wrote in the Introduction to her thoughtful book *My Life on the Road*, "What we're told about this country is way too limited by generalities, sound bites and even the supposedly enlightened idea that there are two sides to every question. In fact, many questions have three or seven or a dozen sides. Altogether, if I'd been looking at nothing but the media all the years of my travels, I would be a much more discouraged person, especially given the notion that only conflict is news, and that objectivity means being evenhandedly negative."

Due to demographic trends, Gloria Steinem points out, the majority of Americans will be of non-Caucasian descent within thirty years or so. This is one reason a white nationalist backlash aided Trump in gaining power. Steinem writes that the sense of identity of many Americans depends on an old "white male Christian hierarchy", and their willingness to vote for a stunningly flawed candidate for president may be a choice made from guilt and fear. They may imagine, "*What if I am treated as I have treated others?*"

Steinem adds: "... with all the power and money that is behind it, this backlash could imprison us in a hierarchy all over again." This prescient observation, made in 2015, casts a bright light of illumination on what happened in the 2016 elections. The old white male hierarchy seized power, through unscrupulous means, with the clear intent of consequentially abusing this ill-gotten power. To hold onto this power, given the illegitimacy of its methods and the betrayal of trust being revealed in deceits about how it governed, the authoritarian leaders in this hierarchy held onto power only by imposing a variety of abusive and repressive measures, because the fundamental premises of authorities in this hierarchy are not fairness and inclusiveness, but rather defensive fear that the coming minority status of white people could result in the new majority treating the power abusers in ways similar to the way they have treated all other minorities.

Theodor Geisel, popularly revered as Dr. Seuss, was a writer and author of children's books who created political cartoons early in his career that showed a passionate opposition to fascism. Geisel portrayed the fear of communism as overstated, and found bigger threats to the American people in Senator Joseph McCarthy's power-abusing witch-hunt and House Un-American Activities Committee investigations in the 1950s, which targeted communist sympathizers, liberals, intellectuals and Hollywood screenwriters, directors and producers.

Many of Dr. Seuss' books commendably express his views on a remarkable variety of social and political issues. This includes the dangers of environmental despoliation in *The Lorax*, and the crazy human prepossession with materialism and consumerism in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and humorous criticism of authoritarianism and arrogance in *Yertle the Turtle*, and the insanity of the arms race in *The Butter Battle Book*, and the merits of racial equality in *The Sneetches*, and the anti-social risks of isolationism and virtues of positive involvements as responsible members of the international community in *Horton Hears a Who!*

One of the most famous rhyme-ers of all  
Was Dr. Seuss, who among men always stood tall  
He cared greatly about real social justice  
So it is time for us all today to honestly discuss this  
For "NOW comes an act of Enormous Enormance!  
No former performer's performed this performance!"

Artists and writers are often the subject of intimidation and repression by authoritarian leaders because they often stand for Right Mindfulness in speaking truth to power. It is, however, generally in society's best interests to cultivate critical thinking and valiantly make commitments to protect the freedom of expression. This is why whistleblowers and organizations like the non-partisan Center for Investigative Reporting are so important for the health of our democracy.

Masha Gessen is a writer who studied Vladimir Putin and other totalitarian rulers, and was inspired to pen the provocative book *Autocracy: Rules for Survival*, in which she noted soon after Trump was elected that we should not pretend that America is starting from scratch and its president-elect is a clean slate, or that "we owe him an open mind." Trump, after all, promised the whole litany of hard-line stances like opposing minimum wages, deporting millions of immigrants, creating a system of surveillance specifically targeting Muslim Americans, building a wall on the Mexican border, and advocating war crimes, endorsing torture, and threatening to jail his election opponent Hillary Clinton.

"The national press is likely to be among the first institutional victims of Trumpism. There is no law that requires the presidential administration to hold daily briefings, none that guarantees media access to the White House. Many journalists may soon face a dilemma long familiar to those of us who have worked under autocracies: fall in line or forfeit access. There is no good solution (even if there is a right answer), for journalism is difficult and sometimes impossible without access to information."

"The power of the investigative press -- whose adherence to fact has already been severely challenged by the conspiracy-minded, lie-spinning Trump campaign -- will grow weaker. The world will grow murkier. Even in the unlikely event that some mainstream media outlets decide to declare themselves in opposition to the current government, or even simply to report its abuses and failings, the president will get to frame many issues. Coverage, and thinking, will drift in a Trumpian direction, just as it did during the campaign -- when, for example, the candidates argued, in essence, whether Muslim Americans bear collective responsibility for acts of terrorism or can redeem themselves by becoming the "eyes and ears" of law enforcement. Thus was xenophobia further normalized, paving the way for Trump to make good on his promises to track American Muslims and ban Muslims from entering the United States."

Because Trump lashed out verbally at every critic and made rude insulting attacks on Mexicans, immigrants, Muslims, women, disabled people, prisoners of war, Gold Star military families and Democrats, there was little doubt whether he would abuse the power of the presidency by lashing out with chilling authoritarianism, starting with immigrants and the intimidation of Americans who exercise their First Amendment-guaranteed freedom of expression and rights to protest. He engaged in retributive actions against media outlets that criticize him, and against lawyers, judges, patriots and politicians who oppose him. During his time in office, there was a catastrophic collision of white supremacism with the demographic reality of growing racial and ethnic diversity in the USA and the world.

President Theodore Roosevelt made it clear that criticism of elected leaders is justified when he stated: "The President is merely the most important among a large number of public servants. He should be supported or opposed exactly to the degree which is warranted by his good conduct or bad conduct, his efficiency or inefficiency in rendering loyal, able, and disinterested service to the Nation as a whole. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that there should be full liberty to tell the truth about his acts, and this means that it is exactly necessary to blame him when he does wrong as to praise him when he does right. Any other attitude in an American citizen is both base and servile. To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public. Nothing but the truth should be spoken about him or anyone else. But it is even more important to tell the truth, pleasant or unpleasant, about him than about anyone else."

An instance of Trump's twittering efforts to mislead people and suppress protests and repress the freedom of speech was demonstrated when he got real angry at the cast of the highly acclaimed play *Hamilton*. The cast felt compelled to communicate a heartfelt message to Trump's vice president-elect at the time Mike Pence, when he attended a performance of this musical about our Founding Fathers in November 2016. After this



popular theatrical production concluded, Brandon Victor Dixon, the actor who played Vice President Aaron Burr, took a microphone and addressed the audience and Mr. Pence with these ringing words:

"You know, we have a guest in the audience this evening -- Vice President-elect Pence, I see you walking out, but I hope you hear just a few more moments."

"Sir, we hope that you will hear us out. We, sir, are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us -- our planet, our children, our parents -- or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. All of us."

In response to these courageous words, Trump angrily tweeted the following morning: "The cast and producers of *Hamilton*, which I hear is highly overrated, should immediately apologize to Mike Pence for their terrible behavior". He added, "Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theater by the cast of *Hamilton*, cameras blazing. This should not happen!"

Anthony D. Romero, the executive director of ACLU responded, "President-elect Trump needs a refresher on his high school civics class. It's Trump -- not the cast of *Hamilton* -- that should offer an apology. Americans don't apologize -- not even to presidents or vice presidents -- for the lawful and proper exercise of their constitutional rights. The First Amendment is a cornerstone of our democracy, and Democratic and Republican presidents alike have understood that freedom of speech makes our country stronger -- even if it sometimes make our leaders uncomfortable."

In the overheated aftermath of the national election and before the Electoral College electors chose who is to lead us into the turbulent future, the fervor of the election theatrics died down from a fever-pitch maelstrom of propaganda to a Twittering tintinnabulation of bizarre pronouncements, like Trump's November 2016 tweet: "Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag -- if they do, there must be consequences -- perhaps loss of citizenship or a year in jail!"

The flag is a symbol, and Trump's blustery condemnation of anyone who might choose to burn it as a protest against injustices should give every American well-justified reason to fear his reaction-exploiting authoritarian tendencies. Even the Supreme Court has upheld the right of free expression that is represented by this symbolic act. Ironically though, the now deceased Justice Antonin Scalia said in 2015, "If it were up to me, I would put in jail every sandal-wearing, scruffy-bearded weirdo who burns the American flag. But I am not king." Trump was not King, nor will he be, unless our democratic institutions fail in the face of extreme partisanship and his treacherous, lie-fueled attempts to claw his way back into power.

Such threats of disproportional penalties to any patriotic protestor who burns the flag constitutes a power-abusing penalty so unconstitutional that it is harsher than punishments meted out to murderers or treacherous national security-compromising spies or genocidal war criminals. It is as if Trump regards the burning the flag as an intolerable symbol of resistance to the Supreme Leader. All Americans were getting a pathetic glimpse of the master manipulator's true colors, and all patriotic Americans should express opposition to having Trump become "His Excellency". We cannot allow him to destroy our democratic republic to replace it with a nightmare of despotism and regressive policies and oppressive actions against any and every group of people who dare to object or displease him in any way.

Abbie Hoffman, the 1960s political activist, made an important point, saying "You measure a democracy by the freedom it gives its dissidents, not the freedom it gives its assimilated conformists."

Charles M. Blow wrote in a December 2016 Op-Ed piece in the New York Times, *Trump's Agents of Idiocracy*, that Donald Trump made a "Thank You Tour" stop in Cincinnati a few weeks after the election, and instead of being magnanimous and conciliatory in an respectable effort to heal and unite the American people, he instead continued his boasting and gloating. Charles Blow incisively pointed out that "Trump and his agents of idiocracy are now engaged in an all-out crusade to exaggerate the scope of his victory, rewrite racial history, justify their vendettas and hostilities, and erase the very distinction between true and false."

Charles Blow also provocatively wrote: "The truest measure of a leader is as much about how he or she attains power as how he or she wields it; while the latter is yet to be determined, the former has been revealed in devastating clarity." ... "the emergence of Donald Trump as a political figure has threatened to kill many of the ideals that we hold dear: decency and decorum, inclusion and empathy, truth and facts themselves." And, "Trump has shown himself beyond doubt and with absolute certainty to be a demagogue, bigot and xenophobe, and has given space and voice to concordant voices in the country and in his emerging Legion of Doom cabinet ... In that reality, resistance isn't about mindless obstruction by people blinded by the pain of ideological defeat or people gorging on sour grapes. To the contrary, resistance then is an act of radical, even revolutionary, patriotism. Resistance isn't about damaging the country, but protecting it."

Progressive-minded folks tend to be much more magnanimous than uncompromising conservatives, but most of them see Trump's triumph as a tragedy acutely contrary to the common good, and they had a difficult time accepting the malfeasance of his regime. After all, Republicans achieved their victory in extremely dirty and unethical ways by exploiting antagonisms, fears, resentments and hatred, and by offering hollow promises for making America great again that then morphed into making our nation a more divided, discriminatory, stressed out, unstable, ruthless and intolerant country, at great risk and harm to us all.

### *It Can't Happen Here*

Throughout history, oligarchic rule by the few has often been characterized by despotic tyranny, because the only way this profoundly undemocratic unfairness can be perpetuated is by imposing dictates on the people that make them obedient, and by using repressive measures to prevent revolts. Today in the United States, our form of government has become a plutocracy, a type of oligarchy in which rich people wield excessive power.

Look at what is happening here, and in nations around the world, for it is becoming pathologically clear. Right-wing political leaders are seizing power by using demagogic tactics of exploiting people's anti-immigrant fears and sentiments, fomenting insecurities and agitating antipathies, including in the USA and Great Britain. Such leaders have become major factors in politics in Poland and Hungary, and even exert powerful influence in Sweden, Germany and France. These reactionary politicians use the power they gain through white nationalism and the exploitation of fears to advance the narrow interests of millionaires and billionaires. This is another form of a cunning hard-times swindle that gives powerful rich people more money and more control over the populace, and threatens the prosperity, security, personal freedoms and well-being of citizens. This domineering hegemony by an elite few over the subjected anxious masses is an insidiously anti-social ruse that is subversive of the greater good, and of the broadly civilizing influences of fair trade and democratic fairness.

Wise patriots recognize that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. *We the People* have been distracted from being vigilant by the deadly serious demagogic antics of master manipulators who manifestly mesmerize the people and the media in order to triumph in the contest for power and control. Trump's activities appear for all the world like a hostile takeover of the U.S. government, and it proved to be hard to stop him from cementing his hold on power and consolidating it with a cabal of loyalists and an enabling phalanx of Big Money plutocrats. This was a revolting development because of its subversive impact on our democracy. And the insidious coup continues with Trump Republicans promoting his big lie about the 2020 elections in the wake of the insurrectionary attack on Congress on January 6 and his fake electors scheme and his targeting of state and local elections officials and efforts to gain control of Congress in 2022 and the White House in 2024 in order to rule imperiously over the people..

We are like frogs sitting in a pot of water that is slowly being brought to a boil. Millions of Americans watch, some even saluting, as right-wing authoritarianism was being insidiously imposed upon our country. Slowly but surely, fanned fears of dangers from immigrants and threats at the Mexican border were exploited in a clamor for order. This rise of neo-fascist-like control was facilitated by a distorted sense of patriotism and feelings of humiliation. Long ago it was written that when and if fascism comes to America, it will be called Americanism. Similar insights contained in Sinclair Lewis' 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here* have been popularly interpreted as "when fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross."

Sometimes life imitates art. When Sinclair Lewis wrote *It Can't Happen Here*, he imagined a Trump-like character named Buzz Windrip who challenged Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election, and won by using scurrilously manipulative demagoguery. What then unfolded in Lewis' novel was a cavalcade of unrest and resistance that was met with highly repressive paramilitary forces. The resulting chaos was calamitous to the people.

Today, the threat of authoritarian rule has arisen from within to impose its anti-American hegemony over the people. It has materialized like a nightmare of fiction on some dystopian Reality TV program, and it has arisen under the deceptive guise of "Making America Great Again".

Fascism is a form of radical far-right authoritarian nationalism led by a strong demagogic leader who proclaims a desperate need for a major transformation of society, often along racial lines. Fascists generally seek to establish a totalitarian state and impose protectionist economic policies and interventionist foreign policies. Extreme political turmoil unfolded as investigations revealed that Trump and his Republican loyalists betrayed the American people through corrupt abuses of power, deceit, stonewalling, division and cruel policies that insidiously shred the social safety net and undermined the well-being of the vast majority of Americans, for the purpose of financing regressive tax cuts that primarily benefit the top 1%.

Ironically, after such leaders gain support by taking advantage of populist passions, they then champion anti-populist policies that satisfy the demands of ruthless bankers and captains of industry and powerful elites. Since Republicans have given huge tax breaks to the rich while increasing spending on the military, we have run up the national debt to dangerous levels to finance this trickle-down Big Lie and military imperialism. This state of affairs is exacerbated by having a justice system that incarcerates a higher number of people than any other country. There are only a few ways to finance this ungodly largess -- by increasing taxes or rashly running up the national debt or cutting spending on social programs such as public education, healthcare for older Americans (Medicare) and healthcare for poor people (Medicaid).

The Goddess of Irony has gotten together with Nemesis, the Greek Goddess of Divine Retribution, to watch these proceedings from the heavens above, and they both seem contemplative at the hubris of hard right-wing demagogic politicians who pathologically crave power and go about getting it by fanning the populist flames of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee fervor. These deities despise leaders who engage in tactics of deceiving the populace about their true intentions of greedily usurping and abusing power. In effect, right-wing leaders take advantage of people's darker impulses and repress the better angels of our nature.

The fight for social justice got much harder with Trump's domineering abuses of power. Those who speak out for social justice suffered a critical setback, and basic fairness, expanding opportunity and fair equal rights came under assault. And those who spoke truth to power were bullied and intimidated.

Unaccountable power represents an existential danger to the greater good, especially when wielded by cunning politicians without conscience who put their own careers and ambition ahead of concerns for the common good. An unconscionably corrupt principle appears to underlie everything Republican politicians stand for. They regard gaining domineering power as being more important than anything else, including moral Right Action. This is why they adopted the virulently anti-democratic strategy of pandering to wealthy conservatives with regressive tax plans financed by huge increases in the national debt.

Author Masha Gessen commented on what Hillary Clinton should have said after Trump's triumph over her, indicating that instead of being magnanimous in conceding the presidential race, she should have said:

"Thank you, my friends. Thank you. Thank you. We have lost. We have lost, and this is the last day of my political career, so I will say what must be said. We are standing at the edge of the abyss. Our political system, our society, our country itself are in greater danger than at any time in the last century and a half. The president-elect has made his intentions clear, and it would be immoral to pretend otherwise. We must band together right now to defend the laws, the institutions, and the ideals on which our country is based."

Think about the famous statement written by the German Pastor Martin Niemöller concerning the cowardice of German intellectuals following the rise of Nazis to power and the subsequent purging of their chosen targets, group after group:

"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out -- Because I was not a Socialist.  
 Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out -- Because I was not a Trade Unionist.  
 Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- Because I was not a Jew.  
 Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak for me."

Many variations of this poem were penned right after the 2016 elections, and a series of tweets by Raphael Bob-Waksberg rings with the most visceral resonance:

First he came for the Muslims, and I said "Guys, let's take a wait-and-see approach here."  
 Then he came for Mexican Americans, and I said, "Let's not be sore losers just because the other guy won."  
 Then he came for the press, and I said, "What makes this country great is our peaceful transitions of power."  
 Then he came for the women and I said, "Try to have some compassion for the frustrations of the other side."  
 Then he came for the black community, and I said, "I know it sucks, but wait four years."  
 Then he came for me, and I said, "How could this have happened? I did everything I could."  
**"No justice, no peace."**

Mark these words. Mr. Trump poses a dire threat to a free press. He has repeatedly called journalists and reporters "the enemy of the people". He came first for Hispanic immigrants, with aggressive deportation agents. He attempted to de-legitimatize protestors by charging that they were professional agitators, basically denying that the fear he inspired with his insult-heavy rhetoric was justified. His actions against Muslims and people in other minority groups strengthened worldwide recruiting support for terrorist groups. He threatened women who get an abortion with some form of punishment, and appointed Supreme Court Justices who want the *Roe vs. Wade* decision to be overturned, an act that will likely result in thousands of women dying from unsafe abortions. And consistent with his vindictive history of retaliation against anyone who opposes him, he came after other individuals and groups, including liberals, intellectuals, writers, artists, professors and state and local election officials. He took harsh repressive actions against Black Lives Matter activists and drug users, who are already disproportionately locked up in prisons.

"Trump was swept to power in large part by white working-class voters who responded to his vow to restore the voices of forgotten people, ones drowned out by big business and Wall Street," according to a front page article in the New York Times in November 2016. Trump campaigned against the corrupt power of special interests, but then he double-crossed his supporters by filling his administration with Wall Street executives, corporate consultants, industry insiders, lobbyists and military generals. The proof that Trump is a con man are becoming obvious because of this involvement of so many people who have helped rig the system against the masses.

The gathering evidence starkly reveals that Trump panders excessively to his political base and is not in the least bit earnest about representing all Americans. *We the People* need to prevent any political comeback to mitigate the risk that he will act like a notorious demagogue such as Adolf Hitler, who basically staged a repressive coup d'état less than one month after he was appointed Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. Remember that Hitler sensationally used a "false flag attack" -- a suspicious fire that broke out in the Reichstag, the German Parliament building -- as a pretext to deprive the German people of their civil liberties, effectively ending German democracy overnight. Similar danger in the USA today is real. We cannot afford to have our key civil liberties nullified by any sort of similar ruse. "With Nazis in powerful positions in the German government", Wikipedia explains, the infamous Reichstag Fire Decree "was used as the legal basis for the imprisonment of anyone considered to be opponents of the Nazis, and to suppress publications not considered 'friendly' to the Nazi cause. The decree is considered by historians to be one of the key steps in the establishment of a one-Party Nazi state in Germany." And THAT was calamitous for the German people!

Republicans grabbed domineering one-party rule in the USA from 2017 to 2019, with the scurrilous help of Russian hackers and the Director of the FBI, who helped throw the outcome of the election from a Democratic

presidency and a Democratic Senate and a more liberal Supreme Court -- all imminent probabilities just 11 days before the election -- to a near monopoly on power that represented an extreme threat to many of the civil liberties enjoyed by American citizens. Many conservatives and Trump supporters became giddy with their triumph, but should wake up to this dangerous development and demand that our representatives take strong steps to strengthen protections of our cherished freedoms and our democratic form of government. Do NOT vote for Republicans in the 2022 midterms or the 2024 elections!

Eternal vigilance is required to keep despotism at bay because it appears for all the world as though the American people have been duped by this demagogic con man, and this narcissistic character seems to be too strongly motivated by money, self-dealing and the egomaniacal thirst for power. It is contrary to the best interests of the people to be ruled by this man who is so lacking in honesty, empathy, compassion, civility, magnanimity, respect for women, honor, virtue, poise, statesmanship, maturity, moral rectitude or ethical sanity.

"These are the times that try men's souls," as Thomas Paine was wont to say. Is it even remotely possible that our plutocratic American democracy could become a dictatorship? Most Americans would deny that there is any chance of this, and express complacent confidence that it can't happen here in the USA. Our civil and military institutions are strong. But we are in entirely uncharted waters with demagogues dominating Republican politics, and considering Trump's vengeful persona and unempathetic self-centeredness and the fealty he commands over the Republican political base, responsible Americans should demand a pledge from each and every one of our representatives to oppose subversion of our democratic institutions. Cowardly Republicans should stop marching lockstep with Trump, and being so afraid of his grotesquely reckless wrath.

Republican politicians have generally proclaimed a mandate in recent years for a right-wing agenda, and they govern rashly, ruthlessly, uncompromisingly, divisively and harshly, as if the contest is a zero sum game where the winners deserve to take all. This is wrong. Republicans do not have the consent of the governed to rule with an ideologically uncompromising one-sided agenda. Read the 2022 Texas Republican platform to see how radically extreme the Party has become. Secession?!

Recall again that Mark Twain called the phrase, "Our Country, right or wrong ... an insult to the nation." Remember the great author's words about true patriotism being loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders. Five years ago, I wrote, "Let's all look Mr. Trump square in the eye and ask, in honor of the tens of millions of Americans who have died in the patriotic duty of protecting our liberties and the values represented by our Constitution, Bill of Rights and rules of law in our democratic republic, that he make an irrevocable commitment not to impose any semblance of dictatorial rule on us in these already terribly divided United States of America. The majority of the American people feel that Trump's rise to power presents a clear and present danger to our liberties, and because of the demagogic nature of his rise to power and his demonstrated authoritarian tendencies, he represents the biggest threat ever in our country's history of our democratic governance being overthrown from within."

This brazen and dangerous demagogue has induced a bout of temporary insanity in our psyches, and this alarming development has served to give this tyrant-wannabe excessive power. Every honest American should recognize this resentment-engendered and fear-actualized moment of error, and should now join together to speak out about the overriding desirability of retracing our steps and seeking to regain the road that is most likely to lead toward reaffirmed assurances of liberty and justice for all, and peaceful coexistence, and personal safety that is found in overarching guarantees of the freedoms spelled out in the Bill of Rights.

Many of the British "brexiteers" who voted for the UK to leave the European Union are suffering a serious case of "bremorse" at their votes, but this pales in comparison to the remorse the American people are experiencing in light of the treachery of Trump's demagogic influence from the far right, instead of from the middle, and his abuses of authority against Americans who have heretofore been guaranteed basic civil liberties.

Trump has given Americans little real reason to trust him or his word, and it should be the moral responsibility of each and every one of our elected representatives to make a commitment that they will honorably try to prevent future abuses of authority that would deprive any class of American citizens of a significant degree of

the liberties they enjoy today, particularly including Mexican Americans, Muslim Americans, African Americans, Jewish Americans, Asian Americans, gay Americans and female Americans.

Steve Bannon was once described as the "Leni Riefenstahl of the Tea Party movement" for his manipulative media spin. It may be recalled that Riefenstahl is possibly the most famous propaganda filmmaker in history, having created films like *Triumph of the Will* that catapulted Hitler's propaganda and droned the German people's minds into dutifully obeying the fascist dictator. Bannon promoted wild conspiracy theories when he was the head of the fringe Breitbart News, so the American people should see the real danger that he and Trump have posed, and we should demand guarantees that our cherished freedoms will not be diminished.

In the 1935 film *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl created a droning cavalcade of psychological manipulation through images that extolled Nazi greatness and the virtues of duty, patriotism and blind obedience by the German people. After Trump's triumph of invective and manipulative fear-mongering and vile exploitation of people's prejudices and the reactive fervor of white male nationalists, he gave a startlingly uncharacteristic victory speech in which he declared he would be a leader who cared for all the people. This gave people a momentary illusory hope that he would rise above the shrewdly manipulative character of his bigotry-spewing and sexist campaign self, in all its socio-pathological vitriol and extreme divisiveness and deep dishonesty.

But no, it was not to be so. Trump failed to discipline his behaviors and steer them toward fair-mindedness, ethical action or any of the respectable hallmarks of true social intelligence, decency, civility or empathic compassion. He continues to stoke culture wars and exploit people's resentments and feelings of alienation on account of modernity, multiculturalism and urban progressivism. The fact of the matter is that Trump cares mainly for money, power, self-aggrandizement and satisfying his ego and ambition, so he shows little of the better angels of human nature or conscience or empathy or scruples.

Recent history is not reassuring in the matter of presidents abusing executive power. George W. Bush abused the power of the presidency in a litany of consequential and extremely costly ways, including lying to the people to gain support for preemptive wars and military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. And conservatives accused President Obama, somewhat absurdly, of having abused power with things like Executive Orders to implement a Clean Power Plan, and the initiative to lift the threat of deportation from an entire class of young immigrants known as Dreamers.

In order to avoid having our democracy meet its demise in dictatorship, the American people need to be hyper-alert to make sure despotic abuses of power do not morph into dangerously deceitful strategies and policies that undermine the common good.

Al Gore made it abundantly clear in his book *The Assault on Reason* that reason trumps faith, and faith trumps fear, and fear trumps reason. So Trump's stunning victory over liberty-loving democracy should not really have been such a big surprise. He used fear to trump reason, and now the unreasonable is exerting too much influence over the Republican Party. Trump effectively exploits reason-hijacking resentments and fear, thereby deceiving with barely believable presumption, while pretending he cares about the downtrodden and those who have been left behind by policies and trade deals that mainly benefit corporations and rich elites.

Trump managed to triumph by scurrilously appealing to white males and "authoritarian followers", using many of the powerfully manipulative tactics known by demagogic tyrants throughout history to be effective in attracting support. This was a modern "triumph of the will" that poses a big threat to cherished liberties and the safety of the American people, and a Trump comeback could bring our great American experiment in democratic governance to an inglorious end, after so many long years of struggle and hard-fought progress.

Profound anger at the extent to which our system is rigged has led many voters to reach for something different -- even though it means turning in risky new directions. Voters rejected a "stale elite consensus", but we are now confronting a still greater threat. What remains of checks and balances in our government is fragile, and some of the most sinister forces in American political life are right now imposing their ruthless will. Voters responding to a desire to get rid of the Washington D.C. swamp have returned many politicians to the capital that are downright antagonistic to democracy and the true best interests of ordinary working people.

Pragmatic leaders of the progressive movement need to clearly articulate the best ideas for what collective response should be made in the face of the "unprecedented moment of crisis" that is affecting us as a result of Trump's rise to domineering influence in the Republican Party.

Curiously, it was Ronald Reagan that coined the slogan "Make America Great Again". It was during his first run for the presidency that he used this slogan to promote a narrow agenda that was a subterfuge used to crush collective bargaining power of working people and hyper-stimulate spending on the military, while reducing public funding for higher education. He also waged a crusade to eliminate regulations on giant banks, in a move that led to a costly savings-and-loan financial debacle. He made concerted efforts to undermine environmental protections, and also put in place rashly regressive tax and spending policies that have been the main factor in having dangerously driven the national debt up from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to over \$30 trillion today.

At least when Reagan campaigned, he asserted a hopeful vision of "beacon on the hill" optimism and propriety. Trump, in contrast, sets forth a dark and dystopian view of America. He doubled down on Reagan's debt-financed trickle-down tax policy, and this could result in a severe debt crisis that would be disastrous to poorly educated Trump supporters in particular, and to billions of people worldwide. Thus, ironically, Trump's dystopian view of the "carnage: in the world could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Trump cunningly adopted the slogan to Make America Great Again for even more nefarious purposes: to promote white supremacy and divide people against each other. His hidden purposes were similar to Reagan's -- to enact highly regressive changes in taxation that will increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, despite the danger this presents to democratic fairness, and to fool people left behind by the forces of globalization and modernity. He is betraying the trust of the American people and acting in ways that are even more divisive, anti-inclusive, racist, sexist, inequality stoking and anti-environmental.

Trump owns or controls more than 500 businesses in some two-dozen countries around the world. Getting things done in many of these countries inevitably involves various forms of corrupt practices like bribery and public graft to accomplish anything. Corruption needs to be understood and exposed to remedy the real nature of improper activities, and secrecy is a roadblock to remedial actions. To allow the Trump family to continue to conceal their business involvements by hiding Trump's tax returns is to engage in collusion that allows likely questionable business activities and conflicts of interest and compromising activities to continue.

Transparency International, one of the top think tanks in the world, defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". Donald Trump's entire personal business history is a saga of money-obsessed endeavors for his personal gain that are tainted with thousands of lawsuits over egregious conflicts of interest and a variety of unethical activities. Transparency International makes it clear that corruption eventually hurts everyone who depends on the integrity of people in positions of authority. The level of corrupt activities and their nature differs from country to country, and includes a wide range of activities, from small bribes paid to officials by millions of people to large-scale looting.

Imagine a better world where social relations are strongly infused with Hygge, the cozy and hugfully heart-warming Danish "feel good philosophy" (pronounced hooga). And imagine, like John Lennon did, all the world living in peace, and not mired in dark divisions and antagonisms riled up in fits of Trumpian bile. Imagine people no longer being forced to suffer from "Trump Derangement Syndrome". Imagine instead all of us together now, healing through the marvelous tonic of people appreciating Nurturing Parent worldviews and throwing their support to much better representatives of the common good. Imagine more honest and honorable leaders who will devote more generous-hearted funding to the general welfare and social safety net protections of public security and public health, and to overall well-being and salubrious protections of the environmental commons.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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## The Con Goes On: A Triumphant Coup by Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalists

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
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A daunting development haunts humanity here in the third decade of the 21st century. Crony capitalism has become unacceptably unfettered by ethical constraints. We must now see clearly, and join together in acting responsibly. The American people have been subjected to this crony capitalist con for many years, but with the electoral coup by Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress in 2016, this über-scam really took off. The fourteen main defining characteristics of this capitalist con are set forth below. Note attentively that these insidious initiatives are being perpetrated not only in the USA, but also in other countries around the globe, so our leaders should work together with majorities of peoples everywhere to rectify these wrongs.

Understand the following nefarious aspects of this Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalist Con. This is a swindle that deeply deceptive politicians and their donor supporters have foisted on the American people ever since Ronald Reagan launched his folksy revolution of regressive taxation in favor of the rich, and made concerted efforts to curtail the ability of working people to collectively bargain for fairer pay and benefits. Recall that these tax cuts are being financed by borrowing unprecedented amounts of money and adding it to a spiking level of national debt. It is bizarre that Republicans lionize Reagan in light of the fact that he married these fiscally irresponsible, inequitable and anti-populist top priorities with a crusade against regulations that govern big banks and corporations, and that he promoted excessively high and profligately wasteful spending on the military.

Grotesque greed drives these capitalist schemes, as evidenced by the rash flip-flop by the Trump family related to environmental protections. In 2009, Donald Trump and Ivanka, Donald Jr. and Eric all signed a full page open letter printed in the New York Times urging President Obama and world leaders who were headed to international climate negotiations in Copenhagen to act on climate change. The letter stated, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." Once they realized that a huge amount of money and power could be gained by aggressively siding with fossil fuel industries against sensible precautionary actions, Donald Trump zealously began denying climate change and pandering obsequiously to polluting fossil fuel companies. As president, he reprehensibly doubled down on the planks of his avaricious agenda by signing a flurry of anti-environmental executive orders, thus contributing to the probabilities that we will suffer "catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet". This is a pathological rejection of social responsibility, fairness and intelligent action.

### Defining Characteristics of the Crony Capitalist Con

Number One. Capitalist vs. Workers -- the Ultimate Coup. Ever since the Industrial Revolution began, capitalists have been taking advantage of working people to amass large fortunes. They are able to do this because they have more power and they "control the means of production". Workers are not able to fairly share in increases in the productivity from their labor, and the repetitive work they often must do makes them little more than cogs in a machine. Capitalists and entrepreneurs generally treat working people like disposable machines, and have been increasingly replacing them in recent decades with automation, leaving many people finding it hard to make a living. Capitalists were so successful in the 19th century that by 1848 a manifesto was published urging "Workers of the World, Unite" -- to gain fairer compensation and safer working conditions and

a modicum more security in a ruthless capitalist world. That manifesto became a source of ideological conflicts that intensified during the Cold War, and threatened to destroy the world in M.A.D. nuclear annihilation. Fairer compromises between power-abusing capitalists and working people are a key to creating a healthier, safer and more stable world.

The ideals of economic fundamentalism are, in theory, quite laudable. They hold that free markets are guided by what Adam Smith called an 'invisible hand' that supposedly creates the best conditions for the public good. Unfortunately, our economic and political systems are corrupted by institutionalized bribery, monopoly abuses, deceptive practices, unfair vested-interest political influence, dishonesty, ruthless banking schemes and other financial shenanigans, pork barrel spending, imperialistic abuses of power, and distorting influences that militate for war and war profiteering. Giant corporations often cheat working people and the public to make bigger profits instead of improving their products or their production methods, or they strive to gain large government subsidies that perpetuate inefficient and polluting industries. They also indulge in exploitive "rent-seeking" behaviors that do not create wealth, but merely allow them to grab a bigger proportion of the national wealth for themselves. And they generally treat workers unfairly, and externalize environmental costs onto society, and indulge in unfair tax avoidance scams by using tax loopholes and offshore incorporation.

The overriding goal of capitalists is to maximize profits. One main means of accomplishing this is by minimizing costs. So corporate management has strong incentives to take advantage of workers and underpay them and dispose of them when convenient, and they generally have little compunction about firing employees and treating workers as shabbily as they can get away with. They also engage in efforts to rip off taxpayers by foisting "too big to fail" bailouts and other costs associated with periodic economic crises -- and then the pandemic -- onto taxpayers. They accomplish these perverse goals by abusing the power they gain through the undue influence of their deep pockets. They achieve this largely because Congress has failed to rein in campaign finance influence peddling, and the Supreme Court has corruptly allowed this, in perniciously harmful rulings like *Citizens United*.

This is why sensible government rules and regulations play a crucial role in making our democracy healthier and safer. Shrewd Republican ideologies, and law making that blindly eviscerates these rules, is often wrongheaded.

Number Two. Concerted Efforts to Concentrate Wealth and Power. This scheme makes today's unprecedented inequality in the USA worse and worse, causing social unrest and increasing potential damages of destabilizing turmoil. The brilliant linguist Noam Chomsky has adduced "10 Principles" that wealthy people use to enable this vicious and risky circle of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of the few; they are evaluated in detail in my essay *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*.

The world's ten richest billionaires have more wealth than the world's poorest 3.1 billion people, according to the Oxfam report *Profiting from Pain*, which was published in May 2022. This is unacceptable, for it represents a monopoly on wealth that contributes to unnecessary amounts of hardship and suffering. The Oxfam report revealed that there are 2,668 billionaires in the world, more than 570 more than when the pandemic began. And this fact contrasts starkly to an increase of more than 250 million people who will be pushed into extreme poverty in 2022 due to the pandemic and rising costs of fuel, food and other necessities.

Number Three. Regressive Taxation. The wealthiest 1% of Americans has increased their net worth in total by more than \$32 trillion since 1981, as one result of Ronald Reagan slashing tax rates on the highest income earners from 70% to 28%. This has been the primary factor in running up the national debt by almost \$30 trillion, from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to a foolishly risky \$30.5 trillion in June 2022. Our representatives have basically embraced a radical antithesis of the precautionary concept of fairly balancing the federal budget, and they certainly have not sensibly invested in "a rainy day fund" for the plethora of costly challenges that are arising as our human population approaches 8 billion needy and greedy people in the next few years.

Low tax rates on rich people are causing not just huge budget deficits but dangerously increasing inequality. Recall billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer's incisive words in *The Pitchforks are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, "If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth

accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counter-examples. None. It's not if, it's when." On January 6, 2021, a MAGA mob assaulted Congress, hoping to overturn the majority vote and reinstall Trump in power in an autocratic plot. It Can't Happen Here? "Like hell it can't!" Effective steps must be taken to prevent this!

The trickle-down theory that rationalizes regressive changes in tax policy is creating dangers too serious to be allowed to persist. Progressive tax reform, with more steeply graduated rates, is necessary. See *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies* for good ideas on how this and other important changes in our national policies and priorities could help us create a dramatically fairer and more secure society.

We should rightly stop catering to the shortsighted compulsions of rich people to get an increasing portion of the economic pie for themselves. The unintended consequences of this greedy and myopic stance are to risk stoking severe unrest and an increased impetus for the proverbial pitchforks to come out against the rich. A most likely result of national policies that increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is to create economic instability and make racial and class conflicts worse. As these developments intensified, Trump and his authority-abusing henchmen ratcheted up their attacks against those who oppose their abuses of power, and the American people are being deprived of some of their cherished personal liberties and desired security.

The Trump agenda was a devious one that is glaringly contrary to the populist propaganda that the Deceiver-in-Chief claimed to represent. He enacted huge new debt-financed tax breaks that are serving as a radically disproportionate boon for the wealthiest 1%, and the spending cuts he pushed cruelly affect millions of others, with the harshest burdens falling on the poorest and most vulnerable persons. By cutting government spending and eviscerating many government agencies, hundreds of thousands of jobs were eliminated in the public sector, many of them precautionarily important. One sad side effect of these actions is that they have a destabilizing effect on the economy. Take note, Texans and other deregulatory profiteers!

"IN MY OPINION WE DON'T DEVOTE NEARLY ENOUGH SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO FINDING  
A CURE FOR JERKS."

--- Calvin to Hobbes (Bill Watterson)

Number Four. Cost Externalizing Schemes. Vested interest groups are indulging in another rash ruse: cost-externalizing schemes, also accurately described as "the socializing of costs". These are über-betrayals of the people by the top dogs and corporations in the U.S. that are deplorably allowing many costs to be foisted on the populace as a whole. This strategy facilitates the excessive monopolizing of the spoils of resource extraction and the productivity of working people and the artificial profits realized through this cost externalizing scam.

The rigged rules that govern corporate entities not only allow Big Businesses to foist a variety of costs onto society to boost profits, but also give the top 1% of Americans more than two-thirds of the resulting capital gains -- and guess what! -- they pay really low capital gains tax rates of only 15% on these spoils, AND only when these gains are realized. Even more outrageously, they and their heirs pay NOTHING after a person dies because the "cost basis" of all investments is revised to the value at the date of death, allowing these windfalls to be transmitted indefinitely forward to every person who inherits these investments.

See what's happening here. These basic facts about how our economic and political systems are rigged urge us to exit our echo chambers and seek to better understand -- and to demand much fairer reforms and leadership. See Dr. Tiffany B. Twain's *Top Ten Ways Our System Is Rigged* for enlightening understandings of the true nature of how our system really works against the interests of the vast majority of Americans.

Number Five. Healthcare Inequities. Another pathetic dimension of the Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalist Con is our fragmented healthcare system that discriminates against young people, the poor, the disabled, the unemployed and women. Consider how absurd our patchwork healthcare insurance system really is. Trends in coverage rates for employer-sponsored insurance are revealing. Coverage fell from 65% of workers in 2001 to 55% in 2019. And premiums for family coverage increased by about 72% from 2001 through 2021. In addition, the share of insurance premiums paid by employees continues to increase. With the sudden spike in joblessness

at the beginning of the pandemic, this situation got drastically worse.

In the big picture, it is cynically calculating to have a system that ties health insurance to having a job, then patches up the obvious defects of such a system with Medicare for older people who are retired, and Medicaid for poor people and workers who are too poorly compensated to cover medical costs, and a patchy system of health insurance coverage for children. This system is terrible for millions of people, and since it involves people's crucially important health, failures in this arena make Martin Luther King's observation poignant when he pointed out, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

We should create a truly fairer system of universal healthcare, starting with a good public option that offers people the choice of joining a low-overhead, non-profit healthcare system like Medicare. Lousy Republican plans to cover fewer Americans and "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act, and get rid of pre-existing conditions coverage, were made in oppositional bad faith in order to enable more tax cuts for the well-to-do.

Number Six. Demagoguery and the Illegitimacy and Tyranny of Hard-Right Rule. The Master-Manipulator-in-Chief and Republican politicians used extremely divisive tactics and emotionally manipulative demagoguery to gain power, and then rashly abused this dominating power. Shrewd strategies to gain domineering political influence are not well suited to governing fairly, or in the best interests of public health and safety. Tactics like suppressing millions of votes and gerrymandering congressional districts have given a narrow minority of Americans undeserved and excessive power, effectively depriving the majority of having a satisfactory say in vital matters. The unjust ramifications of this abuse of power make this illegitimate scam morally wrong.

In fairness, politicians should try to win elections by honestly offering the people good plans for improving their prospects and overall security. Instead, many Republicans win their election contests by using a pathetic variety of unethical means, as adduced in detail in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*.

Consequential ethics tells us that despotism is deplorable in degrees, depending on the number of people that tyrannical rule adversely affects, and the severity of the oppression, and the nature of injustices perpetrated. The tyrannies imposed by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein are among the most notorious and lethal in world history.

One consequence of Trump's disastrous triumph was a significant increase in the number of incidents related to extremists and hate groups dedicated to anti-Muslim antagonism and neo-Nazi ideologies and bigotry and racism and anti-Semitism in the USA. This increase occurred in tandem with the incendiary rhetoric and ascendancy of the demagogic emotion-hijacking tactics of the Machiavellian Pretender-in-Chief and his cronies, like Trump's former provocateur chief strategist Steve Bannon and racist Stephen Miller.

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report provides details of this deplorably divisive, dangerous trend: "After half a century of being increasingly relegated to the margins of society, the radical right has entered the political mainstream in a way that had seemed virtually unimaginable since George Wallace ran for president in 1968. A surge in right-wing populism, stemming from the long-unfolding effects of globalization and the movements of capital and labor that it spawned, brought a man that many considered to be a racist, misogynist and xenophobe into the most powerful political office in the world. Donald Trump's election as president mirrored similar currents in Europe, where globalization energized an array of extreme-right political movements and the United Kingdom's decision to quit the European Union. Trump's run for office electrified the radical right, which saw in him a champion of the idea that America is fundamentally a white man's country."

It is ironic for white people to establish such a belligerent precedent toward minority groups, considering that they are destined to become a minority group within 25 years or so. The USA was about 90% white from the colonial era up through the early 1960s, but by 2020 it was barely over 60% white, and the Census Bureau predicts this percentage will fall to less than 50% by the year 2045, due to current demographic trends - exacerbated by new plans by red state conservatives to force women to have unwanted children.

Number Seven. The Oppression of Women. The far right compulsion to limit family planning options for women and to curtail their reproductive rights is an offensive male-centric, dominion demanding, obedience-expecting

charade. The root cause for most abortions is unwanted pregnancies, and the most effective way to reduce abortions is to provide more funding for contraceptive choices and Planned Parenthood services that are provided to poor women who do not want to become pregnant. Opposition to these choices is wrongheaded.

I encourage readers to cultivate an expansive understanding of the rightful prerogatives of women, who have throughout the evolutionary history of human beings exercised "Original Choice" of their mates, as explained by Dr. Leonard Shlain in *Sex, Time and Power - How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*. Females have one of the most basic of all human rights, to choose NOT to have an unsuitable mate or to be forced to carry the spawn of a male that rapes her or takes advantage of her in other ways. In cases of rape, there should be no hurdles to a woman's right to choose to abort a fertilized embryo so abominably begotten.

There should be a litmus test for every candidate nominated to serve on the Supreme Court. Every one of them should pledge to uphold the reasonable decision made in the precedent-setting *Roe vs. Wade* ruling -- to give any woman who becomes pregnant the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives, bodies and futures by choosing to terminate a pregnancy within the first trimester, before the embryo becomes a viable fetus.

Surely Sister Joan Chittister, a Catholic Nun, was ethically correct when she stated: "I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is."

Social conservatives are incredibly stubborn and hypocritical on this issue. These anti-choice and supposedly "pro-life" hypocrites are inadequately concerned with children once they are born. Their agenda is about controlling women's lives and forcing unwanted obligations on them. Why do conservatives often tend to oppose family planning? It is virtually certain that if males got pregnant, abortion would be regarded as a sacrament, and they would champion the use of contraception and strongly defend the freedom to choose whether or not to terminate any unwanted pregnancy, and they would generously support paternal health care policies.

People are NOT honestly "pro-life" if they oppose abortion but support policies and politicians that promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, oppose women's healthcare, gut public education, support the death penalty, and beef up militarization of law enforcement agencies that disproportionately kill people of color (Blacks and Latinos in particular). Being "pro-life" means nothing if it doesn't mean being "pro-all-of-life".

Additionally, it is crazy to rationalize damages to planetary ecosystems through resource exploitation activities in order to avoid the cost of taking precautionary steps to ensure that we leave a fairer legacy to all humans. Pro-life people, when they champion actions and national policies that are contrary to environmental safeguards, are acting in anti-life ways. The anti-birth control, anti-choice doctrines of the patriarchal minority are wrong for humanity and the prospects for survival of life on Earth. Exploiting hot button social issues for narrow power-prepossessed political advantages is immoral.

Since the number of human beings on Earth continues to grow rapidly, human population pressures on land usages and fresh water resources and wildlife habitats continue to intensify. Already, in less than the last 50 years -- as our numbers have grown by 3.5 billion -- we have contributed to wiping out an average 68% of the populations of all mammals, fishes, birds, reptiles and amphibians on Earth, according to findings of the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report 2020. SIXTY-EIGHT PERCENT!

Mike Pence is a religious zealot who became the first sitting vice president to address the "March for Life" when he participated in it in January 2017. At this annual anti-choice rally in Washington, D.C., he told the crowd, "Life is winning again in America." This is bizarre spin, and another one of the Trump administration's "alternative facts". In reality, these policies are leading to more women being forced to carry a pregnancy to term, and more abortions and more women dying from being denied life-saving health care.

Number Eight. Eviscerating Environmental Protections. Ronald Reagan once stated that "Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge, it's common sense." Today, Republicans are willing to

sacrifice the environment to stimulate economic growth in the short run and maximize profits to be made, no matter how irresponsibly. See *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto* for an introduction to this broad range of ideas and proposals.

A critical environmental issue that will be significantly more serious in coming years is a severe crisis of fresh water shortages that is unfolding as human numbers on Earth approach 8 billion people. According to a report by the United Nations released in early 2015, shortages of fresh water for human consumption and farming could reach crisis proportions by the year 2030, with a stunning 40% shortfall in fresh water needs. That is soon! The United Nations recommended that significant global policy changes be made to address this ominous prospect. These proposals should be heeded, for many sources of underground water are already being irresponsibly depleted, and rainfall patterns are becoming more erratic due to changes in global weather patterns associated with the effects of planetary warming exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions.

The United Nations World Water Development Report provides smart forward-thinking ideas for achieving more sustainable usages of fresh water. In light of these understandings, it is all but criminal to allow Big Oil to engage in unregulated fracking to extract fossil fuels, contaminating ground water resources, or polluting streams in connection with mountaintop removal coal mining.

Number Nine. Deregulation and Profiteering. Deregulation and efforts to enact corporate-friendly policies at the expense of the people serve to weaken government and give more power to corporations. As a sad result, corporations abuse this power, as confirmed by the significant decline in the amount of federal taxes they pay. Corporations paid more than 25% of all federal taxes in the 1950s, yet they have managed to skew national laws and loopholes so that they paid less than 10% of total federal taxes in the last few years.

Deregulatory schemes resulted in extraordinarily large costs in the Savings and Loan debacle at the end of Ronald Reagan's tenure in office, and again during the "Great Recession" at the end of George W. Bush's time in office. The Dodd-Frank bill was passed to prevent future similar financial crises, but Trump Republicans are working to dismantle these protections and stoke the fires of predatory behaviors and risk-taking that will set the stage for a future episode that will likely be worse, given the huge overhang of a \$30 trillion national debt.

"Funny" aside: "The 'party of deregulation' wants to regulate the hell out of your fundamental right to vote."

Number Ten. Tax Evasion and "Tax Holidays". Multinational corporations in the United States evade taxes by squirreling them away in tax havens abroad, until Republicans gain control of the federal government, and then they get these supposedly conservative politicians to give them what they euphemistically call a "tax holiday" reward for bringing these profits back to the U.S. from their tax evasion havens at really low tax rates.

We have foolishly allowed wealthy people and corrupt politicians to rig our economic, social and political systems in ways that make our societies more unfair, and the periodic tax holiday on hidden profits is a classic example of this outcome. This constitutes a serious violation of the best interests of the 99% of Americans, so it is deplorable and morally wrong.

This top Republican priority is really a scam that rewards shareholders in big corporations who eagerly wait for the day they will receive the benefits of this scheme. Their 2017 action "repatriated" an estimated \$2.5 trillion that had been stockpiled in countries abroad, and did so at low tax rates on this corruptly "sheltered" money. The previous such repatriation was pushed by Republicans in 2004, when almost \$400 billion was brought back to the U.S. at an exceedingly low 5.25% rate, and a relative few gained the benefits through stock buy-backs and other schemes that primarily benefit those at the top.

Number Eleven. Consumerism and International Trade. Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent annually on advertising and product promotion to stimulate materialistic consumerism, and huge sums are spent on elections, lobbying and ideological indoctrination that allows this overarching scheme to be perpetuated. The reason this continues is because our national decision-making is dominated by corporations and elites who abuse the power of their wealth. This betrays fair-mindedness and rules of law in supposedly fairly representative democracies.

Our national priorities should be consistent with sustainable activities for humanity over countless numbers of

coming generations. It is insane to blindly believe marketing messages and ideological rationalizations that promote consumerism that recklessly wastes nonrenewable resources on Earth. It is downright dumb to allow profit-driven business entities to irresponsibly externalize the costs of harmful impacts that their production activities have on people, wildlife habitats, natural ecosystems and the global climate.

In the Trumpian era of moral outrage, the majority of people were given a bad deal, especially Blacks and Latinos. There was widespread social irresponsibility as greed was unleashed and Trump demonstrated egomaniacal insecurity and liberty-threatening debt-incurring impulses and authoritarian compulsions. This age was characterized by manipulative deceit, anti-Solon-wise Twittered lies, exclusion instead of inclusion, discriminatory inequality against anyone who is not a white Christian male, cravenly sycophantish loyalties by politicians to extreme planks of the agenda of hard-right "conservatives", and far-reaching ecological insanity.

The Demagogue-in-Chief won the election, in part, by blaming the loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs on bad trade deals and low wage competition in countries like China and Mexico. This characterization struck a chord with many voters in Rust Belt states, but it was another example of a deceitful spin on reality. As the Managing Editor of *The Week* magazine pointed out, "A recent study found that 85 percent of manufacturing job losses from 2000 to 2010 were caused by automation, not outsourcing. American firms have been steadily cutting employees and replacing them with machines that are cheaper (they don't need benefits) and more efficient (they don't take vacations). U.S. factories now produce twice as much stuff as they did in 1984, but with only one-third of the workers. And smarter machines will soon steal a lot more jobs."

Number Twelve. Infrastructure and Privatization. We have irresponsibly allowed our country's infrastructure to deteriorate, and Trump Republicans failed to make big investments in infrastructure improvements during their four years in the White House. They basically proposed the use of "private-public" plans to finance infrastructure. This is a method of financing that is a scheme in which private investors will get rich and taxpayers will get shafted, as Robert Reich makes clear in *Trump's Infrastructure Scam*. Trump's unfulfilled promises to invest in infrastructure involved schemes that would give tax breaks to private "partnerships" with huge corporations that would strip the American people of their own resources, and give private entities the privilege of making us pay for the use of bridges, highways and other projects. Bravo for Joe Biden and his administration for finally having passed legislation in November 2021 to upgrade physical infrastructure.

Infrastructure maintenance is crucially important. This was made starkly clear in February 2021 when Texans suffered a deep freeze catastrophe due to a poorly maintained electric grid. It had also been made clear in February 2017 when a flooding crisis took place at the Oroville Dam in the foothills of California's Central Valley that resulted in an urgent evacuation of almost 200,000 people. This event confirmed that we do not merely need big new projects, which construction profiteers are eager to have the government undertake, but better maintenance of existing infrastructure. There are some 1,400 dams in California, and about 84,000 in the United States, and they should be more safely maintained, or removed, instead of embarking on a new era of aggressive dam building. Executives at Friends of the River and two other environmental organizations had warned in 2005 about risks of having an "unarmored spillway" at the Oroville Dam, and events proved them right. They now provide smart recommendations for ways to shore up unsafe dams and levees, or to decommission dams when they no longer serve the public interest.

The corporatocratic Puppet-in-Chief proposed that key public services be privatized, including the Veterans Administration. He wanted to slash funding of public schools and public broadcasting, and also favored expanding private prisons. Republican politicians in Congress want to go even further by privatizing Medicare, and the U.S. Postal Service, and National Parks, and air traffic control and other functions performed by the government. This is on top of previous privatizations of military contracts, and even food services in the Senate dining room and cafeteria and coffee shops.

"Privatization" means taking public wealth and assets that benefit us all, and turning them over to the private sector, where only a small subset reap the reward. When a road or bridge is "privatized", people must pay a toll to use it, so that the new "owners" of the road can make bigger profits.



There is another problem with privatization. Democratic governments aim to serve as a model of what the public wants, so they try to provide jobs with good pay and benefits. When governments are talked into "saving money" by privatizing, what often happens is employees are laid off, then private companies hire new workers, or rehire the old ones -- at lower wages with fewer benefits. The result is that laid-off employees are made worse off, while new hires are also impoverished because they are often given poorer compensation. A local, state or national government might "save money" in the short term by lowering wages and externalizing costs, but the communities -- and country -- where these people live ultimately suffer the consequences.

Privatization can contribute to an increase in home foreclosures, causing neighborhoods to lose value. This can cause the amount of property and income tax receipts to be reduced, and there are fewer customers for local businesses. Schools are stressed as many children live in poorer families, and the need for emergency government assistance like food stamps rises. So while privatization shifts benefits to a few, everyone is on the hook for bearing the costs and/or dealing with adverse consequences.

While privatizers propagandize by promoting this kind of transfer of public wealth to private hands with claims that it "saves money", privatization harms communities and often costs taxpayers more than it saves. More importantly, it *hurts people*. Avoiding such outcomes should be one of our main civic concerns.

Privatization, or government outsourcing, has been going on for decades, and is often touted as a cost-saving panacea. Today, state and local governments are reassessing whether turning public property and services over to private companies has really been a good idea. Story after story has appeared detailing horror stories of corruption, incompetence and general scamming by companies prepossessed with profit. Molly Ball reported in *The Privatization Backlash* in the Atlantic, "In states and cities across the country, lawmakers are expressing new skepticism about privatization, imposing new conditions on government contracting, and demanding more oversight. Laws to rein in contractors have been introduced in 18 states this year (2014), and three -- Maryland, Oregon and Nebraska -- have passed legislation, according to In the Public Interest, a group that advocates what it calls 'responsible contracting.'"

This sensational observation is contained in a report *Out of Control: The Coast-to-Coast Failures of Outsourcing Public Services to For-Profit Corporations*, which begins: "Eager for quick cash, state and local governments across America have for decades handed over control of critical public services and assets to corporations that promise to handle them better, faster and cheaper. Unfortunately for taxpayers, not only has outsourcing these services failed to keep this promise, but too often it undermines transparency, accountability, shared prosperity and competition -- the underpinnings of democracy itself."

Donald Trump initially instituted a government "hiring freeze" in 2017, which is a strategy toward privatization. Lauren McCauley explained in her article *In Step Towards Privatization, Trump Enacts Federal Hiring Freeze*: "As J. David Cox Sr. pointed out, the freeze would 'actually increase taxpayer costs by forcing agencies to hire more expensive contractors to do work that civilian government employees are already doing for far less.'"

"Numerous studies have shown that contractors are two to three times more costly than each federal employee they replace," Cox said. "President Trump's federal hiring freeze will result in more government waste as agencies are forced to hire high-priced contractors to do the work that federal employees can and should be doing. When a sufficient blanket of anti-government propaganda has been laid down, the privatizers introduce proposals for "reform" and providing "choice." Of course the proposals are to hand over government functions for private profit."

"One result of falling for the privatization scam is that taxpayers have been fleeced, services to citizens have been cut way back, and communities have been made poorer. But the companies that convinced governments to hand over public functions have gotten rich off of the deal. How is this a surprise?"

"Imagine a system where someone makes a profit if more and more people are put in prison. This is known as a perverse incentive. Really, can you think of anything worse than getting a profit to get people put in jail? What you think could go wrong is exactly what does go wrong. These companies want profits, so rehabilitation becomes a 'cost'."



These companies push for government policies that put more people into prison for more crimes and for longer sentences. Prison-for-profit companies work with the notorious corporate lobbying outfit ALEC -- the American Legislative Exchange Council -- to come up with model legislation that they copy in states across the country to push things like "three strikes" laws and "truth in sentencing" that serve to significantly increase the number of prisoners and the amount of time they serve.

If you examine the claim that private companies are always more efficient than government, the argument starts to fall apart. Just how are companies more efficient? The first way companies are supposed to be better is cost-savings. But just how do they save money? There are two ways a company can save money over what government spends. The first is to reduce what it pays employees and suppliers. The second is to cut back on the amount or quality of the service the company is taking over.

The resulting wage and benefit cuts hurt the community at large. Retail sales decline, workers must rely more on public assistance, and there are more at-risk children in low-income families. On a recent phone call discussing the study, Greenwood said that when governments outsource, "the availability of middle-class jobs is affected, even upward mobility." She added, "Contracting to private corporations usually means big reductions in worker pay and benefits," and "lower wages often mean a shift to less experienced employees."

With outsourcing, says Janice Fine of Rutgers University, a study shows that there is often "a stunning lack of government oversight of contractors." She sensibly concluded that "oversight shouldn't be set aside because of cost, it should be an essential part of outsourcing."

Number Thirteen. Deeply Corrupted Petroleum Politics. The term "petro-aggression" has been used to describe the tendency of oil-rich states to instigate international conflicts. There are many examples, including Iraq's invasion of Iran and Kuwait, and Libya's repeated incursions into Chad in the 1970s and 1980s. Iran is justified in having long-standing suspicions of Western powers, having been the victim of the CIA conspiring to overthrow their democratically elected leader in a 1953 coup d'état. Some scholars have also suggested that oil-rich states are frequently targets of "resource wars." Several countries have nationalized foreign-run oil businesses because of abuses of power and interference with national politics by fossil fuel interests. Multibillion-dollar inflows and outflows of petroleum money tend to have worldwide macroeconomic consequences, and major oil exporters often corruptly abuse the influence they gain from their huge profits.

In *The Price of Inequality*, the brilliant economist Joseph Stiglitz discusses the concept of "rent-seeking". This term is used to describe the ways that political policies help insiders at the expense of the rest of us. Stiglitz writes: "Rent-seeking takes many forms: hidden and open transfers and subsidies from the government, laws that make the marketplace less competitive, lax enforcement of existing competition laws, and statutes that allow corporations to take advantage of others or to pass costs on to the rest of society." Oddly enough, countries that are rich in natural resources, and in fossil fuels in particular, are infamous for corrupt types of rent-seeking activities. Whereas one might expect that an abundance of resources could be used to help the poor and the middle class, countries with the most natural resources often have the most severe levels of public corruption and inequality and repression.

Many of Russia's oligarchs, for instance, got their fabulous wealth by obtaining state assets at below-market prices after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, and then ensuring continuing profits through monopoly power. A similar trend ramped up in the USA when Trump appointed oil industry executives and corporate shills to positions in his Cabinet. One of the first regulations the Trump administration revoked was a rule intended to prevent coal mining companies from polluting streams. This action benefits coal company executives and investors while harming wildlife and untold numbers of people downstream from coal mining activities. Also, the Republican House before the 2018 elections used a radical legislative tool called the Congressional Review Act to scrap critical protections against methane pollution from oil and gas drilling on public lands, and many Senate Republicans are thinking what a great idea this is, despite the fact that the well-being of countless numbers of people will be harmed by the detrimental action.

Number Fourteen. Military Keynesianism. Major General Smedley Butler famously wrote a book in 1935 about

war being a racket. "It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives." He went on to describe a racket "as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. ... It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes."

Of the First World War, he wrote, "a mere handful garnered the profits of the conflict. At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War. That many admitted their huge blood gains in their income tax returns. How many other war millionaires falsified their tax returns no one knows." ... "How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets? How many of them parried a bayonet thrust of an enemy? How many of them were wounded or killed in battle?"

"Out of war, nations acquire additional territory, if they are victorious. They just take it. This newly acquired territory promptly is exploited by the few -- the selfsame few who wrung dollars out of blood in the war. The general public shoulders the bill. And what is this bill? This bill renders a horrible accounting. Newly placed gravestones. Mangled bodies. Shattered minds. Broken hearts and homes. Economic instability. Depression and all its attendant miseries. Back-breaking taxation for generations and generations."

There are more than 40 million persons in active and reserve military forces in the world today, plus maybe 20 million in paramilitary forces. And the war racket seems to be intensifying as time passes, and will really be ramped up as shortages of food, arable land and fresh water get worse with the net increase in human numbers of more than 70 million every year, year after year after year.

See *Reflections on War - and Peace* in this manifesto for an exhaustive exploration of this issue. An excerpt: The stimulative economic impact of World War II helped bring the world out of the Depression of the 1930s. Since then, however, a stubborn ideological argument has gained outlandish influence that contends a permanent war economy with profligate military spending is a necessary way to make us safer, and to create jobs and stimulate the economy.

A full-cost accounting of lavish spending on the military contradicts this conviction. Military spending is a waste-oriented and cost-maximizing perversion of self-correcting mechanisms of the free market system, which serve to minimize costs through the forces of competition. Chalmers Johnson investigated this topic in the last book of his *Blowback Trilogy*. Johnson indicated that what he calls "military Keynesianism" is a misguided ideology. This dogma holds that the stimulative debt financing of wars, weapons, munitions and large standing armed forces is good for the economy. In reality, such debt unfairly and irresponsibly defers costs to the future and reduces funds available to emphasize fairer, more far-sighted and more sensible priorities at home. Johnson called military Keynesianism "a form of slow economic suicide."

The U.S. permanent war economy suffers not only from wrong-headed priorities, but also from high cost no-bid contracts, procurement improprieties, and excessive spending on unnecessary military projects. The non-partisan group Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities released a report in 2006 that indicated federal spending priorities are scandalously wasteful, and that Pentagon financial management practices are a big "embarrassment". The report also expressed the opinion that such spending priorities effectively serve to undermine our true national security.

The federal government's spending priorities include large amounts of waste and hidden fraud in military procurement. Much of this is entirely secret ('classified!'), and hence it is susceptible to wasteful earmarks and financial shenanigans. These squandered funds represent a sustained non-productive use of capital and labor. They distort American values and divert resources from more peaceful, just and wholesome goals and investments. They thus represent an outrageous cost of lost opportunities and subverted better priorities.

War may be an ultimate expression of competition, but it gives us a compelling example of why fair and reasonable rules of law are required to achieve greater good goals. Wars and military occupations for ignoble

purposes -- like resource grabs and excessive profiteering -- should be prevented. They are simply too devastating to millions of people around the world. The Ukrainian people would testify to this in 2022!

Both Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman considered war profiteering to be a form of "treason". Today, however, profiting from war seems to have become standard operating procedure as a means of allowing defense contractors, aerospace companies, war services corporations, and investors in these enterprises to make profits from lavish spending on wars and war preparations.

Harry Truman chaired a Senate committee during World War II that launched an investigation into shady wartime business practices. They discovered widespread "waste, inefficiency, mismanagement and war profiteering." The gargantuan military spending of the last two decades is likely to be significantly worse. Truman argued that such behavior was at best unpatriotic. We seem to be so accustomed to profit-making for war preparations today that many people regard it as desirable 'business as usual.' But this does not hide the fact that war is a scurrilous way to make profits, and one that we should find honest ways to control with greater rigor and responsibility.

### Concluding Commentary

These 14 aspects of our corrupt crony capitalist system constitute considerable outrages against many basic American values. We Americans treasure liberties and generally believe in fair dealing, inclusiveness and more broadly shared prosperity. These values are severely threatened by these shrewd schemes.

Trump's Chief Strategist Steve Bannon in 2016 and 2017 talked about dismantling "the administrative state." What he was really talking about is allowing corporations the right to do whatever they want, regardless of how consequentially harmful the impacts of their actions on American citizens or the environmental commons. When Republicans talk about deregulation, what they really want, in effect, is to facilitate corporate predation and reduce citizens' ability to prevent corporate malfeasance. When Republicans have too much influence, like in red state governments, big corporations succeed in using their deep pockets to corrupt our national priorities.

Steve Bannon turns out to be not just a far right democracy-assaulting operative, but another grifter who was arrested in August 2020 and accused of using Trumpian anti-immigrant fear mongering and zealotry for building walls to fleece the aroused Trump base out of millions of dollars of their money. And he played a reprehensible role in helping organize and incite the insurrectionary MAGA mob on January 6th.

No matter what populist rhetoric may say, when Republicans enacted huge tax cuts in December 2017, they structured the new plan to give most of its debt-financed benefits to the top 1%. Ever since then, until the pandemic emergency, they have been striving to rashly impose big cuts in federal spending on programs that benefit the poor and people in the middle class. These politicians are infringing on the hopes of the majority of Americans, and betraying future well-being, in a consequential outcome that violates true populism and destroys the vestiges of representative democracy under a lithified layer of recklessly mean-spirited and self-dealing double-crossing avarice. (Huh?!)

Economic fundamentalists promote national policies that often result in outcomes contrary to the greater good. "They promote it. They sugarcoat it. They sing its virtues. They fling rationalizations upon it, and they even greenwash it. But horse manure rolled in powdered sugar does not a doughnut make."

The four-year domination of our federal government by an irresponsible President represented a reactionary leap backwards. Trump's anti-precautionary actions and egregious abuses of power were a broad betrayal of the public trust in fair governance, and a rash trajectory of torpedoing honorable American values. Scandals pervaded the Trump presidency because of his many conflicts of interest and his efforts to deceive, telling lies Big and small. His unrepentant hubris, vindictiveness and overreaching abuses of power are abominable.

Entrepreneurs tend to be highly regarded in our capitalist society. But from the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, unethical business tycoons and manipulative bankers and ruthless robber barons have exploited opportunities to take advantage of workers and abandon them, and to cheat laborers, screw taxpayers, and corrupt our political system to quash competition, allow monopolies, give subsidies, and evade regulations and

accountability. Real estate moguls and Wall Street fat cats who think they are "masters of the universe" are just following the lead of these earlier entrepreneurs.

Donald Trump, a master deceiver, has sold himself as a successful businessman, though revelations in May 2019 that he lost more than \$1 billion between 1985 and 1995 belie this deception. What "success" he had was in manipulating public opinion and using a litany of some of the most ruthless, dishonest and dishonorable tactics imaginable. He has cheated employees, contractors, suppliers and taxpayers, and exploited tax laws, bankruptcy laws, copyright laws and real estate laws. He has used thousands of lawsuits to intimidate communities and evade responsibilities. He marketed real estate advice in scheming ways to defraud "students" at "Trump University", and was forced to pay \$25 million for this fraudulent audacity. He has run roughshod over the environment to build luxury hotels, gambling casinos and exclusionary golf courses. He has brazenly concealed his tax return information from the public, who should be allowed to see the truth about his often dastardly dealings. And he generally acts in ways that are despicably greedy, dishonest and grotesquely manipulative.

Then he set his egomaniacal eyes on the ultimate power abuser's prize -- the most powerful position on the planet, and he used brazen demagoguery and foreign intrigue with authoritarian dictators like Vladimir Putin, and a long litany of profoundly unscrupulous strategies to triumph in this quest. And then he brought his selfish, cheating, exploiting, screwing, deceiving, manipulative ways to the White House, where he strong-armed compliant Republicans in Congress to corrupt governance. The anti-egalitarian consequences are proving to be catastrophic, and the unintended consequences may be even worse -- and hard to control.

Maureen Dowd expressed her critical disapproval of Trump and his assaults against decency and democracy in her article *Bonfire of Trump's Vanity* on June 7, 2020: "Lincoln gave his life trying to stop a clash of civilizations, 'with malice toward none', while Trump spends his presidency ginning up a clash of civilizations, with malice toward all." This is all but evil.

It is time for patriotic Americans to stand up and shout that we are not going to take this corruption anymore, and to demand that our leaders begin to honestly represent the best interests of humanity, now AND in future generations, and give greater consideration to other species of life on Earth.

"If ever a time should come, when vain and aspiring men shall possess the highest seats in Government, our country will stand in need of its experienced patriots to prevent its ruin." (Exclamation point!)

--- Samuel Adams

Again Mark Twain's words resonate from long past, when he incisively wrote in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, "My kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death."

Mark Twain made another sensational observation about patriotism more than 100 years ago: "We teach them to take their patriotism at second-hand; to shout with the largest crowd without examining into the right or wrong of the matter -- exactly as boys under monarchies are taught and have always been taught. We teach them to regard as traitors, and hold in aversion and contempt, such as do not shout with the crowd, and so here in our democracy we are cheering a thing which of all things is most foreign to it and out of place -- the delivery of our political conscience into somebody else's keeping. This is patriotism on the Russian plan."

Let's begin to champion true American values of democratic fair-mindedness and responsible inclusiveness and precautionary principles that respect the prospects of all our heirs in the future. Vladimir Putin seems to be intent on exporting his ruthless Russian plan, posing a threat to our freedoms, national security and valued self-determination, and Republicans are threatening our individual liberties and preventing us from achieving a more fairly shared prosperity. Let's support honest and honorable representatives to run our country!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain June 21, 2022





## A Conspiratorial Cartoon President During Almost Comically Consequential Times

December 2018, latest revisions Dec. 31, 2021

"What we are before is like a strait, a tricky road, a passage where we need courage and reason. The courage to go on, not to try to turn back; and the reason to use reason; not fear, not jealousy, not envy, but reason. We must steer by reason, and jettison -- because much must go -- by reason."

--- John Fowles, *The Aristos* (1970)

I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, am convinced that we Americans could easily create a healthier, happier, fairer and more inclusive country that would give us greater cause for hope for a better future, and a country much more secure for its citizens. A main obstacle to this providentially positive potentiality is the strong opposition to such an eminently salubrious status by "conservative" rich people who want our economic and political systems to remain rigged astonishingly generously in their favor, so that they are able to gain an ever increasing monopoly on the profits made through the exploitation of working people and natural resources.

A well-informed electorate is a prerequisite for ensuring that a democracy is healthy, and thereby offers all its citizens truly reasonable representation. This simple understanding made it humorous and viscerally provocative to see a political cartoon by David Sipress that appeared in *New Yorker* magazine soon after the 2016 elections. In this cartoon, a woman ruefully observes to her male companion, "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." Ha! Tens of millions of Americans found themselves in this predicament as the Donald Trump reality TV soap opera, crime saga, healthcare failings, and episodes of authority abuses became increasingly dysfunctional, anxiety inducing and deadly, and as he became more unhinged, sinisterly authoritarian and threatening to the public's health, individual liberties, and our national security and greatest American values.

Problems ignored tend to fester, as starkly revealed during widespread civil unrest after the murder of George Floyd and issues of police brutality against Blacks and racial injustices that have been taking place for too long.

### Comic Relief

A tumultuous four years passed when Trump was in office, and consequential matters became critical. It may be an odd idea that we are best advised to laugh out loud during times like this, but humor can help us remain sane, so let's keep our eyes peeled, our ears open, and our skepticism vital, and feel free to watch today's great comedians for perspective, especially socially aware observers like Stephen Colbert, Bill Maher, John Oliver, Seth Meyers, Trevor Noah, Jimmy Kimmel and the folks at Saturday Night Live.

Will Rogers, the great humorist and social commentator, known as Oklahoma's favorite son, once wryly observed, "Everything is changing. People are taking their comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke." It's a mystery how conservatives can be so change averse, yet support a self-promoting egomaniac who creates chaos and stands athwart progress that would likely be beneficial to them, and brazenly misleads them about what's going on.

As historian Will Durant once pointed out, "A sense of humor, being born of perspective, bears a near kinship to philosophy." In Buddhist philosophy, one key to proper conduct is right understanding. This is regarded as the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path toward enlightenment and Nirvana, a form of liberation in Buddhist philosophy. In our terribly conflicted world today, the general welfare and common good are being drastically

undermined by the anti-egalitarian priorities of the ruling class in its relentless efforts to gain ever-more money and decision-making influence, and more benefits, privileges and tax breaks for themselves. The seven other practices considered proper in the Noble Eightfold Path are right intention, right speech, right action, right effort, right livelihood, right mindfulness and right concentration. Right, right, right!

In July 2018, Donald Trump made the Orwellian declaration, "What you're seeing and what you're reading is not what's happening." Wow! The Deceiver-in-Chief thought he could lie with impunity and get away with his deceit by attacking critical news media. He evoked echoes of a passage in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* about Big Brother thought-control schemes in a dystopian world: "The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command." Yikes! Not long after Trump's perplexing and deceitful declaration, the once respectable lawyer and mayor Rudy Giuliani jumped on the Orwellian bandwagon with the twisted observation, "Truth isn't truth." Since then, he became an all but comical yet treacherous Trump TV propagandist, and a Ukraine Plot co-conspirator, and a devious inciter of insurrection against our democracy. Let's rise above, and see self-evident truths!

When Donald Trump was strutting and fretting his sorry hour upon the stage, he damned all of humanity's tomorrows with his self-serving and shortsighted power-abusing agenda. From bully pulpits of the White House and Twitter, he spun the truth with such Machiavellian cold calculation that it resembled a charlatan telling the tale of an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying much, including ominous refractions of our collective destiny.

"A king can stand people's fighting, but he can't last long if people start thinking."

--- Will Rogers

Trump's former White House counsel Don McGahn aptly called him "King Kong", due to his volatility and "volcanic anger" and the "shouting matches" Trump had with him and other members of his staff, and due to his "emotional decision making". Trump's cunningly manipulative and narcissistic tweetstorms contributed to making this moniker appropriate, especially the egomaniacal tweets in which he railed vituperatively against anyone who dared criticize his failings, subterfuges, scandalous behaviors, "voter fraud" fraud or abuses of power. Think of the astute declaration that Will Rogers once portentously made, "People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing."

George Conway observed that this King Kong characterization fits for another reason: "it reflects his desire to escape constraints -- in particular legal constraints." Conway pointed out in a February 2020 article that Trump's "Kong-like urge was illustrated by two developments: the president's latest executive clemency spree and his continued attacks against the federal judiciary." ... "Trump's specific invocations of the pardon power, moreover, appear unwedded to any notion of mercy or public good; they are not guided by the ordinary process of careful review. Rather, they are impulsive expressions of Trumpian spite and self-interest."

As far as Trump's attacks against the judiciary are concerned, they clearly reflect his view that he should have immunity from any form of accountability, and that he should have the absolute power to decide what he can and cannot do. When his co-conspiring enabler Bill Barr, Trump's third Attorney General, chided Trump for making his job "impossible" by tweeting out his demagogic authoritarian eagerness to interfere in the Department of Justice, Trump declared that, "I'm actually, I guess, the chief law enforcement officer of the country." Many people were taken aback by this assertion, but he was technically correct that as president, he sat at the top of the federal law enforcement apparatus, and bore ultimate constitutional responsibility for it. "The problem is that Trump's understanding of what it means to be the chief law enforcement officer, like his view of his office generally, is flawed and corrupt. The presidential oath of office is to 'faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States,' and to 'preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.' The job, says Article II of the Constitution, is to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed.'"

"With those words, the Constitution endows a president with the right and obligation to enforce the laws. It doesn't grant him the power to do whatever he wants. And it doesn't mean that Trump must be allowed to rampage through the legal landscape like King Kong, dangerously unchecked and unbound."

Trump arrogantly gave a blitz of pardons and clemencies after Republican Senators acquitted him from impeachment charges the first time. Jeffrey Toobin, CNN's chief legal analyst, suggested in a comment piece for

The New Yorker that "the real lesson" of those brazen actions were "a story of creeping authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is usually associated with a punitive spirit -- a leader who prosecutes and incarcerates his enemies. But there is another side to this leadership style. Authoritarians also dispense largesse, but they do it by their own whims, rather than pursuant to any system or legal rule. The point of authoritarianism is to concentrate power in the ruler, so the world knows that all actions, good and bad, harsh and generous, come from a single source." Toobin also noted how the people that Trump granted clemency to (including former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich and the former Police Commissioner of New York Bernard Kerik) all had "some personal connection" to him. Therefore, it was "exclusively an exercise of Trump's own power." Trump's spate of pardons just before leaving office in January 2021 were similarly unscrupulous, though he did not give blanket pardons to conspiring lawyer John Eastman or GOP lawmakers who sought them, like Matt Gaetz, for their roles in helping enable the January 6 insurrection.

Trump got away with imposing a rashly greedy and extremely self-serving short-term-oriented agenda on the populace. His demagogic schtick was to act like a preening, bragging "strong man", like a bombastic character in a melodrama. He provokes outrage and creates an exaggerated caricature of himself as a self-aggrandizing authority-abusing demagogic cult leader who loves to bask in the glory of conducting Nuremberg-like political rallies where adulating followers hang on his every word, chanting "lock her up" and fervently believing he might even be the Second Coming of Jesus. But he is about as far from a saint as almost anyone, ever.

Steven Hassan wrote in *The Cult of Trump* about this phenomenon. Hassan is a mental health counselor who specializes in harmful cults, and an expert on "the unethical use of powerful psychological influence techniques". Years ago, Hassan recruited and indoctrinated new members into Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, where "Moonies" blindly followed their cult leader in his political activism during the Cold War as a fierce advocate for anti-communism. He professed to believe that democracy had to defeat communism "as a necessary step in the Divine Providence to establish the Kingdom of God on earth." Many evangelical fundamentalists seem to bizarrely regard Trump with a similar bizarrely misplaced reverence.

### Ecological Sanity

Donald Trump and his family are emulating the scheming Once-ler, the cantankerous exploiter in *The Lorax*, a great cautionary fable written by Dr. Seuss. In this story, the Lorax is a character who "speaks for the trees", and the clever tale concerns the lethal danger that corporate greed poses to the natural world. Dr. Seuss used personifications to give life to industry in the persons of the Once-ler and his "thneed"-producing family, and to the environment in the majestically calm and wise Lorax.

*The Lorax* was Dr. Seuss' personal favorite of his books, for he was able to create a story addressing economic and environmental issues without it being dull. *The Lorax*, he explained, "came out of me being angry. In *The Lorax*, I was out to attack what I think are evil things and let the chips fall where they might." In a similar way, the scandalous behaviors and manipulative deceptions and eco-villain shenanigans of the Trump regime made me hopping mad, inspiring my passion to convey greater clarity about what's going on, and to introduce into the public consciousness a holistic integral worldview in this manifesto. We are all Gaia; and chips seem to be falling furious.

Trump emulated the *Doomsday Cult* of Reverend Moon and "the Moonies" even though he knew full well that "if we fail to act now" to ensure "meaningful and effective measures to control climate change, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequence for humanity and our planet."

Scientists tell us that NOW is the time to protect our nation's natural heritage and most cherished places. They say that humanity enjoys something like \$50 trillion every year in vital "ecosystem services" benefits that people worldwide gain from nature. The U.S. is already one of the most mine-friendly countries anywhere, according to an assessment by the Fraser Institute -- and we are mining and polluting, poisoning, depleting and wasting with ridiculously alarming abandon, as if there will be no tomorrow. The Damsel Tomorrow quakes on tremulous knee.

The great naturalist Sir David Attenborough observed in December 2018: "Right now we're facing a man-made disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years: climate change. If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilizations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon." Attenborough



spoke these words at the beginning of a two-week-long climate conference in Poland where emissaries from nearly 200 nations met to determine how people in the world should dramatically scale back carbon emissions to abide by the landmark Paris climate agreement, and by doing so, stave off some of the most calamitous impacts caused by the greenhouse gas-induced climate crisis. *Our Planet needs greater respect!*

At the Davos Economic Forum in January 2020, Trump attacked climate activists, referring to them as "perennial prophets of doom." This was part of his diabolically twisted rationalization for disastrous profiteering policies benefitting fossil fuel interests, and his crusade to cling to power and continue abusing it by betraying humanity in the future with self-promoting, cynically calculating and idiotically imprudent actions.

This point of view is dumbly backwards. Scientists are today's visionary prophets, who base informed projections on evidence and extrapolations of data. Trump promoted his self-interest by pushing rashly short-term-oriented policies that are tripping ecological tipping points -- and actually making doomsday scenarios more and more likely. "The time to argue over the validity of climate change predictions is over. The time to act is now."

The pragmatic and responsible approach would be to budget for costs that are unpredictable by creating "rainy day" provisions for recovery from inevitable natural disasters. Instead, the Trump Republican approach is to further burden every taxpayer in every future year with burgeoning debt obligations for the reckless purpose of achieving political advantages in the short run by allowing rich people to grab gargantuan benefits from politically corrupt and wrongheaded policies, priorities and state laws.

At this crucial moment in history, it would be wise to mindfully remember the findings set forth in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report. In this assessment, more than a thousand experts in 95 countries had spent four years studying ecological conditions on Earth, just after the turn of the millennium. The conclusion they reached was that human activities are having harmful impacts by unsustainably consuming natural resources while simultaneously significantly damaging ecosystems upon which we are critically dependent. These experts sensibly warned that humanity should develop a better managed economy, and better methods of governance, so that in the course of living our lives we will at the same time better protect the vitality of our environment and the future prospects of life on Earth. Let's come together to accomplish such eminently farsighted goals!

The fact of the matter is that Big Money wields dominating influence in our oligarchic government-by-the-rich. This state of affairs is unfortunately undermining our democracy, due to exploiters betraying the best interests of the populace. Something like 95% of election contests are won by the candidates who spend the most money, and environmental organizations are vastly outspent by a factor of 30 to 1 by special interest groups intent on rigging the system ever more favorably for themselves, to the dire detriment of the citizenry. This situation dangerously undermines all the bedrock environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Wilderness Act, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the strategic Endangered Species Act.

We should rightly redesign our economy so that it works better for everyone, or else it inevitably will be worse for all. Joe Brewer, who describes himself as "a change strategist working on behalf of humanity", wrote an article in July 2017 titled *Do You Still Feel Capitalism Dying?* In it, he characterizes our society today as being afflicted by "a mental disease of late-stage capitalism". He wrote that this is causing "deep worry and anxiety, prompting feelings of severe isolation and humiliation, combined with a profound sense of powerlessness for millions of people around the world." Brewer says we are on a path to "planetary-scale collapse", and that we need to reckon with this challenge in our lifetimes, and the sooner, the better. "Earth's climate is ramping up for a phase transition that threatens our entire civilization." The cause of this ominous development is irresponsibility of leaders in our political duopoly, dominated as it is by politicians who collaborate with those who want to hyper-stimulate growth and maximize private profits at the expense of the greater good. Evaluating a passel of enabling "Global Architecture of Wealth Extraction" schemes, I do declare, "Let's admirably remodel."

As the Republican Party descends further into rigidity and chaos in their dastardly bargain with the amoral right-wing corporate-dominated devil of irresponsible profiteering, consumerism and despotic abuses of power, a superb array of more progressive, positive, inclusive, honest, visionary, achievable and fair-minded common sense

ideas are laying around, as extensively articulated in this manifesto, seeking to achieve a resurgence of power, persuasion and sustainability that will be effective in preventing more undesirable developments.

Consequential ethics is a philosophic discipline that judges demagogues harshly, especially when those who divide us to conquer us push a treacherous agenda that harmfully discriminates against the majority of people and is cunningly calculated to concentrate wealth and power more rashly and radically exclusionary in the hands of a ruthlessly anti-democratic few. It is disgustingly dastardly for demagogues to hijack people's emotions and drive wedges between people to gain power, and to then proceed to abuse that power, torpedoing the great benefits of social cohesion and peaceable coexistence found in fairer and more unifying courses of action.

Trump is shamefully obsessed with getting "wins" for himself, even though these victories reprehensibly come at the expense of the vast majority of the American people, and to the serious detriment of everyone in future generations. Grotesquely, the driving motives for these "wins" are generally selfish and self-aggrandizing. Trump had proclaimed to voters during the 2016 campaign, "We're going to win so much, you're going to be so sick and tired of winning." Fast forward to today, and most reasonable Americans are really sick of the way Trump won, and of the collateral damages he inflicted on our country, its citizens, and humanity at large. "Loser!"

Will and Ariel Durant wrote in *Lessons of History*: "Somewhere, sometime, in the name of humanity, we must challenge a thousand evil precedents, and dare to apply the Golden Rule to nations, as the Buddhist King Ashoka did (262 B.C.), or at least do what Augustus did when he bade Tiberius desist from further invasion of Germany (A.D. 9). "Magnanimity in politics", said Edmund Burke, "is not seldom the truest wisdom, and a great empire and little minds go ill together." If ever there was a time for "winners" to be magnanimous, it is when they win at the expense of others, or are extra successful at milking the government treasury to grab the spoils of the biggest public borrowing spree in history, which is taking place to recover from the global pandemic.

With inequality tragically worse right now than almost ever before in history, it is wrong for Trump Republicans to take advantage of anti-immigrant, anti-abortion and anti-gay prejudices, and gender and racial biases, with the primary corrupt intent of cementing money and power in the control of the rich. Wealthy conservatives are using portions of their ill-gotten debt-financed Tax Cut money to elect more scurrilous con men enablers, so that they can more easily continue to get away with foisting their pathetic agenda on the people. This agenda is stupidly one that zealously sacrifices the public health and natural ecosystems and the ecological commons to artificially maximize short-term profits. This course of action is leaving a terrible legacy to our heirs.

#### Public Corruption, Graft and Crony Capitalism

On October 29, 2018, ten days before the 2016 elections, Donald Trump spouted out a demagogic diatribe at a bombastic campaign rally, deceitfully declaring: "A vote for Hillary is a vote to surrender our government to public graft, corruption and cronyism that threatens the very foundations of our constitutional system." Oh, really!? Public corruption, graft and cronyism! That was an ironically preposterous whopper. Let's laugh aloud, heartily, for Hillary Clinton could never have gotten away with even a tiny fraction of the brazen lies, divisive politicking, personal profiteering, misuses of public funds, outrage-provoking swindles, fomenting of violence, conflicts of interest, violations of the Constitution's emoluments clause, and way-worse-than-Machiavellian abuses of authority and breaches of ethical norms that Trump and his immorally unprincipled cronies are guilty of.

Look how it is turning out, thanks in part to Vladimir Putin, the NRA and Fox News, Inc., and countless slanderous anti-Hillary headlines on the screaming cover of Trump co-conspirator David Pecker's supermarket tabloid, the National Enquirer. The self-described "dirty trickster" Roger Stone was also complicit, advising Republican politicians to do whatever is necessary to win, no matter how contrary to the common good. "Attack, attack, attack. Never defend," says Stone, a cunning arch villain who has waged many smear campaigns and pushed falsehoods to promote far right lobbyist propaganda. And what better line of attack is there, one might wonder, than righteously charging opponents with exactly what you yourself are most guilty of. Busted! The king wannabe is not wearing any clothes, and it is revolting. Citizens, revolt! Roger Stone, guilty!

Under Crooked Trump, there was much public corruption, especially by climate altering fossil fuel interests. And there were many instances of graft in highly unscrupulous uses of the Trump family's power for personal gain, and

in blatant crony favoritism and vengeance, ramped up influence peddling, foreign intrigue, campaign finance violations, misuses of Trump "charitable foundation" funds, and unprecedented nepotism. Too, the American people have had to endure the divisive unfolding constitutional crisis over impeachable offenses that sprang into the public awareness soon after the Trump cult claimed to have been exonerated by Robert Mueller of malfeasance in the 2016 elections. Trump's exaggerated violations of law and sneaky conspiratorial attempts to cover up his misdeeds are cartoonish, though sadly consequential.

Things are no doubt much worse than they would have been under Hillary Clinton, for with Trump Republicans we have ruthless assaults against core human values like honesty, decency, inclusiveness, fairness of representation and opportunity, political moderation, Golden Rule reciprocity, Black Lives really mattering, good neighborliness, social cohesion, personal security, true national security, fairer justice, peaceable coexistence, sensible protections of the environment, and valiant efforts to actualize common good goals.

The whole scope of misconduct and illegal shenanigans by Trump campaign officials before the 2016 elections, and in poorly governing thereafter, shined a glaring light on the absurdity of this devious characterization by Trump of his general election opponent. Trump and many members of his administration demonstrated an astonishing lack of integrity. Seeing this, one hears a jarring refrain of twisted hypocrisy in this monotonously-repeated devious mantra by Trump about Hillary, who he cheated out of the presidency. "Lock HER up!"?

In Trump's pre-election harangue, he went on to claim that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C., and remedy the sad condition in which public corruption, cronyism and patronage politics are causing voters to lose faith in their government. From the day he took office, however, numerous observers and ethics experts and honest persons persuasively made clear that many of the activities that Trump and members of his Cabinet engaged in were outrageously antithetical to his vow to clean up the nation's Capitol.

In Trump's 2016 speech, he said, "We must and we will save America. And that is why my contract with the American voter begins with a plan to end government corruption and to take our country back from the special interests and the donors." This was a preposterous prognostication, and stunningly suspicious, considering how much Republicans do to give more benefits to special interest groups. Predictably, this prominently includes energy, mining, ranching and farming concerns, even though this patronage involves sacrificing our National Monuments and other public lands, and the global commons. Also, wealthy donors are giving huge sums of money to Republican politicians in legalized bribes that have, in effect, been sanctioned by a narrow majority of "conservatives" on the Supreme Court. Big Money is gushing up from a small number of system-corrupting individuals, notoriously including the shrewd Koch brother billionaires' network of profiteering capitalists, and Robert and Rebekah Mercer, and nefarious ilk of these rich conservatives.

These are our puppet masters, and for them and other loyalists to their agenda, no sacrifice is too great for getting bigger opportunities to exploit public lands and take unfair advantage of working people. The public is meanwhile being distracted by the latest manipulative tweets and deceptions, or by the most recent scandalous outrage or treacherous fusillade of impropriety, or by some new instance of Republican loyalists standing by their man, despite his having betrayed the American people by collaborating with Vladimir Putin, Mohammed bin Salman, Recep Erdogan and other autocrats abroad. While civic unrest spiked in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, the USA seemed to be teetering on the brink of totalitarianism, and Trump's urging of "dominance" of protestors by deployments of the military was a dire threat to First Amendment rights. "Crazytown".

Trump also proclaimed in his speech just ten days before the fateful election, "Public corruption is a grave and profound threat to a democracy. Government corruption spreads out like a cancer and infects the operations of government itself." He added, "If the corruption is not removed, then the people are not able to have faith in their government." Sensational -- Trump was right. There is no reason to trust leaders who engage in so much fraud and corruption. The leaders we choose in all future elections should be much more honorable, responsible and progressive representatives in the White House and in the U.S. Senate and House, so that we can get on with the critical business of creating a healthier, saner society and the sensible legacy of a livable world.

Another facet of treachery by Republican politicians is their monomaniacal focus on eliminating regulations and making corporate-friendly changes to rules that were sensibly designed to protect both people's well-being and the health of the natural world. These insidious actions wrongly facilitate the misbegotten goal of allowing big costs to be externalized onto society. These politicians are opposing clean energy initiatives and utterly failing to make responsible efforts to mitigate the disastrous impacts of a warming planet. In addition, these schemers are sneakily striving to undermine transparency and accountability requirements, and impeding efforts toward creating a sustainable future. All of these things are far-reaching betrayals of the greater good.

The Republican Party has adopted a "winning is the only thing" stance -- "willing to place an individual who at best is an embarrassment and at worst a serious danger to the health and security of our nation in the position of leader of the free world. -- 'Party before Country:' -- one can only look on with disgust." Well, Mark Twain's great-granddaughter looks on with chagrin, and launches a chuckling fusillade of comically spiteful ridicule. As all those persistent pharmaceutical drug ads on television always urge on a perplexed public, "ask your doctor if this treatment may be good for you." (Don't bother trying to read the small print.)

Most members of the Trump administration engaged in an astonishing amount of self-serving misconduct. The fingers point particularly at Mitch McConnell and MANY other members of the Trump cabal, including Betsy DeVos, Andrew Wheeler, Scott Pruitt, Steve Mnuchin, Mike Pompeo, Wilbur Ross, Devin Nunes and Jim Jordan. Also excessively treacherous to the best interests of the people were the fired Attorney General Jeff Sessions and then Bill Barr, who all added icy frosting on top of the tainted cake. Let the people eat healthier cake!

Trump's deceitful allegations against Hillary Clinton resembled the rantings of a tinhorn dictator in a banana republic. So do those moronic chants of "Lock her up" at cultish Nazi-like Trump rally events. This rhetoric is ugly and exceedingly dishonest, and misdirected, and it turns out to be another of many instances of what is known as "psychological projection". This phenomenon applies much more to Trump than to Hillary. Trump is much more guilty of what he charges his political opponents with. The English language is deficient in this regard, for there is no word sufficient to describe this pathologically deplorable ruse. Hypocrisy just isn't adequate. Why is it that so often, when the pot calls the kettle black, it turns out that the pot itself has been carbonized over open flames, instead of being sensibly shiny from sitting only on hot coals. (Huh?)

"Public corruption, graft and crony capitalism!" Well, when a fuller extent of the profound illegitimacy of the scandalous rule by "conservatives" finally becomes crystal clear, what course of action shall we chart? Our Founders had not formulated a parliamentary system style "vote of no confidence" that would flexibly allow for quick alterations of course when subversive factions are wielding too much power. So what shall we do?

Fortunately, Democrats won control of the White House, the Senate and the House in the 2020 elections, and they now need to enact true voting reforms (H.R.1). To do this, they must eliminate the filibuster in the Senate related to this constitutional issue to prevent Republicans from torpedoing reforms. This would be the best way to pivot to governance that is much fairer, collaborative, constitutional and truly just, peaceable and sustainable.

Until Trump became the official nominee of the Republican Party, the "powers that be" in the Party had declined to support him. Many declared, "Never Trump." But then many of them fell in line to give him enabling support. The reason for this "change of heart"? Unbridled ambition and fears for their careers! Plus a zealous quest for power and campaign contributions at any cost. Some of these flip-floppers are self-serving politicians in Congress who are eager to serve corrupt right-wing causes to satisfy misplaced loyalties to despotic causes.

Trump, sensationally, is now acting as a subversive against our democracy. This is creating great risks to Party and Country, due to uncertainty resulting from this impulsive, big lie promoting, insult-hurling "madman" and his incomprehensibly loyal base. Then came nefarious incitement to insurrection on January 6th, aided by domestic extremists like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and absurd acolytes of false QAnon conspiracy theories, which all contribute to making the influence of Trump Republicans excessively illegitimate.

Incidentally, the U.S. Constitution is indeed great. But today it requires new amendments to keep it adaptive and effective in dealing well with changing circumstances. An amendment is needed on campaign financing, as rightly advocated by the Move to Amend coalition of public interest groups. This amendment would reduce the

overweening power of giant corporations, and salubriously give more influence to *We the People*. And a broadly fair-minded Bill of Rights for Future Generations is needed to provide us with safer guidance in all our national decision-making. This should become a cornerstone to a more providential Constitution that proves to be better capable of guiding us intelligently toward leaving a legacy of a fairer and more sustainable future.

### Here's the Scoop, Folks!

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, had set forth the essential principles upon which our government was founded, and he referred to these visionary principles when he sensationally stated, "The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety."

Here's the kicker. This is a perilous moment in history for our democratic republic, and the preservation of our democracy and general well-being hang in the balance. Experts in national intelligence confirm that Putin's Russia interfered in our 2020 elections, as they did in 2016. And Trump is using the system-corrupting ability to raise huge sums of money from rich people and big corporations, to be used to hype up manipulative messaging and propagate the voter fraud big lie and intimidate critics and buy the fealty of his allied cronies and sycophants.

The title of this essay is cynically satirical. Note that the greatly-respected writer Mark Twain valued satire and ridicule as weapons of skepticism against folly, ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, irrationality, small-mindedness, myopia, prejudice, impropriety, despotic abuses of authority and blind adherence to dogmas. This is what Mark Twain meant when he famously asserted, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." Yet laughter at modern political absurdities alone is insufficient to providentially alter the course of history, for abusers of authority are exerting domineering influence over peoples in many countries, and they are perpetuating too many corrupt scams -- and the ramifications associated with their tyrannical policies and priorities are too deadly serious to allow us to rely on satire to guarantee the safety, security and well-being of the people.

The 2018 midterm elections were a good step toward correcting this state of affairs. Democrats, having gained new majority control the House, then began setting the agenda, passing hundreds of remedial laws. Mitch McConnell in the U.S. Senate unfortunately continued to betray the common good by preventing most of these remedial laws from even being considered. Control of the House also allowed Democrats to try to fulfill the Constitutional responsibility of Congress to exercise oversight over the Executive Branch and any malfeasance it commits. Republicans in Congress have been glaringly derelict in fulfilling this constitutional duty. Senate Republicans became even more seriously complicit in facilitating corruption when they conducted a sham trial in Trump's first impeachment by refusing to allow witnesses or evidence. Their loyalty to Party is broadly disloyal to the American people. Then, after the MAGA mob assault on the Capitol on January 6th, the majority of Republicans in the Senate once again chose not to hold abuses of authority accountable, and again violated democratic fairness principles and rejected honorable integrity and ethical responsibility in governing.

Republican rule is not only illegitimate due to the ruthless means used to gain power, but also because it is anti-American in the treacherous extent to which Republican politicians are indulging in a long litany of wrongheaded scams, devious bait-and-switch cons, and egregious harms -- as incisively assessed herein.

What shall we do in this dangerous time of constitutional crisis? The illegitimacy of Republican rule cries out for a truly fair-minded resolution. So too does the egregious extent of abuses of authority being perpetrated by conservative politicians, and by system-corrupting wealthy people who keep buying the commitment of puppet politicians to run up the national debt to pay for reductions in their taxes. Mark Twain would scoff, and query, "This is the best government money can buy?"

A good far-reaching fair-minded remedy is called for. In a just world, strict amends would be required for all the Republican wrongdoing. In the aftermath of both of the Senate acquittals of Trump on impeachable offenses, the American people face the most seriously consequential constitutional crisis in history, and we have an overarching need for a sensible resolution to this serious challenge. I, Dr. Tiffany Twain, believe we should

demand restitution from Republican politicians for their wide-ranging malfeasance. The solution we need should be based on a concept that is salubriously civilized: fair compensatory restorative justice for wrongdoing, rather than more primitive retribution against those responsible. Either way, guilt of breaking laws remains.

Right now, at this turbulent juncture in history, it is time for us to take sensible actions to save ourselves from the infamy of yielding to the implacable forces of treachery and despotism -- and public corruption, border walls, trade tariffs, farm bailouts, extreme gerrymandering and the whole enchilada. As Thomas Paine famously put it in his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, "Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honor." And, "we have it in our power to begin the world over again."

### The Need for Positive Change

The famous economist Milton Friedman once declared: "Only a crisis -- actual or perceived -- produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable." Milton Friedman is right that some of the best opportunities for dramatic change arise in a crisis. Witness the impressively powerful energy of the Black Lives Matter movement after the killing of George Floyd. But Friedman advocated "conservative" ideas that are rather wrongheaded in many aspects, due to the consequential extent that they tend to undermine democracy and rip off and oppress the people. His ideas concerning money supply policy, deregulation, cutting taxes, privatization, "free trade" and supply-side economics have significantly influenced government policies around the world since the early 1980s, helping rationalize unacceptably retrograde priorities pushed by conservatives.

The best plan, by far, would be to collect the best ideas together, and to seek out comprehensive understandings -- ones informed by reason, prudence, fair-minded egalitarianism, and consistency with both the greater good and expansive concepts of freedom. In other words, we need well-articulated progressive plans, not reactionary conservative plans, and these need to be articulated clearly and forcefully so that *We the People* will be saved from abusive far right policies that are proving to be disastrous to current and future well-being.

The Earth Manifesto is dedicated to the idea that some day, after we have stuck with a lot of other options that are inimical to the greater good, a growing consensus will develop that is centered on propositions like those contained in this manifesto. Like the fact, for instance, that much better cooperative problem solving is needed in civilized societies to achieve goals consistent with the health, general welfare, security and sanity of the populace. Let's accomplish this, instead of allowing Big Money and poorly accountable corporations to corrupt our political system and create monopolies and pursue ruthless free-for-all race-to-the-bottom competition.

Economic and ecological ruin, after all, will be the "tragedy of the commons" outcome of an insistence that competing interest groups should have unlimited freedom of action to exploit the global commons. For the best guidance, remember -- common good, yes! Tragedy of the Commons, no!

The ideas Milton Friedman incubated were a form of gospel-like economic fundamentalism that has been shown to often be disastrous, as when adverse impacts resulted from ruthless economic imperialism, bubble economic policies, deregulated exploitation, unfair national priorities, fraudulent activities and reduced accountability, all of which contributed to wreaking painful hardships on billions of people around the world during the financial crisis and recession of 2008-09. Friedman promoted ideas that could most easily be imposed during economic or political shocks like recessions, financial panics, periods of revolutionary instability, pandemic disease outbreaks, military coups or other moments fair-minded governments can be subverted. These ideas are subject to spin and propaganda by reactionary conservatives, who employ them for unfair, and system corrupting political purposes.

In *The Shock Doctrine*, activist Naomi Klein criticized some of Friedman's economic ideas, identifying them with principles that guided the economic restructuring that followed harsh military coups in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s. The great linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky agreed with Naomi Klein in pointing out that policies supported by Friedman have contributed to increasing inequality and widening disparities in income and wealth. Both Klein and Chomsky conclude that such outcomes are a serious problem, and have been exploited by conservatives as an ideological cover for rationalizing capital accumulation by rich people and giant corporations.

## Climate Action

A U.S. government report published in late 2018 confirmed that climate change is real and that human activities are primarily to blame. This report by 13 federal agencies (and numerous subsequent assessments by climate scientists) unequivocally contradicted Trump's absurd claims that climate change is a hoax. The report instead made clear that the evidence is unambiguous: increasing damages and risks are being driven by man-made causes, mainly including emissions of greenhouse gases and the destruction of vast tracts of forests. The report stated: "evidence for a changing climate abounds, from the top of the atmosphere to the depths of the oceans."

Stern warnings have been repeatedly issued by the world's leading climate scientists at the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, indicating we have only about 10 years to take transformational steps to keep global warming at a level beyond which risks will cataclysmically worsen of extreme heat, severe droughts, disastrous floods, terrible wildfires, and dire poverty for hundreds of millions of people. Unprecedented urgent changes are needed to prevent this far-reaching tragedy. Scientists give us good hope by speculating that these actions are both affordable and feasible, and that we must act at the most ambitious end of the Paris Accord pledges. It was wrong for the Trump administration to make budget cuts to climate research and mitigation programs, and to repeal Obama-era rules focused on reducing carbon emissions, and to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accords -- and to stint on contributions to the eminently fair Green Fund to offset the climate injustices of our harmful climate impacts on billions of persons in other countries.

In addition to spiraling costs, scientists say the climate crisis could render parts of the planet uninhabitable within this century. Heat waves in places like the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, Europe and Asia in the last few summers are a harbinger of much worse things to come. The time is now to take bold action to prevent the worst scenarios caused by failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We should make dramatic shifts to mitigate climate change, and alter our efforts from being voluntary to being collective action through effective incentives and green fees, as advocated by organizations like the Citizens Climate Lobby and proponents of bold climate actions like former Vice President Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*.

We should all support a real clean energy revolution. As Al Gore points out in his tireless efforts to train large numbers of climate champions to influence U.S. and international climate policy, he is inspiring people with the responsible understanding that the stakes have never been higher, and that the worst perils of the climate crisis could be overcome with human ingenuity, passion and proper commitments.

Scientists are correct that the truly responsible thing to do would be to leave a much larger proportion of fossil fuels in the ground, and to use energy more efficiently, and conserve it, and find better methods for greening our ways. This should be accomplished by implementing powerful incentives that will help make the inevitable and necessary transition to greener forms of energy -- ones that are renewable, less destabilizing of global climate patterns of precipitation and storms, and more indefinitely sustainable. Reforms are better, in general, when they involve incentives and disincentives in market pricing, rather than more intrusive regulations.

Those who have been indoctrinated to strongly oppose government regulations should be willing to have sensible incentives and disincentives put into place to fairly price goods and services. After all, such market mechanisms would have the common sense salubrious effect of preventing costs from being insidiously socialized through the success of cantankerous exploiters externalizing costs onto the populace. As Trump and his climate denying cronies strived to roll back fuel efficiency standards on vehicles in the U.S., they basically acted to implement plans that will rashly and irresponsibly waste fossil fuels at a faster pace. This is crass foolishness.

Revealingly, the three biggest producers of oil in the world are the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia. Giant multinational corporations involved in extracting fossil fuels are overproducing these non-renewable resources, and they are mining these dirty fuels at artificially cheap prices because they do not include mounting costs of pollution, oil spills, associated adverse human health impacts, climate disasters and the real adversities being foisted onto people in the future through the rapid depletion of these resources. The fact that these fuels are being over-produced only to burn them profligately is wrong, especially in light of the fact that scientists tell us we should leave 80% of known reserves of these combustible materials in the ground during the remainder of this

century. Right now, we will burn through this carbon budget within 20 years or so. Let's demand climate solutions that help prevent calamitous costs of global warming and disasters caused by extreme weather events and other climate disruptions, and ocean acidification and the decimation of coral reefs, and coastal calamities that will result from warming temperatures causing inexorably higher sea levels and storm surges.

This state of affairs persists because unacceptable degrees of political corruption infuse global oil politics. This observation is confirmed by the fact that, instead of establishing effective incentives to strongly promote conservation and more efficient uses of these dirty resources, perverse incentives have been put in place in nations worldwide that give huge subsidies and depletion allowances to giant corporations involved in extracting fossil fuels. Such subsidies are bigger for fossil fuels than almost any other commodities, due to the widespread "rent seeking" corruption involved in these highly lucrative pursuits. We have a real responsibility to burn fossil fuels more frugally, so as to conserve them AND mitigate the dangerously detrimental impacts associated with spewing tens of billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year.

Think again about Mark Twain's satirical statement that we have the best government money can buy. In recent years, our leaders have failed miserably at establishing campaign finance limits and sensible controls over lobbying, so our democracy has been subverted into divided coalitions in which under-represented Americans are deprived of influence by wealthy conservatives and corporate CEOs. This gave us a kakistocracy from 2017 through 2021 -- a government run by some of the worst, most poorly qualified and most unscrupulous persons. This is a part of the biggest con in history, which unfolded right before our eyes. This scam featured an ultimate bait-and-switch scheme in which a dangerously unfit demagogue grabbed power by a litany of scurrilous means, and then he and those in his cabal began imposing their retrogressive agenda on the masses to finance new rounds of tax breaks for the rich. Their agenda is clearly highly inequitable and anti-environmental.

Sad images assault our senses. The 'Holy' Bible tells believers to beware of false prophets who perform great wonders to deceive the faithful. Those who are wise will see clearly, and follow the money, and decry the real machinations of self-serving, excessively profit-prepossessed abusers of power and privilege. They will clearly understand that false prophets make reprehensibly poor leaders. Let's overthrow these scheming overlords!

"Teflon Don", as the flamboyant Mafia boss John Gotti was known, was a racketeer who escaped unscathed and unrepentant from several criminal prosecutions during the 1980s. He finally met his deserved fate in the early 1990s when he was convicted of five murders, bribery, tax evasion, illegal gambling, and obstruction of justice. Our cartoon president Donald Trump, or "Teflon Don II", has been engaging in public perfidy, which he tries to conceal beneath an astonishing pile of bullshit, excuse me. This is especially onerous because his actions and failures put the public health, well-being and the safety of American people at unnecessary risk. A dirge of ominous sounds accompanies this observation, signifying that Trump should not have been able to continue getting away with his unconstitutional abuses of power and evasion of consequences for domestic shenanigans and conspiratorial collaboration with an international syndicate of brutal and myopic autocrats.

Authoritarian Trump hates criticism and frequently mocks and denigrates newspapers and journalists, especially ones with progressive viewpoints like those articulated on MSNBC, or balanced perspectives provided by CNN or Public Broadcasting. He is not the first demagogue in American history to distort political discourse through falsehoods and innuendos that exploit public fears and biases. In the early 1950s, Joseph McCarthy, a first-term Republican Senator from Wisconsin, ruthlessly manipulated people's fear of communism, with the diabolical help of the shrewd lawyer Roy Cohn. "McCarthy was only brought down because a courageous journalist named Edward R. Murrow understood that a bully like McCarthy could not be dealt with by traditional reporting."

As a candidate in 2016, Trump promised to change libel laws in a way that could undermine first amendment rights of free speech and erode the freedom of the press. Once in power, however, he found it preferable to bully and intimidate to chill and confuse reasoned discussion. And he indulged in distracting and deceiving people to try to keep them from clearly seeing all the misconduct that was going on. Trump thinks he is not like other people, but "Actually, the U.S. Constitution says Trump is exactly like other people, because under the Constitution, we are all equal before the law. There is no Donald Trump Exception clause anywhere to be found. Even the Founding



Fathers had to take their lumps from their critics. But we get where he is coming from -- the political milieu of fascism. Fascist dictators -- even wannabe fascist dictators -- cannot abide criticism."

### Reflections on Religion

Most religions tell their faithful flocks how to behave to be saved from eternal punishment in an imagined afterlife. In this regard, religions provide solace for the hardships people endure in their lives, but they also can serve to enable injustices in the world right now. Curiously, religions thereby distract people from demanding that their representatives in government act to honestly make the world a fairer and safer place today. And established religions function as an opiate to the people, contributing to divisiveness that keeps people from uniting to throw corrupt and deceitful politicians out of office, and from demanding and getting substantial reforms to our rigged economic and political systems to make them better for the citizenry, in the here and now.

Religions are good when they provide positive effects like closer community relationships and a reverence for the natural world, but they are bad when they serve to prevent people from taking responsible steps to ensure that we leave a saner legacy in the real afterlife of our children's and grandchildren's lives, and the lives of everyone to be born in future generations. To dutifully wait for salvation in some hypothesized afterlife in the hereafter is a much worse plan than demanding -- and getting -- fairer national policies in the world right now. A bumper sticker seen on a dusty old car identifies another reason that established religions often serve to rationalize and perpetuate the status quo: "RELIGION is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich."

In an astute political cartoon, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that the mullahs in Iran only care about money and power, not religion. Really? That is another odd instance of Republican leaders accusing people they regard as enemies with what they themselves are most guilty of. It is highly dubious that Trump is an honestly religious man, but the radical Religious Right in the USA has sided with those who seek money and power and control over those who care about the poor and the downtrodden. Jesus would be horrified. Many in the GOP don't believe in evolution, but sure enough, the Party has de-evolved, going from the honorable Abraham Lincoln to the conniving crook Richard Nixon to the blatantly deceitful and trust-betraying demagogue Donald Trump.

People's adherence to religious dogmas is like a barbarous waste of moral energy. As John Fowles observed in his philosophical treatise *The Aristos*, misguided religious thinking and actions are "like keeping ramshackle water mills on a river that could serve hydroelectric dynamos." Much more positive outcomes could be achieved if these formidable energies were to be redirected into more moderate, salubrious, wholesome and peaceable channels, and if the enormous amounts of time and money devoted to churches were redirected away from discriminatory biases. Imagine, for instance, if we could transcend the horrible conflicts over religious supremacy taking place between Christianity and Islam in the world today, as manifested by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. and the retaliatory War on Terror and military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the disastrous war in Syria, and the drone assassinations of Islamic extremists (and innocents nearby) in places like Pakistan and Yemen. The U.S. military has used air supremacy for years to bomb insurgents, yet terrorist extremism has gained excessive influence that is stoked by blowback against injustices. The costs of conflicts like this are terribly high in a world so much in need of smarter and more salubrious investments of money and energy.

Think how different the world would be if more people studied big picture open-minded enlightened ideas that give respect to the future, rather than closed-minded, myopic and narrowly partisan parochial thinking. The synapses of our brains have a remarkable neuroplasticity, and maybe with broader ways of seeing, these synapses would build new circuits and snap onto new providential perspectives and understandings that would affect our societies in positive ways. This might even make it easier for us to work together to achieve greater good goals!

We need a spiritual renaissance in the world today, and if authorities in established religions are not willing and able to lead in honestly righteous directions, they should get out of the way. Specific good plans for actually creating a more propitious world are articulated in the essays of the *Common Sense Revival*. These detailed recommendations can also be found in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online.

Truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
December 31, 2021





## Belated Introduction - What the Hell Is Going On?

April 2018, most recently updated on March 1, 2022

*We the People* could create a dramatically fairer and more secure society by demanding that our representatives and leaders act more consistently with the needs of the people and the underpinnings of the common good. It is our moral obligation to do this, and to do so in ways most likely to be sustainable, giving greater respect to our heirs in future generations. The main barrier to achieving this salubrious state of affairs is the deep corruption in our corporate-dominated economy, aided and abetted by the sorry dysfunction in our hyper-partisan politics. The fact of the matter is that the narrow vested interests of the wealthiest 1% of Americans are radically over-represented in governance, and the more expansive interests, well-being and security of the other 99% are pathetically under-represented.

We could easily chart positive new courses of action that are smarter, healthier, safer and more sustainable. We simply need to adopt recommendations like those set forth in *See Clearly*, starting with a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations* for overarching guidance. We should also demonstrate much more concern for *Intelligent Precautionary Principles*, and put into effect *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*, and adopt some of the provisions identified in the online *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*. Make no mistake about these things; the fixes required are hard only because of the extent to which the political status quo is corrupt. These remedies are rooted in fair-minded representation of all constituencies.

The USA today is one of the most unequal societies in world history. To understand what has happened to create this retrogressive imbalance, we must recognize all the ways that a corrupt crony capitalist con job has been perpetuated on the American people for many decades. The sensational details of what has caused this exploitive swindle are presented in *The Con Goes On: A Triumphant Coup by Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalists*.

This highly inequitable and inauspicious state of affairs has been achieved through a suspicious smattering of grotesquely inequitable methods that are used to cement the status quo in place. I urge readers to understand more clearly these shrewd schemes that rich people use to maximize their fortunes at the expense of the masses, as spelled out in my essay *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*. These ideas are a prelude to many propitious recommendations for farsighted ethical common sense right actions.

These wealth-concentrating schemes have been made more unfair by the main planks of the Reagan Revolution. First, Ronald Reagan deprived many workers of rights to collectively bargain for a better deal. He started by firing 11,000 air traffic controllers who had gone on strike for better treatment. Then he acted to make radically regressive changes in taxation to mainly benefit the top 1%, irresponsibly indulging in excessive amounts of deficit financing while engaging in efforts to ramp up military spending, which created bigger opportunities for huge profits to be made on militarism, weapons and Cold War conflicts. He also reduced regulations on banks and savings-and-loan associations and giant corporations, and eviscerated measures designed to constrain their risk-taking and hold them accountable. And he took steps to scale back enforcement of antitrust laws, leading to an era of corporate consolidation. Fast forward several decades, and with the 2016 national elections, an electoral coup took place that made all these schemes much worse. Review the details of how this illegitimate outcome came about, and its serious implications, in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*.

Also see my morphing introspection into Mark Twain's extraordinary 1906 essay, "*My Country, Right or Wrong*" for a compelling perspective on related issues, and give close consideration to the real interesting insights contained in *Amazing Disgrace*, which give greater context to the ideas herein. Providentially, all the essays in *See Clearly* contain auspicious proposals for intelligent ways for us to remedy the tragic fix in which we find ourselves. All these understandings help us to better see what is wrong with our economic and political systems. These undesirable aspects of our nation's governance are summarized in *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways the System is Unfairly Rigged* (find it in the online Earth Manifesto). And to understand more clearly how rich folks are going about satisfying their main goals, check out *The Fourteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power*. There you will see abundantly clearly how negatively these shrewd strategies affect humanity.

### A Brilliant Examination

The Sun and the Moon and planet Earth came into perfect alignment on August 21, 2017, when tens of millions of Americans witnessed this phenomenon in a "path of totality" as the 70-mile wide shadow of the Sun-eclipsing Moon sped across the North American continent from the coast of Oregon to the Atlantic shore of South Carolina. Let this awe-inspiring celestial symmetry serve as a symbol of the shared destiny of all humankind on our revolving terrestrial orb. And let this presciently predicted confirmation of scientific understanding of reality represent a growing awareness that scientific experts are the true prophets of modern times, and that their cautions should be heeded. In particular, let us be guided by the increasingly urgent existential warnings that scientists are giving us about the dangers and exceedingly costly ramifications of our failures to reduce the colossal quantities of greenhouse gases we are spewing into the atmosphere. Meanwhile, our emissaries are chopping down or burning vast swaths of forests that would otherwise be propitiously absorbing carbon dioxide. Too, wildfires are annually burning huge hunks of forest, and they are doing so on increasing numbers of acres of land as the climate warms. The crucial understandings in my online essay *Climate Change Consideration, Carrying Capacity and Ecological Overshoot* are included herein by this reference.

In ancient Athens more than 25 centuries ago, the wise lawgiver Solon was given power to mediate between the rich and the poor at a juncture in history when the disparity of fortune between the few and the many had become so extreme that revolutionary fervor threatened to violently overthrow the establishment. The rich were jealously protective of their wealth and power, so they were preparing to crush the brewing rebellion with despotic force. The unrest back then was particularly intense because the poor found their status becoming worse every year, with leaders betraying them and corrupt courts deciding most issues against them. The great philosophical historians Will and Ariel Durant tell this compellingly relevant story in *The Lessons of History*:

"Good sense prevailed; moderate elements secured the election of Solon, a businessman of aristocratic lineage, to the supreme archonship. He devalued the currency, thereby easing the burden of all debtors (though he himself was a creditor); he reduced all personal debts, and ended imprisonment for debt; he canceled arrears for taxes and mortgage interest; he established a graduated income tax that made the rich pay at a rate twelve times that required of the poor; he reorganized the courts on a more popular basis; and he arranged that the sons of those who had died in war for Athens should be brought up and educated at the government's expense. The rich protested that his measures were outright confiscation; the radicals complained that he had not redivided the land; but within a generation, almost all agreed that his reforms had saved Athens from revolution."

The road to salvation is clear. Yet in the USA today, inequality and injustices have reached such dangerous extremes that tinderbox conditions prevail in the land of the free. The racially discriminatory dimensions of prevailing inequities make them immoral, and antithetical to the teachings of Jesus, whose name is often hypocritically affiliated with evangelicals who support undemocratic oppressors. And a match was lit to these conditions when a video of the killing of George Floyd went viral, showing a white police officer nonchalantly killing him by pressing his knee on Floyd's neck for almost 9 minutes. Widespread protests followed, and then six months later on January 6, 2021, white grievances in white hot reaction resulted in a violent extremist attempt to overthrow the peaceful transfer of power to a more diverse political coalition that won the presidency in the November 2020 elections.

The billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer makes it clear how risky this state of affairs is, in his incisive article *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*. He made an astute critique of deceitful trickle-down dogmas, pointing out that the United States "is rapidly becoming less a capitalist society and more a feudal society. Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution." He goes on to add, "If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us."

The smart alternative, of course, is to take effective and courageous steps to significantly reduce the huge disparities in opportunities, wealth, income, economic security and overall experienced well-being between wealthy people and the masses. The great writer John Steinbeck and his philosophic friend 'Doc' Ed Ricketts had debated at length during their famous voyage on the Sea of Cortez in 1940, and they articulated valuable worldviews while afloat and at anchor in this spectacular arid island region. I appreciate the conclusion they reached that seeing things clearly and with keen insight is a prerequisite to breaking through to fuller, more holistic understandings. Think about the philosophic Steinbeck's vision of humankind as "a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim", and his belief in the vital importance in searching for better understandings and seeing things whole, and working with courage and honor to change the way things are, to make them better.

We have an economic and political system that is increasingly a winner-takes-all game, even when the ruthless winners have usurped power by broadly illegitimate means, cheating through election subversion and propagating a raft of lies and discriminating and threatening future well-being. The "winners" despotically abuse the power they wield with fanatically brash fervor. This state of affairs is sad and tragically consequential.

Some sort of useful social action should be one of the obligations of each and every citizen. Individual efforts should be augmented by a systemic restructuring of our political system, together with an implementation of smart incentives and disincentives designed to assure more positive outcomes. We should all strive to minimize the adverse effects we have on others, in accord with the ethos of reciprocity embodied in the Golden Rule, and we should also responsibly contribute to helping achieve goals that are broadly consistent with the greater good. Wealthy people should be required to make much greater contributions to help achieve common good goals.

Thomas Paine, in his persuasive January 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, launched a powerful salvo of criticism against the colonial system and the despotic abuses of authority that so rankled the three million people who lived in the thirteen American colonies. Seeing the onerous abuses of the people in America by King George III and his British government, Paine poignantly observed, "these are times that try men's souls." Today, men's souls are being severely tried once again -- and women as usual are having their souls tried even more challengingly.

George Washington soberly observed that Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* "worked a powerful change in the minds of many men". It did so by igniting popular disaffection with the British, and converting many of the colonists to a belief in the causes of independence, fairer political representation, expanded liberties, solidarity with others, and broadened prosperity. Let's clamor more insistently for these causes again today!

Thomas Paine noted that freedom can be dangerous in the hands of the poor, due to ignorance, just as it can be dangerous in the hands of the rich, due to abuses of influence. This is why he advocated public education as a way to overcome ignorance, along with a robust representative democracy strong enough to prevent corruption.

Both liberty and equality are important to the common good. To the extent that these two ideals conflict, we should wisely strive to establish the fairest balance between them, keeping the best interests of a maximum number of people in mind. Liberties should be protected by assuring openness in our societies and the freedom of speech and religion for every person, and by establishing laws that guarantee a maximum amount of economic self-determination and individual rights for all. Equality should be guaranteed especially with regard to fairness of opportunity and political representation for every individual, coupled with equal treatment for everyone under the law. Persistent efforts by retrogressive leaders that serve to bring about more extreme inequalities are anathema in a democratic society, and they should be opposed and reversed.

Let's be honest and strive to see clearly, and gain big picture understandings. It is an unacceptable development for the American people to have been subjected to an electoral coup by deceitful demagogues who oppose fair-

mindfulness, true social justice, better initiatives to protect public health, ecological sanity, expansive human rights, improved legal justice, a more progressive tax system and fairer national priorities focused on fostering improved social cohesion. Let's demand these things, plus fairer elections and real campaign finance reform, better accountability, more effective constraints on monopoly power, greater openness, improved online privacy, Internet neutrality, and smarter planning for more sustainable courses of action. We should rightly expect more honesty and less partisan ideology in lawmaking -- and in judicial decision-making.

Here is a startling gauge of how corrupt our political system is, due to partisan gerrymandering and the rest of the long litany of ways that Republicans have managed to abuse influence to gain dominating power. Not only did Hillary Clinton get almost 3 million more votes than Donald Trump in 2016, but Republican candidates for seats in the House of Representatives got less than half of the vote nationwide, but won 55% of the races, giving them a domineering 241 to 194 seat advantage from 2017 to 2019. This was corruption incarnate!

The costs of NOT seeing clearly are rapidly mounting, rather ominously, as millions of Americans subserviently acquiesce to the predations of giant corporations, or fall for the ridiculous rationalizations that are shrewdly propagated by uncompromising ideological stalwarts who are contributing mightily to unnecessary hardships and insecurity, grief, suffering, and desperation for countless numbers of people, along with excessive despoliation of the environment and accelerated extinctions of species of life on Earth. This is NOT pro-life!

### Earth Manifesto Proclamation

A specter haunts humanity, a specter of ecological short-termism and of riskily extreme irresponsibility. These mindlessly heedless expediciencies will have harsh consequences for people in the future, and many irreversible impacts on the biosphere and on the survival prospects of most species of life on Earth. This colossal folly is exacerbated by foolhardy financial short-term-oriented activities in which our leaders are mortgaging the future by piling on debt in order to give more tax cuts to wealthy people, and to spare investors the pesky need to pay a larger share of the big profits made from their investments and speculation. Many rich people, in turn, are busy abusing the influence of their Big Money to gain these generous government-given tax advantages.

It is an utterly wrongheaded top national priority to rape and pillage so, and it is a false economy for Republican leaders to treat our home planet like the target of a hostile takeover by a vulture capitalist private equity firm, where assets are sold off and employees and other stakeholders are mercilessly stiffed. Making this situation worse, they do this to make quick windfall profits, to the detriment of the greater good. They further unconscionably act to stoke the fires of consumerism that rashly waste resources, pollute the commons and squander public assets. And they refuse to act to mitigate collateral climate disruptions. These activities are not only far too short-term oriented, but will result in huge long-term costs that will include excessive levels of stupidly-incurred interest expense obligations and the undermining of the prospects for prosperity, security and well-being of people in the future.

This specter that haunts nations worldwide is the amoral impulse of poorly managed capitalism, featuring an overly aggressive oppression of working people, especially women, Blacks and Latinos. This specter was a main reason that political economist Karl Marx declared that people who labor for a living should unite to achieve a fairer deal, and to gain improved benefits in the conflict between domineering capitalist elites (known as the bourgeoisie) and urban and rural working people (the proletariat). His famous slogan, articulated in 1848, was "Workers, of the World, Unite!" Joining together, working people gain the power to bargain collectively for a better deal. Divided, they are weak pawns against ruthless capitalist profiteers, who rake in the spoils.

Conservatives want more like-minded right-wing judges on federal courts and the Supreme Court to help achieve their goals of undermining collective bargaining rights of working people and preventing protestors from gaining too much "Power to the People". Greater fairness, however, almost certainly would work out better for all.

In the year 1776, the philosophic Scottish economist Adam Smith wrote the veritable manifesto of capitalism, *The Wealth of Nations*. In it, he famously asserted that an "invisible hand" properly guides self-interest in free market economic activities. By the year 1848, it had become obvious that there were far-reaching social ills associated with industrialization and oppression in the class struggle between capitalists and workers. So Karl

Marx and the social philosopher Friedrich Engels published their *Communist Manifesto*, with the idea that "a spectre is haunting Europe". This spectre was communism, which saw that history "of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" -- of oppressors and the oppressed.

The Age of Reason has not been repealed merely because the principles-deficient Know Nothing Party of Trump Republicans, and operatives like disgraced EPA officials, have ruthlessly misused power. A pitched battle of unreason and treacherous irresponsibility, however, has nonetheless been waged against the clean energy revolution and sensible actions to protect the environment. And sustained ideological attacks are being made against progressive planning, even though this represents our best hope of averting increasingly extreme weather events and an unfolding severe destabilization of normal patterns of temperatures, storms and rainfall.

The original Know Nothing Party was a nativist American political party in the 1850s that was xenophobic and hostile to immigrants and Catholics. It started originally as a secret society, and "Adherents to the movement were to reply 'I know nothing' when asked about its specifics by outsiders, thus providing the group with its common name," according to Wikipedia. Know Nothing, huh? Surely, ignorance is not bliss in crucial matters!

Devious Trump loyalist Devin Nunes, in the first impeachment hearings, concealed the fact that he acted as an accomplice in the Ukraine Plot, pretending to know nothing about it. Then Republicans in the Senate became turncoats to their Constitutional duties by refusing to consider witnesses and evidence in the impeachment trial.

Huckleberry Finn, in *Further Adventures*, observed: "I seen how it's possible to take things and twist them into whatever shape you want, and see them another way entirely that don't have no resemblance to the truth."

### Inequality and Its Discontents

It is becoming increasingly clear that Donald Trump has deceived many millions of Americans with his false assertions. In the thought-provoking book *What's the Matter with Kansas*, the incisive journalist and historian Thomas Frank provided a stunning explanation of how and why many people are goaded into supporting the economic agenda of billionaires rather than their own self-interest -- or that of their children and people in future generations. A better understanding of these issues could be broadly beneficial for all Americans; it could even energize efforts to create a healthier, fairer and more sustainable society.

The two political parties in our political duopoly system have contributed to causing inequality to reach levels that are historically extreme, and this situation was getting worse even before the pandemic. The insightful entrepreneur Nick Hanauer stated: "The most ironic thing about rising inequality is how completely unnecessary and self-defeating it is. If we do something about it, if we adjust our policies in the way that, say, Franklin D. Roosevelt did during the Great Depression -- so that we help the 99 percent and preempt the crazies and revolutionaries, the ones with the pitchforks -- that will be the best thing possible for us rich folks, too. It's not just that we'll escape with our lives; it's that we'll most certainly get even richer."

Hanauer once made the compelling observation in a blog that, from the point of view of the average Republican voter, "the last 35 years have been a disaster, and their party has caused it. Because if you are a working-class or middle-class white Republican-leaning man, your party has completely and totally screwed you."

"They screwed you by holding down the minimum wage.

They screwed you by almost completely eliminating overtime pay.

They screwed the union that used to defend your interests.

They screwed you out of the pension on which the middle-class once retired.

They screwed you a thousand ways on trade, and exported millions of jobs.

They screwed you on tax policy by lowering taxes on the rich.

They screwed you on infrastructure and education investment.

They screwed you by deregulating the banks.

They screwed you out of your home during the housing bubble and subsequent collapse.

They screwed you on health care costs.

They screwed you on the cost of college and on student debt.

They screwed you (and sent your kids to die) in the Iraq war."

To compound these betrayals, we are now faced with a historic choice between a virtuous economic cycle and a vicious cycle, as made clear in the excellent documentary film *Inequality for All*, which concerned the character and ideas of Professor Robert Reich. With the proverbial pitchforks poised to come out, Republicans are taking deviously determined steps in the wrong direction -- toward making things worse and less fair for the majority of Americans. They failed to make healthcare or prescription drugs more affordable, and were grotesquely ill prepared for the global pandemic, making tens of millions of Americans more vulnerable to disease and economic shock. They are duplicitously acting as though they have gotten a mandate to enrich the rich, after pretending to care about the disaffected working class. Don't make the mistake of supporting these rascals in the future!

Only two outcomes are probable -- Solon-wise reforms that reduce tensions by making bigger investments in what are, in effect, smart social insurance policies, or to impose repressive measures to defend the scurrilous outrages inherent in the rigged status quo in order to perpetuate excessively anti-egalitarian rule.

Little-known fact: Mark Twain acted as a champion of labor organizing when he praised the smart strategies used by steamboat pilots in forming a labor union back in the Gilded Age of the 1880s, as told in *Life on the Mississippi*. Notably, the pilots won their wage demands from steamboat owners. Mark Twain also criticized the exploitation of working people during the Gilded Age in his clever novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, calling for "a new deal". Eleanor Roosevelt said that this was her husband's favorite book by Mark Twain, and this is why Franklin Roosevelt named his Depression-era safety net programs the New Deal.

Today, our country appears to have returned to the greedy and conspicuously materialistic values and profound inequalities of the Gilded Age that Mark Twain wrote about. Financial elites and giant corporations and Dark Money operatives have succeeded in rigging our system in such ridiculously unfair ways that we are in dire need of another "New Deal". This better deal must be a much more honestly fair one for working people, and for the 99% of Americans who are being adversely affected by the control of our country by wealthy elites. In order to fix the plight in which the American people currently find themselves, we need honest leaders who are not overly beholden to moneyed interests. Instead, we were sold a bill of goods by a billionaire real estate tycoon who has acted much more like a carnival barker, demagogic charlatan and melodrama villain than an honest and honorable leader. (Aside: We not only need a new New Deal, but it must be green!)

One thing is certain that bodes ill for working people in the USA. Their best interests will be under continued assault by Republican politicians, who tirelessly try to reduce millions of people's healthcare benefits while reciting a deceitful mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs". They continue to abuse the power of their positions by passing laws that undermine collective bargaining rights of working people, and they collaborate to reduce the influence of workers in being able to get a fairer deal from their employers. This writing on the wall reveals that Republicans want to continue disempowering and disenfranchising workers so that corporate America will be able to maximize profits more and more -- and wealthy people will be able to accelerate the rate at which they are increasing the concentration of wealth in the avaricious hands of the few, at great peril for all.

French economist Thomas Piketty, who published *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* in 2013, expresses intense concern about issues of wealth and income inequality. He emphasizes themes in this book of his focused work on the concentration and distribution of wealth around the world over the past 250 years. He provocatively points out that the rate of return on capital in developed countries has persistently exceeded the rate of economic growth -- and is highly likely to continue to do so. What this means is that wealth inequality will get more extreme in the future. Piketty makes powerful arguments that this is a consequentially serious and risk-laden problem, and he proposes remedial fixes for this increasingly dangerous state of affairs. He suggests that governments should implement more progressive taxation plans, and calls for a redistribution of wealth through a global tax on wealth. Such ideas stand in commendable contrast to the agenda of "conservative" billionaires, who are using their determining influence to impose austerity measures on people in countries worldwide in order to afford giving the highest income earners lower tax rates on the top levels of earnings. This is unacceptably regressive!



Sophisticated new versions of hostile takeovers have come about since the publication of the thought-provoking book *Barbarians at the Gate* in 1989, which concerned a ruthlessly contentious leveraged buyout takeover of the giant cookie conglomerate RJR Nabisco. One ultimate lesson of the whole episode was that it seems to prove conclusively that excessive greed is not good for society. Ayn Rand devotees, take note!

Today, political barbarians have stormed the gates of our democratic republic, greedy with schemes to cement dominating control over the populace and further enrich the rich. The hegemony of their domineering rule is proving to be a mad folly, and portends disaster for the majority of Americans, including Trump voters. Even the rich and powerful will eventually find out that stoked polarizations and extreme inequality is bad for them, since it is causing the social fabric to fray in the land of the free. This is likely to sooner or later cause the proverbial pitchforks to come out, and either wreak revolutionary discord across the country or result in harsh repression against those who dare protest and defy the political and corporate masters in our oligarchy. Yes, these ones right here, who push anti-progressive policies that will exacerbate mounting inequities and injustices.

It is a viscerally valid understanding to see that "we are living through a battle for the soul of our nation". The fundamental values historically appreciated by our fore-bearers are being undermined by division and propaganda, hyped up antagonisms, and extreme levels of inequities and insecurities. As Mark Twain once pointed out, "You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

### The Status Quo

Casino capitalism is thriving, but at a catastrophic cost to the future prospects of humanity. Influence peddling and political corruption are allowing corporate entities to dominate decision-making in governments around the world. Mother Earth is consequently being treated like a business in bankruptcy after having been milked for all that can be gotten from it, before the bubble bursts. Profit-making for CEOs, investors and shareholders has become the primary goal of almost every stand taken by Republican leaders. With this environment-damaging casino capitalist corporatocracy exerting control over so many governments, the risks of widely harmful outcomes are being radically and irresponsibly increased.

And we are being misled and misguided. The main measure used to assess how the economy is faring is Gross Domestic Product, but this is a distorted measure that fails to accurately assess true economic well-being by not gauging many non-monetary goods, and not including many costs being externalized onto society as a whole.

We would be much wiser to adopt a new way of measuring economic and social well-being. In the beautiful Himalayan nation of Bhutan, they have adopted a measure of Gross National Happiness. This concept has often been explained by its four pillars: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, the preservation of cultural values, and environmental conservation. "Lately the four pillars have been further classified into nine domains in order to create widespread understanding of GNH and to reflect the holistic range of GNH values. The nine domains are: psychological well-being, health, education, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, good governance, ecological diversity and resilience, time use and quality-of-living standards. National policies consistent with Gross National Happiness would be much better for social cohesion and a sustainable future than rash policies that risk turmoil and instability by giving financially well-to-do people big public debt-financed tax breaks and forcing tens of millions of others to cope with an increased impetus toward austerity measures, diminishing social security, less personal safety and more stress and resentments in their lives.

The "science of happiness" is looking at the qualities and values that make people happy, and some interesting things are coming to light. One basic realization is that a significant part of people's attitudinal propensities toward being happy or unhappy, toward manifesting a sunny disposition or a darker one, is essentially a genetically inherited predisposition toward positive or negative attitudes. Researchers are finding that people's circumstances in life generally have a surprisingly small influence. International happiness research, according to the 2011 documentary film *Happy*, reveals that happiness is best achieved, after basic needs are met, through the pursuit of intrinsic values rather than external ones. Inherently satisfying intrinsic goals include personal growth, fostering good relationships and community connectedness, while external goals are focused on more hollow and less satisfying materialistic goals like money, egotistic self-identity and social status.

Today, people are being "brainwashed" with materialistic messages, manipulative marketing, slick propaganda and broad distractions from vital values. We are being subjected to unnecessary dissatisfaction, discord, envy, suspicion, animosity and an over-emphasis on external sources of happiness at the expense of more important internal sources of satisfaction. And something is seriously awry in the land of the free when judged by the proliferation of drugs to combat depression, as well as the opioid epidemic of addiction that has tragically killed more than 70,000 people each year in the past few years (more than triple the number in 2000).

The biggest street demonstrations in U.S. history took place in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, a black man, by white police officers. These protests against racial injustices are reminiscent of Women's March demonstrations across the nation that took place on January 21, 2017 and annually thereafter. These were remarkable civic events that occurred while Republicans exerted too much control in Congress and the White House. In those marches, millions of participants tried to build momentum for equality and justice, as well as protections of women's rights and an end to sexual misconduct and harassment. Back then, in an amazingly tone deaf and manipulative attempt to misconstrue the purposes of protest marches by millions of energized women and their supporters, Trump sent a weak and disingenuous tweet that pathetically proclaimed the occasion of the protests to be a fine one for women to "get out there now to celebrate the historic milestones and unprecedented economic successes and wealth creation that has taken place over the last 12 months." Ha! -- what devious spin! Let's join together and chuckle ruefully at the ridiculous absurdity of this characterization!

Any of millions of folks who participated in one of these community activism events knows that the Women's Marchers broadly opposed the whole far-right agenda, and expressed a very low opinion of the Narcissist-in-Chief, who had not long before the occasion proclaimed himself a "very stable genius". One of the best of many colorful handmade signs seen was one that declared MAKE AMERICA THINK AGAIN. This is a valuable sentiment, for H.G. Wells was surely right -- this "prolific prophet and proponent of globalization who was never short of a nifty turn of phrase" -- when he remarked in the closing pages of his lengthy *Outline of History* that the human condition was becoming "more and more a race between education and catastrophe".

In an interview with British journalist Piers Morgan, Donald Trump voiced idiotic skepticism about the climate crisis by trying to confuse people about scientific understandings concerning correlations of extreme weather events to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere. He said, in a reflection of his usual garbled thought processes, "There is a cooling, and there's a heating. I mean, look, it used to not be climate change, it used to be global warming. That wasn't working too well because it was getting too cold all over the place." Ha! That is absurd spin! Why propagate such muddled thinking? Fie on those who make such rationalizations for failing to take climate action in order to gain power and make excessive profits.

Global warming is a measured rise in the average temperature of Earth's surface. It is just one symptom of a changing global climate. Climate change refers to an altering of the world's temperature, precipitation and storm patterns that is being caused by an increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The culprit in this geo-historically rapid increase is our profligate burning of huge quantities of oil, coal and natural gas, along with a reckless excess of chopping down forests, and witnessing many of them go up in flames. Recent years have been the warmest on record, and almost every year in the 21st Century is among the warmest ever recorded, on average around the globe, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Recent summers have been sizzling in many places around the northern hemisphere, with terrible heat waves like one that caused tens of thousands of people to be hospitalized in Japan, and ferocious wildfires have flared. And Europe in the summer of 2019 baked in spells of record high heat, and California wildfires were deadly and destructive. Etc.

Two of the biggest and most consequential challenges we face in the world today are extreme inequality and the unfolding impacts of climate change. The scale of response needed to begin properly addressing these problems is epic, so let's devise a comprehensive national plan on the magnitude of the New Deal that was created during the Depression to reduce desperation and inequalities. One goal should be to draw down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby constituting a major effort to mitigate both social AND environmental injustices.

Albert Einstein famously used visualized thought experiments as a tool for understanding issues in physics, and for clearly conveying his concepts to others. In a positive development, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in conjunction

with Naomi Klein created a 7-minute video, *A Message from the Future*, which used a thought experiment from the perspective of a future frame to convey hope that we will be able to succeed in taking big steps to solve daunting problems like these, and to appreciate the future value of right action. Watch this video!

### The Ramifications of Stoked Insecurity

Populists on the conservative and far right of the political spectrum often fall for the ploys of devious leaders who manipulate their emotions to get power and peddle Big Lies like the trickle-down theory. Deceit-driven initiatives like this betray gullible followers by being good for the richest 1% but starkly contrary to the best interests of almost everyone else. The rich are too foolishly penurious when it comes to investing in the smart social insurance policies of a healthier populace, a safer infrastructure and an adequate safety net. In a robust and healthy democracy, leaders would honestly represent the best interests of the people, and recognize and respect them, not just strive to give rich persons a bigger slice of the economic pie at every turn.

Alan Greenspan said in testimony before the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee in February 1997: "Atypical restraint on compensation increases has been evident for a few years now, and appears to be mainly the consequence of greater worker insecurity. The willingness of workers in recent years to trade off smaller increases in wages for greater job security seems to be reasonably well documented. The unanswered question is why this insecurity persisted even as the labor market, by all objective measures, tightened considerably." Capitalists then and now shamefully seem to have workers almost completely cowed.

Noam Chomsky's take on this Greenspan observation was what he regards as the true capitalist motive: "If the workers are more insecure, that's very healthy for the society, because if workers are insecure they won't ask for higher wages, they won't go on strike, they won't call for benefits; they'll serve the masters gladly and passively. And that's optimal for corporations." Seeing the outcome of labor and trade policies in the past few decades, Chomsky's wry interpretation seems accurate. Here is the age-old two-for-one capitalist scam again, where benefits accrue to corporate CEOs, stockholders and rich people -- and working people are left behind. By crushing collective bargaining rights, big businesses can more easily control their employees, minimize wages and benefits, and create increased job insecurity, making it easier for executives to take advantage of workers.

Ideological rationalizations that serve to exacerbate inequalities, inequities and injustices should be roundly rejected. Similar initiatives supported by apologists for a hard right agenda should be exposed when they serve to perpetuate the retrogressive agenda of right-wing conservatives, as evaluated at length throughout this manifesto. Let us give new respect to Thomas Paine, who voiced the honorable philosophy, "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." In shocking contrast, the religion of extreme conservatives is not oriented toward doing good, but to supporting politicians and organizations that oppose democratic fairness, Golden Rule reciprocity ethics, equitable inclusiveness, and sensible protections of the environment.

### On-Going Barrage

Mark Twain's mother Jane Lampton "Jean" Clemens -- my great great grandmother in an unofficial Tiffany B. Twain genealogy -- was known for being a sunshiny woman with a cheerful disposition. I can feel this enervating influence coursing through my genes, so that even in dark days when the world does not seem right, or there is some physical or existential complaint to annoy me, a hike into beautiful natural surroundings can free the spirit of a measure of anxiety, and let appreciation shine through. Life can be a rich, marvelous experience, and it is best enjoyed when economic and social stresses are not at excessively inequitable extremes. This is why one of our top national goals should be to improve the quality of life for all, and to make successful efforts to reduce economic insecurities for the masses. This is why social inequities should be reduced, and it is why federal judges should NOT make so many decisions in favor of the powerful. And this is why we should take bold action to prevent extreme weather events from wreaking more damages on people here, there and everywhere.

Self-proclaimed "truth-teller" Trump declared in August 2016, "We can't fix a rigged system by relying on the people who rigged it in the first place." He milked people's populist anger at being left behind, and attacked Wall Street interest groups in his TV ads and campaign speeches. He promised to "drain the swamp" in D.C. if he got elected. That assurance became one of the biggest lies in all of American political history, once Trump

filled the government with establishment bankers, political insiders, conservative billionaires, alt-right strategists, ideological extremists, anti-environmentalists and brazen shills for fossil fuel industries.

Republicans have used every slick scheme they could imagine, except the simplest and fairest plan: appealing to the American people by honestly trying to represent their best interests and the greater good. The primary objective of Republicans has been to gain overweening power, no matter what scurrilous means may be required. It doesn't seem to matter to them how dishonorably subversive their tactical strategies are against holistic and just values. This is their overarching goal, no matter how deceitful the bait-and-switch swindles may be, as evaluated from the perspective of working people and the hundreds of millions of people whose health, well-being and trust are being betrayed by these scheming, self-serving, unethical, morally deficient politicians.

This drive to gain power by any means is an overriding goal of dominion-seeking Strict Father types, as assessed by insightful linguist George Lakoff, who contrasts the constellation of values and characteristics that typify Stern Father types to the more responsible constellation of values and characteristics embraced by Nurturant Parent types. The best course of action for the human family is to be neither too strict nor too permissive, and to fairly and moderately balance competing forces, and to marginalize fundamentalism of stereotypical proponents at both extremes of these family metaphor narratives and ideological positions.

### What's Goin' On?

Angry right-leaning populists joined social conservatives in 2016, along with economic elites – many millionaires and billionaires -- to hand almost unchecked power to a pathological cabal of uncompromising rulers who made it obvious they intended to perpetuate what can be described as the biggest financial swindle in world history. This swindle has involved irresponsibly borrowing more than \$20 trillion since 1980 to slash taxes mainly for the benefit of the few. This swindle has been achieved by cutting marginal tax rates on the top levels of earnings. Tax rates on these highest levels of earnings had been 70% or higher each and every year from 1936 until 1980. But then Ronald Reagan launched his rash revolution of the rich against working people and the New Deal, and succeeded in radically slashing this top rate to 28%, and it has never been increased up to even 40% since.

The bottom line effect of this scheme has been to dramatically contribute to increasing the net worth of the richest 1% of Americans by more than \$30 trillion since 1980, and to burden all taxpayers with mounting added national debt obligations. This scheme will make it necessary for all taxpayers in every future year to pay interest costs on the debt that will dangerously compound, totaling 100% of this obligation every 15 or 20 years, on average (depending on the prevailing levels of interest rates) -- over and over and over and over again.

A bipartisan group of prominent national security experts declared this huge and irresponsibly high debt to be one of the biggest threats to our nation's security. With the national debt reaching such a risky level, it is time to take effective steps to rein in this fraudulent scam. Instead, rich and powerful people are staunchly opposing compromises that would curtail these schemes. They are zealously intent on ramping up this rip-off by doubling down on this con job. They are spending Big Money to elect highly partisan politicians who will cut their taxes even further, especially for those in the top 1%. And they are financing this largess by trying to cut social safety net programs. This imposition of new austerity measures on the masses is making inequality worse, and will mostly hurt vulnerable people on the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

There is a depressive economic impact associated with concentrating wealth more narrowly in the hands of the few, so this action is counterproductive and threatens to bring on a severe debt crisis and economic recession or depression. This danger was exacerbated by the Trump administration taking foolish new risks with their imposition of protectionist trade tariffs and belligerent "America First" taxes on imports from other countries, and with their agenda that accelerated increases in the national debt.

The ideological push for the U.S. government to double down on this financial swindle is a colossal folly. It could only be accomplished through brainwashing and oppressing and coercing the people, who are getting more intensely unhappy about these ruling elites and their greedily selfish priorities. Their goal was, in effect, to rig our economic and political systems ever more irresponsibly against the general welfare and the common good. A more sensible goal would be to promote fairer governance and more responsible management. Instead of

foolishly ratcheting up debt, we should manage our national affairs with greater fiscal responsibility, and implement consensus solutions. It would be much better to create a rainy day fund to buffer against adverse developments -- like a global pandemic! -- than to reduce our options by painting ourselves into a desperate corner with spiking amounts of debt incurred for ill-advised purposes. The people of Puerto Rico would concur, for the government there created a serious debt crisis through decades of mismanagement. Then, after Hurricane Maria struck a terrible blow to the people of Puerto Rico, they now live in perilous straits.

To improve conditions in the United States, and to thus help ensure a greater degree of common good, we must sincerely adopt more inclusive goals, and we should understand the best means to achieve them. As Gifford Pinchot reckoned, the greatest good consists of reconciling conflicting interests by always seeking solutions that are focused on achieving "the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run." That was a good call by the first director of the U.S. Forest Service, after President Theodore Roosevelt created it in 1905.

For decades now, too many of our representatives have been seeking to achieve the greatest good for the few in the short term. This shortsighted and inequality-stoking scheme has been perpetrated against the people in the USA for much too long, and too mercilessly. And it intensified after a greedy real estate mogul seized the reins of power and waged an incendiary and chaotic shock-and-awe offensive against core values of democracy and inclusive visions of the greater good. Readers will understand the many scurrilous facets of this con job when they evaluate "The Sad Truth of the Real Character of the Trump Republican Agenda", which can be found online in *Good Proposals for Saving Humanity*.

No matter how loudly and persistently conservatives push deceptive propaganda claiming that tax cuts are a panacea for what ails us, this alternative reality is a colossal Big Lie, a ruse that threatens to destabilize human civilization and wreak havoc on billions of people around the world. Think about this. What is needed is a far-reaching strategic initiative that will significantly reduce the risky inequalities, inequities and injustices that are stimulating widespread unrest right now. Many millions of people would benefit from piecemeal reforms like higher minimum wages and compensation for overtime work, equal pay for women and men, comprehensive healthcare reform and stronger collective bargaining rights for working people. But what we really need is bold tax reform that would reward work, not wealth, and make the tax code more progressive -- that is, more steeply graduated. We should assess a bare minimum top tax rate of 48%, which is still a damn good deal for the top dogs, compared to the 70% or more that was in effect for every one of the 45 years before Ronald Reagan cajoled the people into giving him power. And we should more generously fund common good initiatives, social safety net programs and stronger protections of the environment. We really should move responsibly toward balancing the federal budget, instead of exploiting the rash expediency of deficit financing for Tax Cuts. To really succeed at implementing such reforms, we need to make elections fairer and get Big Money out of politics.

#### Code Red Debt Risk Approaching

The record high national debt recently roared past \$30 trillion, heading for becoming the highest ever in our country's history as a percent of GDP, exceeding the previous high incurred in connection with costs incurred fighting World War II against fascist aggressors during the 1940s. The rapidly increasing national debt represents "a structural gap between how much the country collects in taxes and how much it spends." It is folly for Republicans to have passed the Tax Cuts law in December 2017 that is forcing the government to borrow something like an additional \$2 trillion over a ten-year period, and to give most of the proceeds of this public borrowing to the wealthiest 1%, forcing every taxpayer in every future year to pay interest costs on this debt, year after year after year after year.

The Congressional Budget Office made it clear in a report in 2020 that this debt dilemma will continue to get worse as interest costs on this irresponsibly incurred debt compound, driving up the debt to even more risk-laden levels and putting pressure on federal spending. This burden imprudently increases the risk of another financial crisis. The CBO projected this worsening status, indicating that the debt is "burgeoning" -- well before the pandemic. In the decades ahead, this spiking debt will result in reduced national savings and income, along with increased pressure to cut other budget priorities, due to growing interest costs. This irresponsibly-realized imbalance will also limit lawmakers' ability to respond to unplanned events and natural disasters.

Bizarrely, in retrospect, Donald Trump claimed in April 2016 that he would eliminate the national debt "over a period of eight years." Given his propensity to twist the truth, this was merely a deceitful expedient for him, an empty promise made to promote his candidacy without a shred of honest intention to it. His administration enacted huge debt-financed tax cuts, and when combined with significant spending increases for the military and other things he signed into law, Trump Republicans rapidly drove up the national debt, NOT reduced it.

#### This Belated Introduction Approaches Conclusion

Aristotle and Epicurus were two of the greatest Greek philosophers of the Classic Age of Athens. They were commendably concerned with the concept of understanding what truly makes for *eudaimonia*, or human well-being and the "good life". One of their salient ideas was that cultivating balance and moderation in all aspects of life is the most valuable and virtuous of pursuits, for this fosters resilience and allows people to cope well with inevitable challenges. Tellingly, ancient ethics considered virtue of character to be strongly linked to human flourishing and the highest good. Aye, there's the rub! Unscrupulous self-serving leaders who should be representing our best interests today lack an adequate commitment to honesty, virtue and the general welfare.

The Demagogue-in-Chief won the 2016 presidential election by using a myriad of illegitimate means, but he did NOT win a mandate to further enrich the rich by scrimping on safety net programs that keep 100 million Americans from more desperate circumstances. He did NOT win a mandate to deprive millions of Americans of medical insurance or Medicaid. He did NOT gain a mandate to deceive the people, propagate a raft of lies, or violate rules of law, or to attack the press and characterize it as "the enemy of the people", or to severely undermine the integrity and independence of the judiciary. He did NOT win a mandate to ruthlessly crush opposition, stifle free expression or abrogate the personal liberties of the majority of the American people. He did NOT win a mandate to sacrifice public lands and inflict a more rapid Tragedy of the Commons calamity on wildlife habitats and entire ecosystems. It was a broad abuse of power to act as if he won such mandates.

Trump and his greedy crony capitalist enablers are heedless politicians who are tragically eager to sacrifice the environmental commons, despite Professor Garrett Hardin having made it clear back in 1968 how crazy such compulsions are, and how detrimental to human prospects. Trump did NOT win a mandate to let uncompromising billionaires control the economy and rashly run up the public debt, or to let climate change deniers maximize short-term profits by sacrificing longer-term well-being and security. He did NOT win a mandate to appoint a Cabinet of Wall Street enablers at the expense of folks on Main Street across the USA. He did NOT win a mandate to allow anti-public education reactionaries to undermine public schools and foist bigger debt burdens on students. He did NOT win a mandate to build a wall on the southern border that the American people would be forced to pay for. And he surely did NOT win a mandate to wage rash trade wars that drive up costs, hurt farmers and threaten future economic growth -- and risked exacerbating social strife and intensifying conflicts.

Trump and his cronies gained power by lying and exploiting bait-and-switch strategies, but the party of Trump will not be able to sustain this con game with impunity, for inevitably the American people will be smitten by the outrageous unfairness of these deceptive and fraudulent con man schemes. Nemesis, the Greek Goddess of Divine Retribution, watches intently, her long red robes a-flowing, and her hypersensitivity to hubris visibly rattled. And her irascible ire appears to be piqued. In the 2020 elections, her modern emissaries finally exacted a measure of justice for wrongdoing.

Truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

NOTE: Frankly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a *nom de plume*, just like Mark Twain was a sly pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens. How this whole project came about is a long and evolving story, and one that is better left a mystery than being disclosed in the full scope of more prosaic actual circumstances. See the autobiographical assertions made in the online *Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future* for some interesting images.

"Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the important thing is the IDEAS THEMSELVES, and not the author. Yet it is necessary to say that she is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, other than the influence of reason and principle."

-- Thomas Paine (gender revised)





## A Sharp Exposé and Scathing Critique of Misguided and Misguiding American Leaders

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, creator of the Earth Manifesto  
June 2017, with updates through April. 1, 2023

Please give these clear-eyed Big Picture understandings close consideration. This essay is contained in *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times - Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto*, a book that contains accurate assessments of many ways politicians are looting the country, undermining our democracy, excessively exploiting working people, betraying the best interests of the majority, lying to their constituents, cheating in elections, irresponsibly mortgaging the future, manipulating people by hijacking their emotions, abusing power, rashly depleting natural resources, tragically damaging the environmental commons, and immorally sabotaging the greater good.

In bona fide liberty-loving democratic republics, people are protected from being ruled with excess ruthlessness by wealthy dominion-demanding rich people and their organizational tools -- giant corporations. Or for that matter, being governed by demagogues in repressive authoritarian regimes, or by religious fanatics. *We the People* generally prefer fairer and more honest governance. We want a more broadly inclusive populism that offers better opportunities and more assured freedoms, and we want greater social justice to reign from sea to shining sea. We want to live in places where the air is not polluted and the water is not tainted with toxins, and where the environment is protected and a reasonable modicum of environmental justice prevails. We want to be able to enjoy our lives and liberties and individual pursuits of happiness, and we want a fairer society that is more inclusive, and thus enjoys improved social cohesion that makes for greater mutual security and more peaceable coexistence. To establish these social goods, we must demand that our representatives honestly refocus our national priorities.

To really improve matters, a more widely shared prosperity is needed, and improved security for the populace, and adequate investments in social safety net programs, and better protections of the environment. These propitious conditions are needed at the same time that our leaders are not running the country into risky levels of debt by wrongly borrowing trillions of dollars to give the lion's share of the spoils to the few, bribing voters with small tax cuts to gain their support for this ruse. To achieve common good goals, we need respectable leaders who will help enact fair reforms and govern with more honorable ethical integrity, and stop imposing more austerity measures on people to give foolishly big tax cut windfalls to those with the highest levels of incomes and inheritances.

### A Focus on More Comprehensive Understandings

To promote the general welfare, we must be guided by more comprehensive concerns -- ones that take into account *The Common Good, Properly Understood*. Most folks see that the status quo is rigged against the vast majority of the people. As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump promised to fix this, in a deceitful assurance that was in actuality a part of a pathological con job. Instead of taking effective steps to honestly fix things, conniving Republican politicians managed to win the 2016 elections through a long litany of shrewd, illegitimate and deceitful means, and then began imposing an unbelievable number of manipulative schemes and frauds against the people in the course of their chaotic rule. The sordid details of this short-term-oriented infamy are spelled out herein.

Our colonial forbearers were outraged at despotic usurpations and abuses of power by King George III, so they courageously declared independence from the British monarchy in 1776. Then, 12 years later, delegates

representing the people of the new nation ratified a Constitution that had been hammered out during four months of contentious consensus-seeking at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia the previous summer. A primary purpose for the creation of this commendably good guidance in our democratic republic was to ensure that sufficient checks, balances, safeguards and accountability were established in the government to protect the people from having any future despots or demagogues seize power, usurp it, and blatantly abuse it.

These eminently respectable Founders declared that the government's legitimacy itself, and its moral right to use the power of the state, are only justified and lawful when the people who are subject to that political power give their consent. This theory of consent is historically contrasted to rule by those asserting a divine right of kings, and was often invoked as a charge against the legitimacy of colonial empires. In Article 21 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this ultimate gauge of legitimacy was formally confirmed in 1948, stating: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government."

Lord Acton, a member of the British Parliament in the 1860s, once famously wrote, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The Founders of our great American experiment in democratic governance understood this basic political truth; this is why they created a Constitution containing effective checks and balances to prevent corruption, self-dealing by politicians, abuses of power, demagogic despotism, and taxation without fair representation. Ever since the Constitution was ratified, there has been a progressive evolution of laws, rights and protections that have helped make our democratic republic a broadly propitious force in helping assure the majority of people a fair modicum of liberty, justice and reasonable cause for being able to pursue happiness and share in the American Dream of opportunity, equal treatment and fair dealings under the law.

The truth in Lord Acton's words were revealed anew by the bright light of subpoena power that Democrats in the House of Representatives have tried to exert to fulfill the implied responsibility given to them in the Constitution to wield oversight over politicians and federal agencies in the Executive Branch. With a House Democratic majority setting the legislative agenda and holding investigative hearings from 2019 through 2023, this meant the American people saw many scandalous details of the January 6th assault against Congress, along with the rigging, strategic deception, corrupt activities, miscellaneous malfeasance and conspiratorial cover-ups that many Republican politicians have been engaged in. Republicans, having lost the domineering One Party power they exerted in the legislative branches of government from 2017 to 2019, fell back on their narrow majority in the U.S. Senate to acquit Donald Trump in two sham impeachment trials that basically forgive the many incriminating findings that have come to light about wrongdoing by Trump and his Cabinet members and honesty-deficient, corporate-kowtowing Republican politicians. A crisis of reckoning is engulfing our public sphere as a result of this obstruction of justice. *See Clearly* provides good plans for how to deal with this!

Here is a Biblical perspective: According to Proverbs 6:16-19, there are six things the LORD hates, and a 7th that is an abomination unto Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to evil mischief, a false witness who speaketh lies, and a person who sows discord among brothers. In light of Donald Trump's manipulative strategies and narcissistic character disorders, the Goddess of Irony grumbles ominously, and sounds of singing reverberate in our consciousness, moving our attention inward and subtly swaying our consciences. Listen! It is the voice of the melodious singer-songwriter and activist Holly Near, voicing these lyrics: "I ain't afraid of your Yahweh; I ain't afraid of your Allah; I ain't afraid of your Jesus -- I'm afraid of what you do in the name of your God."

Yet we are living in a Bizarro world in which Republican politicians have abandoned stances they long stood for, as Max Boot pointed out in his compelling book *The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right*. Max Boot is a longtime conservative writer and historian who succinctly states that he has been utterly dismayed since the 2016 national elections by witnessing "the Republican Party switch its position on issue after issue -- going from free trade to protectionist, from pro-immigration to nativist, from tough on Russia to appeasing Russia, from fiscal discipline to fiscal irresponsibility, from defending the rule of law to undermining it."

The ruling class is waging class oppressive aggression against the citizenry, and as a pathetic consequence of the ways the status quo is rigged, millions of people in the USA and billions around the world are being endangered and outright harmed. With conservative politicians so cravenly doing the bidding of corporate CEOs, they have



been eviscerating government regulations, causing us to lose sensible safeguards against influence peddling, cost externalizing schemes, environmental harms, political roguery and impeachable offenses, and all manner of Trump scams that included tax evasion, violations of campaign finance laws, money laundering, insurance and bank fraud, emoluments improprieties, Charitable Foundation fraud and deficit-financed tax cuts. Additionally, eased regulations allowing moral hazard risk-taking have caused financial turmoil and facilitated financial leverage that heightens the eventual probability and severity of a recession and more costly bailouts.

It is fanatically misguided for our representatives to allow corporate entities to exercise dominating power. Since the two main legal purposes of corporations are to maximize profits and minimize responsibilities and liabilities of CEOs, managers and investors, corporations are given the privilege of externalizing costs, foisting them onto you and me -- and onto everyone in the future, to their inevitable hardship and titanic chagrin.

### The Vital Role of Women in Politics

Gender inequities are among the harshest of all injustices in our male-dominated society. When Martin Luther King Jr. declared that injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane of all forms of inequality, he was tangentially highlighting the fact that injustices related to healthcare, pre-existing conditions and reproductive rights are especially onerous for women. These are just a few aspects of a multitude of gender inequities and harms, including many that have been exposed by aggrieved women in the #MeToo movement.

Congratulations to the record number of women who won political office in the 2018 and 2019 national elections! These achievements were long overdue. While many good women were successful in their election contests, many more like Stacey Abrams in Georgia were cheated out of power by the GOP political machine. Women have been broadly deprived of fair representation in the halls of power in our sexist patriarchal republic ever since it began. This deeply unjust disenfranchisement of females has enabled significant discrimination against women in compensation, benefits, job security, a hard-to-break glass ceiling, sexual harassment, violations against both their dignity and safety, and many episodes of domestic violence, in addition to discrimination based on race and harsh deprivations of reproductive rights. Women of the world, unite! Men, give us greater respect.

Let us philosophize. The legacy we leave to every person in the future is consequentially important for us in a collective sense, and we need farsighted guidance from our leaders and institutions to ensure that aggregate impacts of all our individual choices and activities do not too severely compromise the hopes of people in future generations to live in a healthy and sustainable world. Let's help prevent a dystopian future!

It is crucial for humankind to make accurate assessments of the big challenges we face in the world today, so as to identify and implement the best plans for propitiously dealing with these existential challenges. We need our leaders to more honestly and honorably strive to promote the common good, instead of allowing shrewd opportunists to use divisive propaganda and demagogic deceit to exploit working people and consistently favor the interests of corporations over individuals. And we need to find better ways to prevent the excessive depletion of natural resources and wanton damages to the environmental commons.

Here's the bottom line. We humans are treating planet Earth like a business in liquidation, converting natural resources to cash at the fastest possible rate. As a result, the tree of life is under furious assault, with many species of wildlife being driven toward extinction and the most productive biological habitats being decimated, sadly including beautiful coral reefs and tropical rainforests that are exceptionally rich in biodiversity. Both threatened species and endangered species are being sacrificed to hunters, developers, zealous exploiters of public lands and fossil fuel profiteers.

Compounding this insidiously consequential folly, shrewd ruling factions are making damned sure that economic and political systems continue to be rigged so that the wealth generated is ever more narrowly concentrated in the hands of the few. This gives them dominating power. The outcome is highly detrimental to the vast majority, with mounting costs and risks being foisted onto the masses -- and everyone in the future. This tragic scheme is being made worse by leaders who are rashly running up national debts by borrowing huge sums of money and ensuring that most of the spoils of this fraudulent burdening of future taxpayers are given to the same wealthy people who are grabbing most of the benefits of these über-scams. Increases in public debt

stimulate spending in the economy, partially masking the ill effects of increasing inequality and dire disparities in security and well-being between the fortunate few and the struggling many.

### History and the Present

The brilliant design of checks and balances in our government was developed to prevent despotic abuses of power by making sure that no branch of government could become too powerful. The Constitution divides power between legislative, executive and judicial branches of the federal government and includes various limits and controls on the powers of each branch. When one political party manages to gain control of all branches of government, it allows a culture of corruption to fester, and opportunities for tyranny to reign.

Ruthlessly shutting opposing political parties out of power is an extraordinarily harmful and unethical gambit, for it is contrary to democratic fairness and personal freedoms. When political power is dominated by a single political party, it allows greed-driven compulsions to proliferate, and protections to be decimated, ambitions to go unchecked, authority to be abused, political corruption to corrosively continue, and wealth to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few. Under the cover of darkness, exploiters of public lands and mineral resources are allowed to proceed full speed ahead, externalizing costs, socializing risks and tragically damaging the commons. Such were the outcomes of Democrats having been shut out of power from January 2017 to 2019.

Treacherous Republicans demonize Democrats, to boot, rashly ignoring voices that propose excellent solutions, like a carbon fee to sensibly internalize costs currently being externalized. They are also preventing working people from being given a better deal in place of the current Bad Deal most workers are getting. Our leaders must deal more honestly with colossal challenges like economic inequalities and climate injustices, and with the unimaginably dire and costly consequences of an insidiously unfolding greenhouse gas double-glazing of our home planet. We must come together and show much greater regard for future well-being and sustainable existence.

Far-reaching corruption in electioneering and governance are currently undermining fairer representation of the people, and violating the common good. This renders excessive Republican influence illegitimate. The GOP political machine has been formidable in its zealotry for gaining control and abusing power. Their main way of achieving this has been by pandering to rich conservatives and illicitly allowing Big Money to corrupt our elections and lawmaking. Republican politicians have been ruthless in their use of divide-to-conquer tactics and distorting propaganda to brainwash their followers, telling them Big Lies and deceiving them and distracting them from crucial issues. "Conservative" politicians are betraying the vast majority of American people through bait-and-switch treachery and their fiscally irresponsible Tax Cut scam financed by borrowing trillions of dollars from all taxpayers in every future year. They have engaged in this "casino capitalist" hyper-stimulus of the economy to goose profits and funnel them to the few, and to drive unemployment down while ramping up materialistic resource depletion and the damaging exploitation of public lands. In this, they are foolishly sacrificing future well-being and sustainability to gain short-term advantages for themselves and their cronies.

The GOP political machine has been ruthlessly formidable under MAGA Republicans, for they have demonstrated they will do anything to win, no matter how unethical and immoral, and no matter how divisive and antithetical to creating a more perfect union, and contrary to the general welfare of the American people, and damaging to domestic tranquility, and undermining of individual and national security, and tragically harmful to the common good, and insidiously threatening to hopes for securing "the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

These understandings are not "fake news". It should be clearly recognized that investigative reporters and journalists in the free press -- "the Fourth Estate" -- make the media vitally important to democracy for informing the public and serving as a check on abuses of power in Congress, the White House, the judiciary and the corporate world. Great reporting is coming out of the Washington Post and the New York Times, and on MSNBC, serving our democratic republic commendably in this moment of unfolding crises. In pathetic contrast, Fox News and conservative talk radio hosts are confusing the national dialogue, giving cover to abusers of power, rationalizing wrongdoing, pushing fake news and Big Lies, whipping up violent rhetoric, promoting hate, and using divisive strategies to push a far right agenda and the politicization of the judiciary.

The devious master manipulator Donald Trump tells his own narcissistic version of reality, using bizarrely self-

serving and self-aggrandizing spin to impose a twisted solipsistic narrative on every happenstance. He tells stories that bitterly attack anyone who criticizes him, and they tend to be real whoppers -- WITCH HUNT! -- FAKE NEWS!! -- and he tries to skew public opinion into a cult-following-like belief system in his distorted rhetoric and versions of reality. This creates starkly oppositional camps of hosanna-chanting believers and apologists on the one hand, and outraged folks who see the glaring contrast between his deeply dishonest spin and fairer and more expansive visions of reality.

In our world of excessively short attention spans, Trump's bizarrely selfish solipsistic tweets gained surprising traction, and his demagogic deceit has had having tragic effects. He is like a Trojan Horse for the few, echoing the disingenuous, dissembling, deceitful, manipulative and extremely divisive preaching of emotion-manipulating shills on Fox News, Inc., and on Sinclair Broadcasting and other conservative and alt-right media outlets.

Since the legitimacy of leaders in our democracy relies on the consent of the governed, and since Republicans represent only a minority of the people -- and considering that the 2016 elections involved much devious intrigue and downright illicit activity -- Republican leaders in Congress right now are cast in the stark light of infamy. It should be acknowledged that most of the people who supported Trump in 2016 and 2020 gave their consent only after being subjected to an unprecedented barrage of divisive and deviously manipulative propaganda that hijacked their emotions, goaded their fears, stoked resentments, scapegoated immigrants, promoted a raft of really Big Lies, propagated malicious cyber-attack disinformation, riled up racial prejudices, caused hate crimes to spike, and stoked white male nativist nationalist tribalism in millions of individual echo chambers across the land of the supposedly free. And they have indulged in unethical, debilitating, anxiety-inducing and effectively diabolical machinations targeted to make people believe the Supreme Court should be stacked with more anti-choice and anti-gay Republican judges who just happen to side with giving overriding prerogatives to corporations and the rich, instead of representing the best interests of the majority. This infamy became even more stark with MAGA Republicans having managed to win a very narrow majority in the House in 2023.

Not only did Republicans achieve their 2016 election wins through a long litany of illegitimate means rather than by offering people fairer representation of their best interests and the common good, these scheming politicians governed with ruthless unreason. They double-crossed the American people by acting with cunning chicanery, discriminatory zeal, fiscal irresponsibility, contempt for rules of law, unrelenting deceit, widespread conflicts of interest, extreme ecological myopia, un-Jesus-like moral turpitude, and an anti-egalitarian agenda that panders to the elite well-connected few, with little evidence of honest integrity or caring for the many. And they shut down the federal government for a record 35 days, and operated under an illicit national emergency declaration to force the American people to pay for additions to a wall on the border with Mexico.

From January 2017 to January 2019, with the Trump administration and the Senate and the House all run by narrow majorities of conservative politicians that had been elected by a minority of the people, these politicians ruled as if they had won a landslide mandate to impose a harsh hard-right agenda. They abused the power of their offices and refused to compromise with representatives of significantly more than half the people. Given the broad illegitimacy of such rule, federal courts are the best hope for the people to be protected from a myriad of harms and wrongdoing. Unfortunately, Republicans compromise the foundational independence of the judiciary by having stacked federal courts with young judges appointed to life-long terms, and these judges are tending to injudiciously favor patriarchal sexism and "right-wing social engineering" and an exploitive economic agenda that helps corporations engage in corrupt activities and mount an anti-egalitarian, anti-environmental and undemocratic crusade against the common good. Many rulings far outside the mainstream in legal cases have facilitated this misrule and wide-ranging malfeasance. Let's demand more moderate progressive judges!

#### A Spotlight on the Crucial Role of the Supreme Court

Chief Justice John Roberts maintains that the Supreme Court is "apolitical." Oh, right. This is a real deceitful contention, as revealed in the partisan ruling to overturn lower court decisions against the corrupting influence of gerrymandering. The Roberts Court also betrayed the American people with its ruling in the *Citizens United* case in January 2010 by selling our democracy to the highest bidders -- rich people and giant corporations. In that ruling, the narrow 5-4 majority of "conservatives" overturned restrictions on corporate

spending in elections dating back more than 100 years -- and they had the brazen effrontery to try to justify their action by using the flimsy assertion that "independent expenditures do not lead to, or create the appearance of, *quid pro quo* corruption." In the dozen years since then, it has become damningly clear that Big Money is profoundly corrupting our elections and rashly skewing our national policies and pathologically distorting our national priorities.

John Roberts engaged in a revelatory Twitter dispute with Trump in November 2018, after Trump tweeted about an "Obama judge" having made a decision against the constitutionality of an effort to keep desperate migrants from applying for asylum. "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges," Roberts said in a statement released on Thanksgiving eve in November 2018, "or Bush judges or Clinton judges. What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them. That independent judiciary is something we should all be thankful for." Trump immediately reacted by tweet from his vacation home in Florida: "Sorry Chief Justice John Roberts, but you do indeed have 'Obama judges,' and they have a much different point of view than the people who are charged with the safety of our country." That was really maniacally twisted spin!

Both of these "eminences" are partially right. Roberts was right, we do need to be thankful for the judiciary still being somewhat independent, though the rushed confirmations of Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett were steps backwards because they strengthened domineering rule by a minority party, and many legal cases in our country show that our criminal justice system treats people better if they are rich and guilty than if they are poor and innocent. Also, Trump was right, our judiciary has become too politicized -- but it is Republican judges that are the most biased toward enabling abuses of minority power and giving excessive influence and advantages to religious fundamentalists, rich people, corporate entities and crony capitalist robber barons.

I appeal to each and every judge in the federal judiciary to really honestly and honorably try to do their fair-minded "level best" by keeping consequential ethics in mind and Big Picture considerations like those evaluated in *See Clearly*. Supreme Court Justices should much more honestly honor the oath of office they have sworn to -- that they "will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich."

Trump Republicans appointed more judges in a four-year period than ever before in history, due to machinations by Mitch McConnell and other Republicans in the U.S. Senate who had refused to allow President Obama to fill more than 100 vacancies on federal courts -- and one on the Supreme Court. And biased "Trump judges" will be tilting the scales of justice for decades to come, reprehensibly reinforcing corporate power and stimulating uncompromising extreme partisanship and allowing improprieties in campaign financing and restrictive voting laws. They will continue to staunchly defend patriarchal sexism, racial discrimination and a general culture of corruption that has spread like a cancer, corroding the foundations of our society. Trump judges will tend to make partisan rulings that favor capitalists over workers, corporations over communities, Republican politicians over Democrats, men over women in denying reproductive rights, white people over people of color, those who gerrymander over those disadvantaged by gerrymandering, rigged elections over fair elections, conservatives over the Country, partisan advantage over bipartisan ethical propriety, dishonest propagandists over honest journalists, gun rights fanatics over those who support sensible efforts to reduce gun violence, fearful citizens against immigrants and asylum seekers, irresponsible profiteers over common sense protections of public lands and the environmental commons, rich people over poor people, evangelical religious zealots over women and gay people, Christians over Muslims, Jews, agnostics and atheists, an extreme agenda over the general welfare of the people and progressive national plans, reckless short-termism in letting resource exploiters deplete natural resources instead of championing conservation, and climate crisis deniers over those who advocate wise precautionary principles and the greater good and sustainable well-being. These priorities are wrong.

Republicans efforts to entrench a right-wing majority on the Supreme Court are targeted to make sure that a partisan conservative majority will continue to be able to impose its will over the people by making more narrow rulings that side with the Few over the Many -- and men over women -- and Christians over all others.

In the biggest scheme of things, Republican politicians want to have a majority of extreme judges on federal courts who are predisposed to allow Republicans to get away with cheating in elections and violating provisions of the Constitution and rules of law, and weakening our democratic republic. Corruption incarnate!

Seeing clearly, the American people should renounce this stacking of federal courts with partisan judges. Donald Trump chose Brett Kavanaugh over all other possible nominees because he seemed to be biased toward acting as an enabler of abuses of power rather than as an independent check against sexual misconduct, violations of women's rights, influence peddling, growing inequality, political corruption and the anti-democratic litany of increasingly radicalized Republican agenda priorities.

Kavanaugh is a lifelong Republican partisan who is likely to be deciding people's fates on the highest court in the land for decades. He suspiciously happens to be far outside the judicial mainstream in having professed the belief that courts should show greater deference to the presidency, possibly even when power is being used contrary to the law, ethical norms, fundamental values or ideals espoused in the Constitution itself. He should not have been confirmed as a Justice because he is likely to side with protecting Trump from accountability for his lies, obstructing justice, and evading accountability through cover ups and various abuses of power and violations of the Constitution. In November 2018, it was the wrong time for Republicans to have succeeded in appointing a judge to the Supreme Court who would take the side of the "Roberts Five" in rationalizing, enabling and facilitating much of the egregious wrongdoing that was taking place.

The Supreme Court should act as an effective and ethical check against abuses of power. We simply can't trust today's Republicans to act morally and constitutionally, since right now Republicans in Congress and state legislatures are acting like functionaries enabling wrongdoing. Judges should rightly be chosen on merit, who will honestly commit to fairly and impartially deciding cases in ways that reasonably limit inimical abuses of authority by wealthy people and big corporations and the scheming politicians they have bought. We simply can't trust the Supreme Court right now, and that makes the institution too illegitimate to accept.

*We the People* have historically feared attacks from abroad, so it is ironic that we are now experiencing such existentially significant threats to our democracy from within. We can no longer tolerate Republican politicians in Congress abdicating their responsibilities of honestly representing the people and serving as a check against the permissive reigning culture of corruption. And in 2023, with Kevin McCarthy, Jim Jordan and Marjorie Taylor Greene? Dastardly!

#### More on the Litany

The goal of establishing a government with strong checks and balances that can stand for time immemorial against both domestic despotism and foreign tyranny is at the very heart of the U.S. Constitution. So it is tragic that our democratic republic, dedicated in founding ideals to serving the common good and the general welfare, devolved between 2017 and 2021 into an illegitimate state run by a demagogue and his co-conspiratorial minions who conspired with foreign autocrats like Putin in Russia, Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and Erdogan in Turkey. This was contrary to the best interests of American citizens.

Republicans are putting their Party over Country by using terribly divisive tactics to succeed in sacrificing the common good to the monomaniacal pursuit of power, profit and personal advantages in our corrupted crony capitalist system. In so doing, these politicians are causing excessively myopic and consequentially harmful impacts. It is no wonder that many folks judge their worse-than-Machiavellian schemes as "acts of evildoers".

Think clearly of the long litany of corrupt scams and unethical swindles and illicit schemes that "conservatives" have used to win elections and grab power. Keep in mind that most religious evangelicals support Trump Republicans, in an egregious instance of hypocrisy. These politicians have engaged in almost every possible unethical ruse, rather than more genuinely trying to promote the greater good and improve the general welfare of the people. They have suppressed voting, purged voter rolls, restricted early voting and made extreme gerrymanders of hundreds of congressional districts, all to advance their self-interest and do the scurrilous bidding of rich people and giant corporate entities. They have refused to take steps to prevent influence peddling and limit the corrupting effects of Big Money given by donors, often in secret, to decide elections and

rig our laws and pervert our system of justice. They have cheated, repetitiously told falsehoods, divisively stoked hot button cultural issues, emotionally manipulated people, taken advantage of people's grievances and fears and resentments, and engaged in duplicitous smear campaigns, character assassinations and dirty electioneering tricks. They traitorously encouraged Russian cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns in 2016 to help them get elected, and promoted fake news and inimical political conspiracy theories, and denied facts and expertise to push their shortsighted corrupt agenda. Trump started with breaking laws by using hush money to cover up his scandalous adulteries, and finished by waging a failed coup on Capitol Hill. Yet he and his loyalists threaten their opponents with jail or violence! Yikes! Let us meditate.

See clearly what's happening here, and why it's so seriously wrong. Wealthy donors, led by secretive Koch conclave co-conspirators and other well-heeled allies, have colossally corrupted our economic and political systems by using the powerful influence of their Big Bucks and *Dark Money*. Encouraging this corruption, Supreme Court conservatives gave their stamp of approval with the *Citizens United* ruling, holding that Big Money in our elections cannot create even an appearance of corruption. Really! They expressed this odd opinion despite the plainly evident extent of corrupting influence in allowing rich donors to decide almost everything. "Not a puppet, not a puppet!", Trumpian characters exclaim, in almost comically disingenuous diabolical denial.

All of these indignities are being exacerbated by the fact that many of the scams being perpetrated are sad examples of malfeasance and activities that bend or outright break rules of law, and even violate the great Enlightenment Era ideals upon which our Constitution was founded. The American people are being subjected not only to this litany of ruses and outright frauds, but to deep psychological distress and insecurity due to the extremely divisive nature of Trump's attempts to blame others, insult opponents, stoke racial prejudices, and pit people against each other. "United we stand; divided, the despots win," the Underground Mole shouts out, adding "Reject these uncivil, decency-deficient, unpatriotic and democracy-undermining villains!"

Ideas like this are expansively evaluated in *See Clearly*. Note that there are plenty of excellent solutions to all the big challenges we face, and we urgently need to begin undertaking them. They should be guided by a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*, and by *Good Proposals for Saving Humanity*. And they should be informed by the propitious worldview and recommendations made in my first book, *Common Sense Revival*.

In light of all the misguided and illicit actions being taken by MAGA Republicans in the world back in 2020, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain proclaimed: "If Donald Trump really had a shred of moral integrity, he would have repented of his dastardly deeds, admitted his sins, fired Vice-President Mike Pence and then resigned from office. The Constitution stipulates that their successor would be the Speaker of the House (Nancy Pelosi, at the time). As for Brett Kavanaugh, he should be replaced on the Supreme Court by a well-qualified consensus candidate, allowing fairer adjudication in the halls of power."

Chaos in the White House is dangerous to national security, and revelations about it during Trump's time in office resemble an intrigue-packed thriller novel. The respect-deserving investigative journalist Bob Woodward painted a harrowing portrait of the Trump presidency in his book *Fear: Trump in the White House*, which was based on many in-depth interviews with officials in the administration and other principals. Woodward relates the story of Trump's lawyer John Dowd peppering him in the White House residence with questions about the Russia investigation, "provoking stumbles, contradictions and lies until the president eventually lost his cool." Trump finally erupted, "This thing's a goddamn hoax", and launched into a half-hour-long rant that finished with him saying, "I don't really want to testify" to the Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his team of investigators. Ha! -- I guess not! After all, his then lawyer John Dowd reportedly warned him he would likely end up in prison wearing an "orange jumpsuit" if he were to testify under oath in the investigation. He should know!

Republicans in Congress during Trump's tenure evaded their Constitutional duty to exercise oversight over the President and members of his administration. In response, Democratic state Attorney Generals filed lawsuits against the rogue regime at a record pace, blocking Trump's cruel "zero tolerance" child separation policy, defending women's reproductive rights and fighting for protections of the environment, which is critically important in sustaining us and everyone in the future. Many state Attorney Generals were thus acting to create accountability needed to stop the worst harms of the domineering Republican agenda. "The inability and

unwillingness of Republicans in Congress and state legislatures to hold this administration and others in power accountable means that our system of checks and balances rests with state attorneys general, who are filing lawsuits against Trump when he violates tenets of the Constitution and rules of law."

### What We Must Do About the Excessively Dangerous State of Trump Republicanism

Republicans assert that their agenda is undermined by "a vast left-wing conspiracy" and "an angry, left-wing mob". In sharp contrast, Hillary Clinton famously declared back in the 1990s that there was a "vast right-wing conspiracy" against her and President Clinton and progressive causes. Since every American is being veritably bombarded with an intense barrage of competing claims and obfuscating spin and propaganda, it is hard for us to know what really to believe. We need to think straight, and see clearly.

It is crucial for us to ferret out the essential truth of this matter, since the consequences for our lives and for the lives of all humans forever hereafter will be profoundly affected by the environmental, ecological and climatic decisions being made today -- and by our resource depletion activities, and the extent to which we allow cost externalities like pollution, toxic wastes and resulting medical care to be foisted onto society, instead of demanding that our representatives take effective steps to prevent and alleviate such harms. Likewise, the impacts of our economic, business, financial, regulatory, social and political activities powerfully affect people living today, and will affect the fate of all people in the future. So our systems should be redesigned to be more in accord with visionary progressive understandings like those articulated in this manifesto.

To figure out whether the biggest threats to us will be found in left-wing schemes or right-wing schemes, let's be smart and "follow the money". Look what's happening here. Left-leaning politicians are calling for more affordable medical care, a safer healthcare system, improved public education, lower interest rates on student debt, comprehensive immigration reform, greater fairness in political representation, stronger protections from corporate wrongdoing, and smarter regulations to prevent harms and mitigate the impacts of cost externalizing schemes. They push for bigger investments in the country's physical infrastructure, urgent climate actions, reductions in the amount of money borrowed by the government to finance tax cuts, a fairer and less racially unjust system of criminal justice, better solutions to the deadly coronavirus and opioid crises, lower prices for prescription drugs, the end of punitive marijuana laws, and thorough investigations into election malfeasance and violations of rules of law and the Constitution. They also call for international cooperation to pay forward economic stability and environmental justice, and more broadly shared prosperity for our heirs.

In glaring contrast, right-wing politicians are using outrageously divisive tactics to grab and keep power. They staunchly oppose election and campaign finance reforms and expanded voting rights and fairer representation of the people. They are obstructing justice and covering up malfeasance by Donald Trump and his loyalists. They are entrenching corrupt governance through partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts. They are abusing their illegitimately gained power by dangerously running the nation into trillions of dollars of additional debt to reward wealthy donors with huge tax cuts. They have stacked federal courts and the Supreme Court with far right conservatives who inimically favor wealthy people over poor people and corporations over workers and citizens. They are giving big oil and coal companies more privileges to push their products and spew more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, with inevitably damaging and catastrophically costly impacts caused by global warming. These impacts include more intense storms and flooding and extreme temperatures, and worse droughts and wildfires in many places, along with bigger storm surges and ominous rises in sea levels, and growing numbers of people worldwide devastated by extreme weather-exacerbated natural disasters.

In the big picture, unprincipled Republican politicians have used twisted trickery in the form of an egregious bait-and-switch scheme in which they promise to champion the best interests of the working class and people on Main Street, and then do the bidding of rich people and corporate entities by crippling the ability of workers to collectively bargain for fairer treatment. At the same time, they try to insidiously impose austerity measures on the masses by cutting spending on healthcare, public education, environmental protections and many other hallmarks of a civilized society. And they simultaneously give lavish benefits to rich people and Wall Street banks and usurious Payday loan lenders and other corporate interests, to the detriment of the vast majority of the people. In these rash schemes, they are undermining the common good and the general welfare, mortgaging

the future, sabotaging the environment, and courting "catastrophic and irreversible consequences" by failing to take effective steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

### The Way It Is

Being that our Founders loved liberty and hated despotic usurpations and abuses of power, they created a brilliant Constitution that featured checks and balances to prevent tyranny. This helps ensure a more perfect union dedicated to an expansive vision of the general welfare of the people and their liberties and the nation's security. Fast forward to today. *See Clearly* is an ultimate Big Picture exposé of the wide-ranging wrongdoing involved in the way the status quo is currently rigged. In seeing clearly, we realize how long a litany of corrupt schemes and illicit scams and unethical con jobs are being perpetuated by power abusing "conservatives" against the people. By seeing clearly, we recognize the vital importance of wide-ranging farsighted progressive change.

It is my strongly felt conviction that we can no longer afford to let conservatives run roughshod over greater good goals by ruthlessly dominating our churches and state governments, and wielding excessive influence in Washington D.C. We need to collectively pledge allegiance to unifying policies, the common good and smarter national priorities. We must demand a peaceable revolution that will ensure our representatives give us more just national plans and more honorable, inclusive and egalitarian national priorities. Our representatives in Congress should start by enacting laws that effectively reverse the corruption-facilitating *Citizen's United* ruling, which wrongfully allows Big Money to corrupt our elections and lawmaking.

Most people see that Big Money-bought puppet politicians prioritize profits over people's health and well-being. They see the treachery and ultimate wrongheadedness of those who rationalize helping domineering CEOs and crony capitalists succeed in imposing their excessively profit-obsessed plans on the people -- while promoting a crusade against a safe environment and fairer treatment of working people. Sensible folks see that all of this is crazily contrary to the health of providential living conditions for human beings and life on Earth.

"The culture of corruption" in Crazytown seems to be spreading like cancer, and is metastasizing with MAGA House Republican extremists. What we really need is a new reality that features better management. We need fairer leaders who are not pushing a divisive agenda or striving to benefit from partisan rancor and chaos in the administration of what should be proper governance. We need leaders who are less obsessed with letting corporate entities exploit workers, cheat consumers and use up limited resources at the fastest possible rate. We need leaders who are not creating a Reality TV drama that allows them to get away with propagating a tsunami of distractions from all the unscrupulous, self-serving, self-dealing and harmful goings on, and correlated excessive profiteering and malfeasance. Big Brother government like George Orwell imagined in his dystopian novel 1984 has come in an ugly, cruel, deceitful, condemnation deserving, and irresponsible form! Let's reverse course. Instead of getting rid of many important functions of government and opening the barn doors to individual and corporate cost externalizing and unethical scheming, let's do the opposite!

Today the specter that haunts humanity is transmogrifying, and it is a specter of corporatocratic capitalism run amok. This force is depriving *We the People* of greater fairness in the "social contract". It is tragic that the eminently wise aspects of Golden Rule reciprocity principles are being arrogantly abrogated. It is sad for we Americans to be forced to suffer the consequences of the Tricky Trumpster's naked greed and the terrible detrimentality of his money-obsessed crusade for self-dealing and maximized benefits for himself -- and the few -- always at the expense of the many, "the lazy bums". Also, it is appalling to have scandal and distraction and misinformation and divisiveness trump all, and to have the people be subjected to poisonous psychological games being played by leaders who exhibit a deficiency of empathy and an absurdly narcissistic hubris, and a dangerous lust for cultivating the good graces of the world's worst despots. Our Founders would have fits!

Let's give Donald Trump the Actor of the Century Award, which he deserves for his leading role in a Feature Drama portraying a Twitter-mad demented demagogue in a modern reality show adaptation of Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*. Let's do this in a star-studded celebrity ceremony sometime soon, and then usher him off the national stage and out of the glare of the revealing spotlights. He is simply too dangerous to democracy, true justice, fair elections, national security, people's civil rights, and peace in our democratic republic.



Let's stop aiming our slings and arrow at each other, and stop allowing scheming Dividers to exploit the people, for that only ensures too much outrageous misfortune. Once we *See Clearly*, we will realize more.

The Profiteer-in-Chief tried to make sure that he himself would be the biggest beneficiary of his corrupted national priorities. He and his crony pals -- which include the damned Mercers and titans of industry like the ruthless billionaires in the Koch network of wealthy "conservative" donors. Yes, titans of giant power-abusing oil companies and brazen drug companies engaged in excessive profiteering, and Wall Street banking institutions and real estate tycoons. Many of these modern day robber barons meet in secretive conclaves where they hatch and further their scheming plans to rig affairs to their maximum advantage by eliminating regulations, artificially goosing profits, and making real sure that the top dogs who are doing the deciding will be the ones that get most of the spoils.

There are often U.S. Senators and House Representatives in attendance at the conspiratorial Koch conclaves that take place every year in Palm Springs. They join cunning conservative journalists, media propagandists and scheming Republican Party operatives. Two Supreme Court Justices have also attended the meetings (Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia). Impeach Clarence! He has too many conflicts of interest, like his Tea Party wife's activism. And his judicial record demonstrates unequivocally that he violates his Judicial Oath of Office. He seems to have conveniently forgotten that he solemnly swore he would "administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich." And he repeatedly supported the assertion, absurdly, that he cannot see any corruption or even appearance of corruption in anti-democratic ruses implicit in the *Citizens United* ruling, which was a wrongly decided case that basically allows politicians to make our system a "one-dollar-one-vote" political system instead of a much fairer one-person-one-vote system. This is corruption incarnate! And the consequences are proving to be catastrophic for the USA, and for humanity.

Most people would probably prefer that our leaders be chosen in fairer elections, by citizens uniting to elect persons who honestly appeal to the broadest expression of the general welfare of *We the People*. That means NOT pandering so exclusively to the best interests of the few, corruptly enabled and unethically prioritized. This, pathetically, is *What's the Matter with Kansas*. "It's about the Corruption, Stupid!", screamed a headline.

A few practical voices among conservatives now and then warn about excessive injustices that may lead to serious or even revolutionary conflicts. But with strong police forces and the world's most powerful military, and with an oppressive *Incarceration Nation* injustice system -- and authoritarians wielding too much influence - - they seem satisfied to continue to let Party extremists overplay their hands, as if they figure that critical resulting problems will lie somewhere down the road, perhaps after they are out of office, or dead. Their election losses in November 2018 finally resulted in some investigative oversight by House Democrats, but Republicans doubled down on their complicity in wrongdoing. Let's honestly understanding what's going on here.

Dateline July 24, 2018, one week after the Helsinki Summit

Something suspicious is happening here. Donald Trump held a secretive summit with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki that was followed by a revealing press conference in which Trump sided with Putin in denying that either of them could possibly have been involved in underhanded efforts to rig the 2016 election outcome in favor of Republicans. By taking that deceitful stand, Trump was almost treasonously denying extensive evidence that convinces all our American intelligence agencies that Russia was deeply involved in influencing our 2016 elections. How again? One way was through Russian hacking and dissemination of Democratic Party communications and voter information. Another was profiling of voters by Cambridge Analytica, and micro-targeted propagation of emotion-hijacking fake news, conspiracy theories and character assassinations through ads on Facebook and other social media. There were also many other Russian cyber-attack strategies designed to divide people and to demoralize them by means of what a KGB defector called "ideological subversion, active measures, or psychological warfare." By thus eroding people's trust in democracy, these villains strive to triumph.

Trump deserves the exposure of his law breaking by investigators and reporters in an approaching dénouement to what he often ridiculously refers to as "fake news" and a "Witch Hunt". Hmmm. As Parkland High School student Emma Gonzales stated, "We call BS." There were dozens of indictments and seven guilty pleas in the

Mueller probe, and Republicans materially distorted the findings in the final report, and deceitfully spun it as "exonerating". It was not. We face a constitutional crisis, and our political leaders should have been more honest with us about the Mueller investigation, and the Ukraine Plot, and criminal efforts made to cover up shenanigans and obstruct justice. And Republicans should not have opposed the investigation into the consequences of Trump's Big Lies and instigated coup attempt on January 6, 2001. Let's hang tight, my fellow Americans, as this crisis unfolds, and get better organized to really actualize greater good goals.

Let's also demand that the improper confirmation of the partisan Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court be reversed, because it was tainted by the FBI's failure to investigate improprieties. Then let's put a reasonable moderate onto the high court as a first step in Republican restitution on account of the profound illegitimacy of the scandalous coup that Republican politicians perpetrated to put so many partisan in the federal judiciary.

Once we *See Clearly*, we will also know that we must reverse provisions of the debt-financed Tax Cut swindle passed exclusively by Republicans in Congress in Dec. 2017. The fact that these politicians achieved their election victories using nefarious means makes their swindles doubly offensive. This highly regressive debt-financed Republican Tax Cut scam should rightly be replaced with a fairer plan that results in balanced budget impacts, not spiking amounts of debt. The new law should give Not One More Cent in tax breaks to people in the top 1%, compared to tax rates in effect before the roguish Republican law. After all, the law gave America's 5,000 richest families an average tax cut of more than \$80 million EACH per year, which future taxpayers will have to pay for, in principal and interest costs, every year, forever. And the new law should be designed so that more generous funding is available for schools, physical infrastructure, healthcare for all, improved social safety net programs, environmental protections, the environmental-justice-oriented Green Climate Fund, and foreign aid and international diplomatic missions that help ensure peaceful coexistence. "Build Back Better!"

### Conclusion

Survival is the ultimate moral good for our kind, and Big Picture perspectives are needed to help ensure our human survival and flourishing. Such perspectives should be comprehensive, and they should take into account the best understandings of deep ecologists and scientists in every discipline, and of spiritual leaders. They also should not deny the most ethically aware worldviews, or the latest and most accurate scientific understandings. Survival involves indefinitely sustained biological existence. We humans need to clearly recognize and respect the fact that we cannot continue to consume more than can be supplied by natural resources and regeneration in healthy ecosystems. The carrying capacity of damaged ecosystems is much less than that of healthy ones, so it is an overarching necessity for us to act to prevent devastating harms to habitats. Otherwise, by upsetting the providential balance in nature, we will degrade the indispensable foundation of our flourishing and survival.

"Après moi, le deluge" attitudes did not work out well for the power-abusing nobility in France, because they cavalierly treated the masses too ruthlessly, provoking the French Revolution in 1789. And it sure didn't prove to be propitious for King Louis XVI, who was guillotined in January 1793. It may have been indignantly worse for "Let them eat cake" Marie Antoinette, who met the same fate nine months later. Republican efforts today to roll back environmental protections, and to reject global responsibilities under the Paris Agreement on climate change, are essentially a dead end "Après nous, le deluge" attitude. Revolutionarily positive change must come!

Big Picture perspectives should be better informed by a Buddha-like triumvirate of Right Mindfulness, Right Understanding and Right Action. They should be guided by foresight and respect for long-term greater good goals, like that imbued in a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. Greater concern should be given to social justice and environmental justice, and to the proper stewardship of Creation. More respect should be given to attitudes like the compassionate caring manifested by spiritual leaders, like Jesus Christ and the Dalai Lama.

I feel strongly that all people should be enlisted to help pay forward some good deeds to our heirs in the future generations, so that we create improved and safer prospects for overall well-being for everyone.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

April 1, 2023





## Broadly Peaceful Progressive Revolution Arrives -- Scathing Critique Continued

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, creator of the Earth Manifesto  
June 2017, with updates through July 1, 2020

We should all laugh out loud together at the perceptive insight in a wry cartoon that appeared in The New Yorker magazine: "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." An existential Ha! Humor is good for the soul, but make no mistake about it, these are trying times for our souls, and the information and perspective in these essays could change the world, and do so in a Solon-wise way that could providentially and positively resolve our unfolding national nightmare and set our country onto a more star-spangled course than the direction in which it seems to be headed today. At this crucial juncture in history, American citizens cannot afford to shrink from engaging and participating in our democratic decision-making.

Humanity is in great need of better guidance and spiritual vision - socially, politically, fiscally and environmentally. Instead we have a profoundly undesirable state of corrupt, unethical and immoral misguidance, and we are being led by those who mislead us to accomplish their selfish money-obsessed and power prepossessed goals. Thomas Paine wrote, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again", and it is our duty today as voters, responsible citizens and good humans to choose more honest leaders to guide us sensibly into a future that is fraught with increasingly challenging predicaments.

I invite everyone to read all 16 essays in *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times*, so that better understandings will materialize that cast a bright light on all the rash ruses that the ruling class is perpetuating against the American people. And in light of these clear realizations, I urge every voter to vote in every future election for moderate and progressive candidates, and more honest representatives, and give a stern rebuke to all incumbent politicians who are engaging in deceit and scandalous malfeasance, or who are blinding following Donald Trump in his insidious efforts to corruptly abuse power in his position of domineering authority.

"There's a wonderful mythical law of nature that the three things we crave most -- happiness, freedom, and peace of mind -- are always attained by giving them to someone else."

--- Unknown, from *Peace Be with You*, compiled by Dan Zadra

### Skullduggery Is A-Goin' On

Rich people want to pay less tax, and thus scrimp on the safeguards provided by social insurance policies that could make our society much fairer -- AND save their own necks from revolutionary strife. They are stubbornly opposed to paying increased marginal tax rates on the highest levels of their earnings, even for some of the best investments they could make for society in greater well-being for everyone concerned. The most egregious instance of this antagonistic stance is found in the current Republican drive to slash spending on social safety net programs and protections of public health and the environment, while at the same time ramping up military spending and cutting taxes to mainly benefit the highest income earners. This is dangerously misguided policy.

It is important to note that our nation's Founders believed that "a well-informed public is best equipped to root out corruption and, over the long haul, promote liberty and justice." One way Trump has violated our founding principles is by attacking the free press. Early in the Trump era, A.G. Sulzberger, publisher of the New York Times, warned that Trump's savage attacks on reporters and investigative journalists, and on news organizations

like CNN, the Washington Post and the New York Times, are creating significant danger to reporters. These reckless authoritarian attacks are calculated to give cover to merciless and corrupt authoritarian leaders in nations around the world, including in Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, where despotic rulers are engaging in ruthless actions to suppress the freedom of the press, transparently to make it easier to abuse power. The macabre murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Arabian embassy in Istanbul may have been facilitated by this attitude, and by this journalist being a critic of hard-line rule in the Saudi kingdom -- and of the Trump regime.

Some say that those who choose to indulge in acts of infamy like this are being judged by God, so what might happen at "the Pearly Gates of Heaven"? Dante scholars would likely assess the situation skeptically, and try to speculatively determine which circle in Dante's *Inferno* each and every one of these usurpers and dastardly abusers of power should be destined to reside in, for the rest of eternity.

Forget the afterlife! Let's demand fairer economic, social and legal justice in the here and now. Let's all throw open our windows and holler "I'm not going to take it anymore!" Let's demand new management, and insist that their only legitimate top goal is to better meet the needs of the people. Trump Republicans should resign in disgrace, admitting they have been unwilling to honestly take steps necessary to create a fairer, more fiscally sound society that is more just and egalitarian, and therefore safer, more secure and more peaceable.

One of Mark Twain's most famous essays is *Corn-Pone Opinions*. In it, he concludes: "In our late canvass half of the nation passionately believed that in silver lay salvation, the other half as passionately believed that that way lay destruction. Do you believe that a tenth part of the people, on either side, had any rational excuse for having an opinion about the matter at all? I studied that mighty question to the bottom, and came out empty. Half of our people passionately believe in high tariffs, the other half believe otherwise. Does this mean study and examination, or only feeling? The latter, I think. I have deeply studied that question, too - and didn't arrive. We all do no end of feeling, and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God." Hmmm ... This perspective puts a new spin on conformity and people being "politically correct".

Each and every one of us exists in our own unique bubble chamber, particles and energy zipping through. Our personal worldviews are powerfully determined by the circumstances of our birth and upbringing, and whatever hands the fickle fingers of fate have dealt us. But to an extent, each of us does have some degree of free will, and it would be an excellent idea for us to give a larger measure of respect to facts and evidence, and to scientific reality, and to ecologically sane courses of action. One of my pet theories is that it would be better for everyone to strive to see more clearly -- in ways that are more comprehensive, more inclusive, more sustainable, and much more visionarily fair-minded.

#### A Focus on the Common Good, Properly Understood

Let these words serve as a powerful call to action. Our democracy is under concerted assault, and it is becoming crucial for us to restore sanity by choosing more responsible and broadly inclusive representatives. This is our overarching civic duty because "conservatives" have been dishonorably betraying the vast majority of the people for their own power, profit, privilege and ruthlessly domineering control. They have succeeded in this nefariously selfish goal by perpetrating many scams against the people, diabolically dividing us, rudely deceiving us and cheating us, manipulating people's emotions, pitting us against each other, stoking resentments, and taking deleterious advantage of people today while leaving a disastrous legacy to all people in future generations. This legacy is one of inequality, disempowered workers, harsh corporate hegemony over national decision-making, rapidly increasing public debt, depleted resources, a polluted environment and destabilized climatic conditions. These are sad consequences of millions of Americans being *Blinded by the Right*.

Let's come together, y'all, and anyone who supports the Cult of Trump, please stop being obedient authoritarian followers, as astutely characterized by Bob Altemeyer in his online book *The Authoritarians*. Please strive to see more clearly, and don't mindlessly nod at every tweet or biased segment on Fox News broadcasts.

Here is another reason that patriotic Americans should vote for progressive political representatives. Copious quantities of irrefutable evidence confirm that Republicans strongly favor unfair elections that are corrupted

by voter suppression tactics, extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts, and the distorting influence of Big Money and Dark Money. Wealthy conservatives who finance them also favor the contortions, perversions and manipulation that can be accomplished by taking advantage of the dark side of people's emotions through social media, by means of microtargeted disinformation, race-baiting, fear-mongering, distractions, really fake news, false conspiracy theories and character assassinations on platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Trump Republicans are violating the public trust by abusing narrow majority power that they have illegitimately seized, and they are compounding their treachery by transforming this ill-gotten power into assaults against the greater good. The agenda they push rewards the rich, cheats the people and makes the vast majority of people more vulnerable and insecure. They have rammed through regressively rigged tax laws that require huge amounts of public funds to be borrowed, and give most of the spoils to the top 1%. The bottom line effect of this fiscally irresponsible scam is to increase the concentration of wealth, power and privilege ever more exclusively in the hands of the few. These ruthless partisans are siding with corporate entities that soullessly strive with monomaniacal focus on keeping working people minimally paid and weakly meek in their insecurity.

And these schemers staunchly oppose regulatory safeguards and environmental protections. These facts make it clear that conservatives are pushing twisted priorities, and that we cannot afford to continue to allow power-abusing politicians to treat our home planet like a business nearing bankruptcy and in the process of liquidation. We must demand that every single one of our representatives in Congress starts to side with the true best interests of the people.

We Americans should rightly demand that our leaders make an overarching commitment to an eminently fair Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as set forth in this manifesto. We should stop unleashing the powerful profit-obsessed engines of exploitation that are so wastefully stoking materialistic demand, depleting natural resources, damaging habitats, sacrificing public lands and externalizing a myriad of costs onto society. This folly is basically a means for socializing costs, including costs related to pollution, toxins, hazardous wastes, medical care for resulting adversities, and natural disasters made worse by extreme weather events.

### Crucial Ecological Issues

Make no mistake about it, there is an even worse aspect of the Republican agenda and the shrewd schemes they are pushing to reward hyper-privileged partisans for their political support and campaign contributions. This is in the arena of environmental protections. Republican politicians want to slash spending on protections of clean water, clean air, food and drug safety, environmental science, the Environmental Protection Agency and NASA. And they are striving to torpedo efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. By these actions, these politicians are acting like *Conservatives without Conscience*, condemning countless numbers of people right now, and for all future years and decades and centuries, to rashly increased risks of calamitous hardships, resource shortages, food supply disruptions, damaged habitats, air pollution, fresh water shortages, diminished water quality, and worsening natural disasters made worse by human-caused global warming.

The harshly negative impacts of these retrogressive initiatives on human health can be categorized into a broad array of effects that saliently include climate change factors like extreme heat, severe weather, spiking risks of diseases, exposures to increasing amounts of allergens, rising sea levels and a worsening degradation of the environmental commons. This agenda ignores the indisputable fact that a healthy environment serves as a providential underpinning for overall human and biotic well-being. It is colossal folly to court such catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and life on Earth. Big picture understandings contained in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity and Population Overshoot* are relevant here, and crucially important, so they are included herein by this reference.

Pope Francis issued an important ecological encyclical on climate change in June 2015. In it, he made a strong moral case for the need to mobilize people of faith and others into action to seriously address climate change. The Pope centered his environmental protection theology on the biblical creation story in the book of *Genesis*, in which God is said to have created the world and declared it "good", and charged humanity with its care. Pope Francis tied the ongoing environmental crisis to misguided economic schemes and the mindless exploitation of

the planet by a wealthy minority, and he emphasized the social injustices that these trends cause while wreaking detrimental damages onto the downtrodden and the poor and powerless. Jesus Christ!

Pope Francis has called for climate action as a moral imperative because of the perilous effects of global warming trends, which cause the harshest harms to poor people and folks in vulnerable developing countries, who happen to contribute the least to factors disrupting the global climate. Smarter and fairer policies are needed to achieve truer environmental and social justice. All developed countries should make bigger contributions to the Green Climate Fund to mitigate the impacts of climate injustices. Most of all, the United States should rightly contribute much more money, because it has been responsible more than any other country for the increasingly rapid build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in the past century.

The smartest path forward would be to implement Pigouvian incentives such as a carbon fee-and-dividend plan that would reduce the profligacy of wasteful usages of fossil fuels. Plans like this would have the effect of giving "extraordinary encouragements" and "extraordinary restraints" to businesses and individuals. This idea was first advocated by the insightful British economist Arthur Cecil Pigou, who promoted the implementation of subsidy incentives and tax disincentives because such mechanisms have the salubrious effect of properly reflecting both social benefits and costs to society that are not accounted for in private transactions. This would be a good means for influencing people's activities and behaviors in sensible ways. A carbon fee-and-dividend plan, progressively designed, would have added benefits of helping reduce inequalities in our society by returning some of the carbon fees generated to all Americans in a highly egalitarian way.

Conservative leaders seem to want us all to stick our heads in the sand. Instead of making honest vulnerability assessments of the unfolding adverse impacts associated with juiced-up fossil fuel profit-making, they are firing environmental scientists, eliminating the best scientific understandings from government websites, and dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency. And they're trying to pull the wool over our eyes. Crazytown!

I implore all politicians to remember the meaning and value of honorable public service, and to consequently stop trying to sacrifice future well-being merely to pander to narrow goals of corporate executives, fossil fuel profiteers, opponents of collective bargaining rights for working people, uncompromising gun rights extremists, religious fundamentalists, and wealthy moguls like Charles Koch, Sheldon Adelson, Robert and Rebekah Mercer, Foster Friess and David Pecker. Charles Koch and the recently deceased David Koch and their billionaire cronies have exerted more influence over our democratic American republic than perhaps any other individuals in history. They think Republican healthcare plans are simply not "conservative" enough, and before the midterm elections in 2018 they were "gearing up to target vulnerable Democrats on the ballot in 2018, pledging to spend upwards of \$400 million". Senator Kamala Harris stated that Koch organizations were "specifically coming after some of the most effective voices in the fight to save the Affordable Care Act, like my colleagues Senators Chris Murphy and Bill Nelson." The gamesmanship of extremely partisan politics should not ignore human ethics and morality, and the common good should not be sacrificed with such ruthlessness in the pursuit of money and power. Bill Nelson was unfortunately defeated by the scheming Rick Scott.

There are extraordinarily good reasons to cultivate a miraculous healing for the Earth that "awaits this planet once we accept our new responsibility to collectively tend the Garden, rather than fight over the turf." So say Bruce Lipton and "Swami Beyondananda" in their insightful book *Spontaneous Evolution*.

#### Riff on the Undesirability of Extreme Inequality

Inequality today is more extreme than it has been at almost any time in U.S. history. The gaping gap between the rich and the vast majority of everyone else is worse than it has been at any time since the Roaring Twenties or the tawdry Gilded Age that Mark Twain wrote about. And this state of affairs will continue to get worse, for a variety of convincing reasons adduced by French economist Thomas Piketty in his blockbuster tome on economics, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

During his presidency, the respect-deserving Barack Obama called increasing inequality a "defining challenge of our time." One reason this is true is because of the daunting implications of an observation attributed to the brilliant Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis: "We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may

have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Brandeis, born of Jewish parents who had emigrated to the U.S. from Bohemia, was a commendably powerful champion of progressive social causes.

If the American people are truly committed to pledging allegiance to an indivisible democratic republic, a nation that really stands for liberty and justice for all, then we need to remedy the extreme imbalance between rich and poor. We need to heed the cautionary words penned by Plutarch, a famous Greek essayist, who declared some 19 centuries ago that such imbalances are "the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics."

In their fascinating book *The Lessons of History*, the great historians Will and Ariel Durant wrote that, when the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest becomes too extreme, as has happened periodically throughout the centuries, such an "unstable equilibrium generates a critical situation" that results in either "legislation redistributing wealth or revolution distributing poverty." It seems obvious that the best choice for *We the People* would be to demand that our leaders create plans that would reduce inequality through smart legislative actions guided by fairness principles, precautionary insights, honestly egalitarian policies, farsightedness and greater empathy for the suffering of those whose interests are severely underrepresented.

The wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker Solon saved Athens from debilitating conflict by forging sensible compromises between the rich and the poor at a juncture in time when inequalities of wealth and power had reached extremes in ancient Greece. Solon is regarded as "the father of democracy" for the fair-minded progressive reforms he instituted way back in the 6th century BCE. Historians say that Solon repealed almost all the earlier harshly draconian laws that had been enacted by an Athenian legislator named Draco.

Today, inequalities between the top 1% and the masses of poor people and those in the declining middle class are reaching historically unprecedented new extremes in the USA. This has become drastically worse with the 2020 Pandemic, as the ranks of desperate people have swollen while the world's richest people have enjoyed double-digit increases in their wealth every year for years. This state of affairs is creating critical risks that require bold, honest, intelligent, visionary, democratically fair and Solon-wise reforms to prevent our country from sliding into dire straits and violent strife. Unfortunately, with "conservative" politicians having seized power in Washington D.C., as well as in a majority of state governments, they are taking steps to impose draconian austerity on the populace to defend the status quo of excessive privileges for elites and low tax rates on the highest levels of income, capital gains and inheritances.

Nowhere is this neo-Draconian approach more pronounced than in healthcare reform efforts, where conservative ideologues are striving to destroy the Affordable Care Act and roll back progressive steps taken by President Obama. Conservatives are pushing mean-spirited healthcare laws that would slash federal spending on Medicare and Medicaid, and allow increased discrimination against poor people and women and children and old people and anyone with "preexisting conditions" -- in order to help pay for more big tax breaks for the rich.

In a cynical modern twist, the Draconian Party is trying to spin their severe policies as having "heart", giving lip service to populist concerns, but at the same time they are brazenly handing out more regressive debt-financed tax cuts. Their other top priorities are to ram through narrowly-focused corporate benefits and curtail the collective bargaining rights of workers, and reduce protections of the health and well-being of people who work for a living, and expand opportunities for artificially inflating private profits by allowing the costs and harms of pollution and climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emissions to be "socialized" (i.e., rashly externalized onto society and people in the future). In general, they seem to be mindlessly committed to myopically sacrificing public lands and the environmental commons to increase profits and achieve other short term-oriented goals.

With Republicans in Congress having demonstrated a willingness to put tens of millions of American lives at risk by repeatedly trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act and giving rich people a massive tax cut, Barack Obama made an observation that applies much more broadly: "After all, this debate has always been about something bigger than politics. It's about the character of our country -- who we are, and who we aspire to be. And that's always worth fighting for." Let's fight for it! Remember this, attendees at bizarre Trump rallies!



In a persuasive book titled *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution - Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic*, legal scholar Ganesh Sitaraman expressed a strong conviction that extreme levels of inequality are existentially dangerous to our democratic republic. A healthy middle class, he wrote, "inspires a sense of shared purpose and shared fate, without which the system of government will fall apart." Since ancient times, when a small minority of the populace is allowed to become very rich while ignoring large segments of the population that are much worse off, it leads to two undesirable probabilities. The downtrodden may rise up and confiscate the wealth of the rich; or the masses, given little opportunity for social mobility or for improving their prospects, are susceptible to turning to a manipulative demagogue "who would overthrow the government -- only to become a tyrant. Oligarchy or tyranny, economic inequality meant the end of the republic."

Risks of revolution also rise when rich people impose their rule with little regard for poor people and those in the middle class, especially when they disenfranchise a majority of the populace and effectively enslave them with excessively onerous tight control over wage laborers. In a review of Ganesh Sitaraman's book, Angus Deaton observed in *It's Not Just Unfair: Inequality Is a Threat to Our Governance*: "Sitaraman reviews many possible correctives, including redistribution to reduce inequality; better enforcement of antitrust laws; campaign finance reform to break the dependence of legislators on deep pocket donors; compulsory voting; and restrictions on lobbying, including the possibility of 'public defender' lobbyists to act on behalf of the people." Let's seize the bull by the horns and address this critical challenge by adopting these remedies!

To achieve a more peaceable world, we need to create more just societies with more fairly shared prosperity, and more broadly shared security and freedom. Our concept of freedom should be expansive and more inclusive, not merely the freedom to spend unlimited amounts of money on political influence, or the freedom to not buy medical insurance, or the unrestricted freedom to own guns. President Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated such an expansive vision of freedom in his 1941 State of the Union address, when he declared that there are four fundamental freedoms that people "everywhere in the world" ought to enjoy: "the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear." Stand and Deliver, ruling elites! Give the people expanded security and freedoms and greater overall societal well-being, for Christ's sake!

Excessively unequal societies become unstable and are unsustainable. An adequately strong social safety net is needed to provide social insurance policies against revolution, and it is riskily wrongheaded to promote ideological rationalizations that serve to make inequality worse and worse. Sixto Rodriguez, a surprising singer and songwriter featured in the excellent film *Searching for Sugar Man*, struck a resonant chord with his cogent insight: "I have a thesis: oppression equals revolution." Let the progressive revolution begin ASAP -- and let it be peaceable.

Sometimes the Goddess of Irony materializes in our midst, and she can be enlightening. A powerful reaction to Trump Republican roguery is spreading across the land of the free, constitutionally dedicated as it is to democratic values of fairness and expanded liberties. This is a progressive reaction, unlike reactive deluded right-wing populism. This is a rational reaction against political corruption and extreme economic inequities and environmental folly. This progressive revolution should honor policies and top priorities that are consistent with the general welfare of all the people and the common good. NO ONE SHOULD BE ABOVE THE LAW!

### Inequality by Crooked Design

Look again at what's going on here. Republicans in Congress shoveled through a Tax Cut Act in December 2017 without public hearings and without honestly considering the real consequences of the action, and here's what it will do. The public treasury will borrow an additional \$2 trillion or so over the next 10 years, running up the already dangerously high national debt, and the law will give most of the spoils of this money-borrowing swindle and economic stimulus to the top 1%. The interest costs of this con job obligation will be owed by each and every taxpayer in every future year, basically forevermore. The fact of the matter is that the interest costs will almost certainly compound, as we continue deeply irresponsible deficit spending ways, year after year after year. The interest expense on the additional \$2 trillion will total \$2 trillion every 20 years or so, over and over again, conservatively assuming that the prevailing rate of interest on long-term government borrowings averages

only 4%. This is a treacherous Santa Claus political strategy that is profligately generous to wealthy system-corrupting beneficiaries, to the dire detriment of the people.

Increasingly extreme inequality is a sad side effect of this swindle. Since fairness is one of the founding principles in our democratic republic, spiking degrees of inequality between the few and the many threaten our democracy and our collective well-being. Such injustices also put our personal freedoms at more serious risk, as well as our individual and national security. Peaceful coexistence in American society will not be achieved through more unjust laws or more severe austerity measures, or more prisons, or authorities waging a harsher war on drugs and poor people. It will not be achieved by bankrupting the government or slashing government spending on healthcare, education, the social safety net and the country's physical infrastructure, which is crumbling in too many places. Skimping on sensible environmental protections is a particularly foolish course.

All these swindles compound the folly of *We the People* allowing these consequential scams in the rigged status quo to continue. Those to blame for enabling these outcomes, which are so radically harming the lives and prospects of millions of people, are deeply irresponsible.

To save us all -- and their own necks -- the wealthy ruling class should discover a new urgency in finding much better ways of fairly sharing the profits generated through natural resource exploitation, the stingy treatment of working people and public debt swindles. Billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer would concur, judging from the brilliantly simple insights he conveyed in his 2014 article *The Pitchforks are Coming ... for Us Plutocrats*. In this Memo to "My Fellow Zillionaires", Hanauer expressed this provocative understanding: "The problem isn't that we have inequality. Some inequality is intrinsic to any high-functioning capitalist economy. The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. Our country is rapidly becoming less a capitalist society and more a feudal society. Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution." ... "And so I have a message for my fellow filthy rich, for all of us who live in our gated bubble worlds: Wake up, people. It won't last. If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

Let's right the wrongs! Balance, moderation, Right Mindfulness and Right Action are called for. Let's demand that our leaders act much more responsibly. See *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto* for a fuller comprehension.

#### Time's Up -- Give More Rights to Women in Our Patriarchal Society

The French aristocracy was overthrown in the French Revolution that began on what has become known as Bastille Day on July 14, 1789. This historic event launched a decade-long period of intense social and political upheaval in France and its colonies. Notably, 1789 was the same year during the Enlightenment "Age of Reason" that our courageous and honorable Founders ratified the truly great U.S. Constitution, thereby creating an enduring framework for our freedom-championing democratic republic, and it has served as a powerful beacon to humanity of aspirations for opportunities, personal liberties and fairness for over 230 years since then.

A commendable French feminist and activist wonderfully named Olympe de Gouges was outraged because women were overlooked in the reforms following the French Revolution. So she proclaimed a bold *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* in 1791 to expose the failures of leaders to establish gender equality during the revolution. Let's embrace greater equality NOW!

Listen, guys. Violent revolutions are exceedingly bad for almost everyone involved, so what we should do now, at this crucial point in history, is to come together and implement a noble, earthshaking, broadly beneficial and admirably peaceful revolution that embraces the Equal Rights Amendment -- which simply states, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

This fair-minded Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed soon after women won the right to vote in 1920, but it took the Women's Movement in the 1960s for it to finally gain traction. The House of Representatives approved it in 1971, and then the Senate in 1972. As stipulated in the U.S. Constitution, two-thirds of all state legislatures were then required to ratify the Amendment, and during the following 5 years, 35 of a necessary 38 state legislatures had ratified it. But then conservatives mobilized against the bipartisan initiative, derailing it, "arguing that the ERA would disadvantage housewives and cause women to be drafted into the military."

With more outrages of domineering male privilege now being exposed through the #MeToo movement, and by the desperate deceptions of officials like Donald Trump and Brett Kavanaugh, sex discrimination can be seen to have been perpetuated in our society for much too long. A measure of justice is served by the exposure of such injustices as being unacceptably treacherous against the female half of the populace. Let us now come together and guarantee fairer treatment to Female Citizens in the world today. #MeToo. #HeForShe. #TimesUp!

Let's do this by unanimously declaring greater respect for women by supporting the Equal Rights Amendment. The states of Illinois, Nevada and Virginia ratified the Amendment since early 2017, making a total of 38 states, so let's turn our expectant eyes on each and every one of the states that have failed to ratify this sensibly fair Amendment because they are controlled by dominion-demanding male conservatives. The world turns its eyes on you, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Utah. And the world looks with pregnant expectation on the five state legislatures that had ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, but subsequently turned their backs on women by voting to revoke their ratifications -- Idaho, Kentucky, Nebraska, Tennessee and South Dakota.

When the courageous Dr. Christine Blasey Ford gave her powerful testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee in late September 2018, observers were struck by how overwhelmingly old, white and male the Republican members of Congress were, whom she had to face. The consequences of dominating GOP control in Washington D.C. -- and unfortunately also in the majority of states -- are profoundly affective and highly negative for the majority of Americans, and humankind -- and life on Earth.

Instead of trying to be reasonable, Republican politicians are doubling down on their treacherous dealings, having taken advantage of the willingness of Democrats to compromise and now taking ruthlessly uncompromising stands. The self-proclaimed "grim reaper" Mitch McConnell pathetically leads the way.

With the exposure of Brett Kavanaugh's character, the legitimacy of the male patriarchy is crumbling before our very eyes. Clarence Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh and Donald Trump have all declared they have been subjected to "a witch hunt", but now, astonishingly, extraordinarily and stunningly, these witch hunts have been revealed to have discovered all but malignant privileged male witches. These are deceitful men who are eager to fool the people to get power and usurp that power, and to deprive other more deserving people of positions of authority -- especially women who are generally more honest, honorable, legitimate and moral. Brett Kavanaugh made a belligerently zealous stand in his sworn public testimony, proclaiming his absolute innocence of charges of sexual misconduct because he desperately wanted to join the highest ranks of the male patriarchy, a cult of men who are driven to abuse power with an indignant sense of entitlement. These men tend to exploit women and dictate to them, and take advantage of gender and racial prejudices to impose their will on females. These are men who for decades have been exploiting hot button social issues of reproductive rights and social control of women, and of people in racial minorities, with the coldly-calculating purpose of entrenching themselves in power.

One of their most inhumane injustices has been to sabotage the Affordable Care Act in order to benefit the wealthiest Americans, and to spew out a smoke screen to obscure their role in undermining the common good. This is morally indefensible. Doctors have sworn for more than 2,000 years to "First, do no harm", by affirming the Hippocratic Oath, the earliest expression of medical ethics. The GOP, in astonishing contrast, first makes coldly-calculated efforts to fool the people, and then strives to get away with all the harms it can, on behalf of their donors, who President Theodore Roosevelt critically characterized as "malefactors of great wealth". In the closing weeks before the November 2018 midterm elections, the lies skyrocketed, with Republican politicians pretending they wanted to defend people against being deprived of medical care due to pre-existing

conditions -- despite having tried for the previous eight years, over and over and over and over and over again, to repeal the provisions of the Affordable Care Act. Disgusting hypocrisy!

### Perspective on Anti-Egalitarian Ruses

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a five-star general and hero in World War II, and then a Republican president for eight years. He provocatively declared in 1954: "Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes that you can do these things. Among them are a few Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or businessman from other areas. Their number is negligible and they are stupid."

It seems like Dwight Eisenhower is being proved wrong today, now that diabolically deceitful politicians have managed to gain narrow control of the U.S. government by brainwashing a strident minority into giving them power. Ike appears to have been wrong because these hyper-partisan politicians are pushing policies that rashly undermine the social safety net for the primary purpose of enriching the already rich. But the "arc of the moral universe is long", and tends to bend toward justice, as Martin Luther King asserted, and Trump Republican politicians are beginning to get their comeuppance for their abuses of power and obstruction of justice. Of course they should begin to act more responsibly -- but no! Instead, they dangerously double down.

Since our democracy has been corrupted by their trickle-down Big Lie and a corporate-friendly betrayal of the best interests of working people, Republicans are destined to lose power in the November 2020 elections for their insidious offenses. Their replacements MUST strive to be much more honest, and REALLY make America fairer again.

"Gee, I don't think we have to get all that radical, Tiffany!"

--- the underground mole

### Breaking News in September 2018

The Reality TV-like suspense is getting more dramatic by the moment. Who was the author that secretly wrote an Anonymous Op-Ed article in the New York Times in early September 2018 that savaged the Trump White House? Speculation ran wild. The author stated that a resistance has arisen within the administration because many officials are deeply concerned about the destabilizing and dangerous chaos that is taking place.

The Anonymous author wrote in this Op-Ed, *I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration*, that many officials realize Donald Trump's impulses are rooted in anti-democratic beliefs and convictions that trade tariffs and aggressive anti-immigrant policies are proper plans, and they consider Trump's priorities and his alarming conduct, fraught causes and risky behaviors to be dangerous to the country. So they have shot ideas down or taken things off Trump's desk, or otherwise tried to contain Trump's maniacally volcanic impulses.

Perplexed observers wonder if members of this inside resistance are patriots helping keep the American people safe, or if they are treacherous unelected rogues illegitimately asserting power. An increasingly unhinged Trump regarded them as traitors, and demanded that the Department of Justice get involved to ferret out the culprit who wrote the Op-Ed article. He clearly wanted to vent his vitriol by firing the traitor for his or her disloyalty to him personally, and he has purged dozens of people who are critical of his actions from his regime.

Insightful Opinion Columnist Thomas Friedman made incisive observations in his article, *'Anonymous' Is Hiding in Plain Sight*. Friedman indicated that the anonymous members of the resistance within the Trump administration are persons who are trying to save our country from too severe a degree of catastrophe and chaos. Curiously, the sentiments expressed by the mysterious Op-Ed author implicate each and every one of the large group of people who have helped Republicans usurp and abuse power. This includes members of a big "G.O.P. crowd who accepted the devil's bargain."

Those in this resistance are not progressive renegades working against the Republican agenda. In fact, the Op-Ed writer extolled the orthodox virtues of deregulation and tax breaks and a military build-up. They seem to be

Movement Conservatives who are establishment-like in their scheming, but more honest in seeing the dangers posed by having a leader who is a lying, cheating, manipulative, unprincipled, narcissistic, mercurial demagogue.

Dozens of officials distanced themselves from any involvement in writing the Op-Ed, or of participating in resistance activities, because they fear the wrath of the Supreme Leader, whose highest value is loyalty to him. Vice-President Mike Pence readily declared he would take a lie detector test "in a heartbeat" to prove he has not betrayed his loyalty to his alpha male master, being an adoring sycophant, as he cravenly seems to be. And well should he be concerned, for the fireworks would be incendiary, should the Trumpster's suspicions be aroused about the person next in line to replace him in the presidency at any time, as whispers about removing him from office in accordance with the provisions of the 25th Amendment reverberated in the background.

The threat to the Trump presidency was real as evidence accumulated that Trump was becoming more unfit to faithfully fulfill the duties of the job. The 25th Amendment stipulates, "Whenever the Vice President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive departments or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President."

In his best-selling book *FEAR: Trump in the White House*, the highly respected investigative reporter Bob Woodward wrote about the nature of the resistance against Trump from within by various staff members in the administration. One of Woodward's mentors once told him, "The truth emerges". And so it does, but it often takes time for the full story to come to light. However, one thing is sure, the truth is NOT the friend of duplicitous people like untrustworthy Trump and his Republican loyalists. Trump's war on truth is falling flatter than a pancake, from the perspective of those who choose to see clearly. And his mad impulsivity was exposed with the provocative resignation letter by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in late 2018 that shook the world.

A prolific award-winning author named Richard North Patterson wrote a succinctly vituperative summary of the Crazytown condition of the Trump administration in his scathing 2018 article, *With This Cast of Characters, No Wonder Trump's White House Is a Toxic Mess*. He observes, "Those surrounding Trump aren't real to him -- they are disposable props in the malign psychodrama of a man without knowledge; judgment; decency; empathy; ethics; respect for law; regard for institutions; interest in governance; tolerance for dissent; or loyalty to country or office." Wow, that's acerbic! But, in truth, the summary judgment is justified.

Remember Mark Twain's observation in 1901, during the Philippine-American War in which revolutionaries in the Philippines fought for independence: "It would be an entirely different question if the country's life was in danger, its existence at stake, then -- that is one kind of patriotism -- we would all come forward and stand by the flag, and stop thinking about whether the nation was right or wrong; but when there is no question that the nation is in any way in danger ... then it may be that on the question of politics the nation is divided, half patriots and half traitors, and no man can tell which from which."

The African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass once made the nature of power dynamics explicitly clear by declaring, "Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will." We must make proper demands. Let's demand that an end be put to the widespread wrongdoing that's going on right now!

With these ideas as prelude and context, and as rationale for incisive evaluations of American leaders, read on.

### Understanding Movement Conservatism

The Democratic Party is a coalition of interest groups that share some views and also have many differences of opinions, and Democratic politicians tend to succeed by making compromises and finding acceptable solutions to the problems and challenges experienced by the citizens they represent. Republican politicians, in contrast, have for decades been part of a more monolithic structure called "movement conservatism" that has a rigid ideology advocating tax cuts for the rich above all other priorities. Other aspects of this monolithic structure include a captive media outlet like Fox News that pushes the party line almost all the time and promotes

alternate facts, deceptive talking points, emotion-exploiting spin and alternate realities that are at odds with truth, or balanced perspective or fair-minded understandings.

This monolithic structure is lavishly supported by a small number of very wealthy people who reward loyalty by politicians who promote their causes. Nearly all Republicans in Congress today are "apparatchiks" with no principle higher than party loyalty and remaining committed to corrupt abuses of influence. Loyalty like this to chaos-generating Trump and unfolding revelations of his administration's wrongdoing is proving to be calamitous to the people, as dissatisfaction grows with their power-abusing ways and law-violating propensities.

Movement Conservatism has been surprisingly successful in gaining excessively domineering power and control in American society by its unrelenting focus on this overarching goal of giving dominating insider influence to the highest income earners and the wealthiest people, who invest hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions to scheming politicians to gain hundreds of billions in tax breaks. This success has been realized by using a litany of corrupt, power abusing and anti-democratic methods. The most significant of these has been promoting Big Lie propaganda that purportedly proves that lower taxes on rich people and giant corporations are the best way to create jobs, stimulate economic growth and achieve greater good goals.

This trickle down ideology basically claims that everyone will do better when rich people pay less tax. Of course, the tautological truth is that everyone will do better when everyone actually does better. The benefits of economic activities and resource exploitation and worker productivity should be much more widely shared, rather than being allowed to be excessively monopolized by capitalist elites. While Movement Conservatives disingenuously claim to care mainly about the best interests of constituents they represent, in reality they are betraying them by making commitments to a far-right agenda of debt-financed tax cuts that heavily favor the well-to-do while imposing austerity measures on the masses. This betrayal contributes to creating a society where inequality of opportunity and wealth are spiking, and economic insecurity is becoming more widespread.

Movement Conservatism drives a divisive wedge between American citizens by promoting an extreme ideological framework that includes a whole constellation of Strict Father values, and it undermines opposing Nurturing Parent values of showing empathetic concern for people and protecting them from harms and abuses of power by big corporations and governments. This perspective is evaluated in greater detail in the Original Earth Manifesto in 2004 (Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto), which concludes with the understanding: "These family morality worldviews cannot be judged definitively 'right' or 'wrong', according to the perceptive linguist George Lakoff. A main difference is that the highest goal of conservatives is to achieve and perpetuate their own ends of exerting dominating control, regardless of whether the means are fair. Therefore, conservatives are much more willing to have people suffer harm to achieve their goal of greedily usurping and abusing power."

Now, in the age of immoral, deceitful and emotion manipulating Trumpism, a shrewd demagogue has seized power and is engaging in dictator-like abuses of power. It Can't Happen Here? "Like hell it can't!"

#### Concluding Observations about Legitimacy and the Supreme Court

Progressive-minded people are getting tired of losing out to reactionary corruption-enabling "conservatives", so tinderbox political conditions are developing. The majority of Americans is getting tired of seeing Republicans lie and cheat to gain and usurp power, and threaten and bully and blatantly abuse authority. They are tired of realizing how the greater good is being sacrificed for partisan advantage and special privilege for the few, at the expense of the many. They are exasperated at women -- and Blacks and Latinos -- being deprived of fair representation. They are tired of having Republicans mortgage the future by engaging in fraudulently borrowing trillions of dollars to give most of it to the richest 1%. They are angered by the Republican war on egalitarian policies and sensible precautionary principles and protections of the natural world, which serves providentially as a foundation for human prosperity, health and well-being and the diversity of life on Earth.

Indelible in the minds of progressives is the gloating laughter of triumphant Republicans on account of the remarkable success of their abuses of power, which they perpetuated as they took one more treacherous step into infamy by ramming through the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh onto a lifetime position on the Supreme Court, where his record shows he will most often side with the "Roberts Five" that has made dozens of

extremely partisan decisions in favor of the Republican agenda. Three decisions stand out that have enabled this corruption of American politics by giving domineering influence to wealthy people and giant corporations -- and all were made by a narrow 5-4 majority of partisan Republicans. First was the 2010 *Citizen's United* ruling that has allowed huge quantities of corrupting money to help Republican politicians win elections -- and to allow lobbyists to determine most of our national policies and priorities. The second was the 2013 shredding of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which has allowed legislatures in states dominated by Republican majorities to pass many new laws restricting voting by constituents likely to vote against Republicans because they so exclusively represent the rich and powerful. And third was the ruling that gives the green light to state legislatures to continue creating extreme gerrymanders of congressional districts to deprive millions of fair representation.

Republicans are winning Pyrrhic victories over the common good, and in this war that they are waging for the dominance of male privilege over female dignity, the optics look exceptionally bad. First, it was the far right Judge Clarence Thomas against Professor Anita Hill. Then, it was the partisan Republican Brett Kavanaugh against Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford. In the dark foreground is adulterer and sexual assaulter Donald Trump, who brazenly denies credible allegations made against him by porn star Stormy Daniels and almost two dozen other women who have courageously spoken out against the most notorious liar in American political history.

The Brett Kavanaugh hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee contained testimony that should have disqualified him for consideration of being confirmed to the Supreme Court. "That testimony didn't come from Dr. Christine Blasey Ford. It came from Kavanaugh. Because his statements didn't just show a man who was emotional and angry. They showed a man who was completely embedded into a machine whose central purpose was attacking Democrats and creating a false narrative of conspiracy to fuel partisan rancor." Kavanaugh's temperament was revealed to be belligerent and disrespectful toward U.S. Senators who are Democrats and more liberal minded. This reactive character flaw threw a dark shadow on the probability he will be fair-minded, independent and capable of making judgments and rulings that are not politically partisan.

The legitimacy of the Supreme Court as an independent judicial institution took a hit when Mitch McConnell refused to allow President Obama to fill a vacant seat on the high court for almost a year, and then used the "nuclear option" to reduce the requirement for confirmation of Supreme Court Justices from 60 to 51 of the 100 U.S. Senators. Now the Court's legitimacy has been damaged by Republicans with the Kavanaugh power play. Not only did Kavanaugh demonstrate he is highly partisan, and has a hostile bias against liberals and Democrats, but he also has expressed the belief that the Court should show deference to a Republican president, who he will probably try to help protect from accountability, criminal liability and impeachable offenses.

Conservative political columnist Jennifer Rubin wrote incisively, "I want to focus on what may be the most significant issue -- whether Kavanaugh's 'big reveal' that he is an angry partisan who thinks Democrats conspired to get him -- now disqualifies him to sit on any court, let alone the Supreme Court." ... "The 'politicization' of the court, as many call it, didn't start with Kavanaugh. However, before the parties were entirely polarized and the filibuster destroyed, there was some requirement to reach bipartisan consensus on nominees. The judiciary's role in vital, hot-button issues has increased, making Supreme Court seats precious, but the Senate used to act as a brake, ensuring that qualified and temperamentally fit people were confirmed. Then the GOP became an extreme right party that radically eschewed long-held principles such as truth, humility, decorum and respect. Republicans radicalized, and with no filibuster to sift out the political operatives from the judges, we get Kavanaugh's nomination." Worse still, the illegitimate administration has stacked federal courts with almost 200 judges, many of them poorly qualified, hard right and ideologically biased toward the hegemony of Movement Conservatism over the people. Much culpability belongs to the self-described "Grim Reaper", Mitch McConnell.

Stop the sham scam, vote Mitch McConnell out of office, impeach Brett Kavanaugh, and appoint Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

July 1, 2020





## In the Firmament, Far Above the Twittering Trenches

First version July 2018, latest revision January 24, 2023

### Breaking News: *It Is Happening Here*

Attention here and now! The following poignant perspectives are not just philosophical words, but important and consequential ideas and understandings. The ruling class, in order to defend national policies and priorities that increase inequalities and make social injustices worse, relentlessly strives to impose increasingly repressive and harsh measures on the people, and to see that this rude and rash imposition will be enforced by right-wing politicians and stronger police and military forces. This is not good for you and me, and it is drastically detrimental to domestic tranquility, peaceable coexistence and the overall well-being of the American people. And government oppression is treacherous to our hopes to enjoy our liberties and individual pursuits of happiness.

The main arenas where Republicans want to spend much more money is on the military, weapons and preparations for war, and on police forces, prisons, deportation forces and detention facilities. So, *It Can Happen Here!* And we are right in the middle of a maelstrom of its actually happening. Let's sharpen our focus.

"James Mattis, the esteemed Marine general who resigned as secretary of defense in December 2018 to protest Donald Trump's Syria policy, has, ever since, kept studiously silent about Trump's performance as president. But he has now broken his silence, writing an extraordinary broadside in which he denounces the president for dividing the nation, and accuses him of ordering the U.S. military to violate the constitutional rights of American citizens." So writes Jeffrey Goldberg in his article *James Mattis Denounces President Trump, Describes Him as a Threat to the Constitution*. "In an extraordinary condemnation, the former defense secretary backs protesters and says the president is trying to turn Americans against one another."

"I have watched this week's unfolding events, angry and appalled," Mattis wrote. "The words 'Equal Justice Under Law' are carved in the pediment of the United States Supreme Court. This is precisely what protesters are rightly demanding. It is a wholesome and unifying demand -- one that all of us should be able to get behind. We must not be distracted by a small number of lawbreakers. The protests are defined by tens of thousands of people of conscience who are insisting that we live up to our values -- our values as people and our values as a nation." ... "We must reject and hold accountable those in office who would make a mockery of our Constitution."

Mattis excoriated Trump for setting Americans against one another. "Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people -- does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide us," Mattis wrote in Dec. 2018. "We are witnessing the consequences of three years of this deliberate effort. We are witnessing the consequences of three years without mature leadership. We can unite without him, drawing on the strengths inherent in our civil society. This will not be easy, as the past few days have shown, but we owe it to our fellow citizens; to past generations that bled to defend our promise; and to our children."

He goes on to contrast the American ethos of unity with Nazi ideology. "Instructions given by the military departments to our troops before the Normandy invasion reminded soldiers that 'The Nazi slogan for destroying us ... was 'Divide and Conquer.' Our American answer is 'In Union there is Strength.'" He concluded, "We must summon that unity to surmount this crisis -- confident that we are better than our politics."



Consider closely the words Franklin Roosevelt spoke in January 1941 in his Four Freedoms speech. Talking about military expenditures just before the United States entered World War II, FDR declared that the American people would need to pay more money in taxes. "In my Budget Message, I will recommend that a greater portion of this great defense program be paid for from taxation than we are paying for today. No person should try, or be allowed, to get rich out of the program; and the principle of tax payments in accordance with ability to pay should be constantly before our eyes to guide our legislation."

In stunning contrast, at a time when military spending is at the highest ever in the U.S. -- and increasing -- Republican politicians cunningly rammed through into law a Tax Cut plan in December 2017 that authorized \$1.5 trillion to be borrowed over the next 10 years. The devil is in the details: the law gave most of the benefits of this public debt-burdening swindle to the top 1%. This is a diabolical scam because, in effect, it bribed the public with relative crumbs to undermine opposition, giving almost everyone a small fraction of the spoils of this fiscally irresponsible largess. But it did so to deliver the lion's share of this scheme to the already rich.

Trump is always obsessed with getting "a win" for himself, but perversely chooses anti-progressive priorities like sabotaging the Affordable Care Act and undermining protections of the environment, and discriminating against minorities and immigrants and asylum seekers, even though such small-minded egomaniacal triumphs will have real harmful impacts on millions of people's health, well-being, personal security and psyches. See clearly: Pyrrhic victories like this negatively affect salubrious social cohesion and civility and decency in the USA, and they betray christian good neighborliness, and indeed the general welfare, domestic tranquility and our cherished liberties, along with potentials for all to pursue more authentic happiness, now and in posterity.

In the face of all these goings-on, House Republicans in July 2018 came up with what was, in effect, a cynical new slogan: "BETTER OFF NOW". Really? One observer on Daily Kos gave swift consideration to the Russia scandal and Trump tariffs, skyrocketing national debt, immigrant children being taken from their parents, weakened democracy, hyped-up divisive partisanship, Big Money abuses of power, demagogic propaganda and corporate despoliation, etc., etc. -- and remarked: "I could go on forever, but really ... HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA."

In fact, the majority of Americans will be Better Off only when the majority of Americans really are better off, not just when the rich are richer and white male hegemony over the masses marches toward a zenith.

There's something goin' on here, and what it is, is becoming ever more abundantly clear. Republicans represent the "grifter class" in our plutocratic republic. These are folks who are the main beneficiaries of the way the economic system is rigged. They work tirelessly to rig the system more advantageously for themselves. This is ultimately harmful to society because their success comes at the expense of everyone else, so this is a brazen overreach by the swindling grifter class. This overreach involves not just shredding the social safety net but also putting everybody's future at bigger risk, and mortgaging the country to achieve wrongheaded goals.

The changing demographics in the USA make it clear that this will likely be one of the last opportunities for arrogant white guys to exert a significant monopoly on power, and make hay while the sun glares reprehensibly on their deeply discriminatory abuses of power. A consequential day of reckoning is coming.

Hyper spending on the military is a racket that is good for excessive profit-making, and for the ability of the government to impose severely undemocratic authoritarian control over the masses, "the lazy bums." The people may protest, but that just confirms to those who rule that the protestors are not sufficiently patriotic in their refusals to loyally march lockstep with their every dictate.

The great philosopher Voltaire incisively expressed this opinion: "I always made one prayer to God, a very short one. Here it is: 'Oh, Lord, make our enemies quite ridiculous.' God granted it." Ha! Voltaire, remember, was not only famous for his wit, but also was an admirably outspoken advocate for expanded civil liberties -- despite the risk this placed him in, due to strict censorship laws in France at the time. He was a "satirical polemicist" who commendably made frequent use of his works to criticize intolerance and religious dogma and the oppressive French religious and governmental institutions of his day. Hear, hear!

What's Happening?

Win-win politics would be vastly better for everyone than the Republican's modern brand of win-lose politics and Trump's profit-obsessed triumph-at-any-cost con game. Most Americans are getting tired of this "bad actor" and his crowing about the brilliance of his "wins". After all, his MAGA agenda was fiscally irresponsible, environment damaging and socially wrongheaded, and he arrogantly defied laws, subpoenas and the Constitution.

Let our eyes of lament touch the souls of our fellow countrypersons. Let's give this desperate egomaniac his Academy Award for gilded demagoguery, and usher him and his crony co-conspirators off the stage!

The pandemic and economic recession in 2020, along with the widespread street protests against police brutality and systemic racial inequities that summer, revealed that we have a critical need for a smart and constructive remodeling -- "big structural change"! Yet what we got was a rash opportunistic teardown that sacrificed future well-being in favor of short-term economic recovery and profiteering. There was no evidence that our representatives would try to balance the federal budget by assessing eminently reasonable excess profits taxes, or an accumulated wealth tax, to rectify the extreme imbalances that are developing.

There is a long history of Excess Profits taxes in the U.S. These are assessments on any profit above a certain amount. Excess profits taxes are fiscal instruments that have predominantly been used in times of war to capture wartime profits that exceeded normal peacetime profits. They did this to raise revenues during the crisis, and prevent perverse incentives for manufacturers to engage in war profiteering and warmongering.

The U.S. has been morphing from having a largely propitious system of democratic capitalism to being driven by a dystopian authoritarian corporatism that is supported by Wall Street interests cheering on fiscal profligacy with money borrowed from the public treasury. Vested interests love this lavish benefit for businesses and investors. Our representatives are wrongly kicking the can down the road instead of being fiscally responsible, progressively fair in taxation, and willing to demonstrate reasonable concern for the future good.

In this emergency episode of extreme short-termism, disaster capitalists are grabbing all they can get, and what the renowned economist Joseph Schumpeter called the capitalist "gale of creative destruction" is attaining Category Five hurricane force. One instance of greed and unconscionable treachery was the Republican success in sneaking a tax loophole that gave an average \$1.6 million tax cut to 43,000 millionaires into the March 2020 CARES Act, a \$2.2 trillion pandemic financial aid package. Truly outrageous!

"Buoyed by their covert success of leveraging the pandemic for personal gain, Wall Street is at it again, calling for a payroll tax cut that would undermine Social Security and Medicare, and a capital gains tax cut that would mostly benefit the top 1%!"

Republicans are making fools of their blue-collar and poor supporters, and those in the white middle class. They are also making their supporters accomplices to a profound treachery against the common good by pushing extreme short-termism in fiscal, social, political and environmental policies. They continue to tell big lies about trickle-down economics, and abuse power by mortgaging the public good for the benefit of the excessively rich. Theodore Roosevelt spoke out passionately in favor of an Estate Tax, "increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate", so as to prevent the increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few, where it is invariably abused. This is good guidance for *We the People* to be assured that dastardly despots will be prevented in the future from illegitimately seizing power and abusing authority.

Recent elections have featured an unbelievable barrage of political propaganda, conflicting opinions, sneaky disinformation, deceitful attack ads and distortions about the desirability of a generations-long dominance of the Supreme Court by conservatives. The newly elected Democratic House majority in 2018 encountered stonewalling in its efforts to investigate Trump and his corrupt Cabinet members, who took advantage of the permissive Trump regime at the time to gloss over their conflicts of interest and abuses of authority. It is imperative for our Constitutional system to act as a check against corrupt activities in the executive branch. In all future election contests, I urge all voters to rightly vote for more moderate and progressive-minded representatives in Congress -- ones with significantly more honesty, integrity and moral character.

It is normal for a majority party to lose seats in Congress in midterm elections. This is because people are

generally not happy with the political party in power, and elections are one way to hold those in power accountable. But never in the history of our democratic republic has a regime abused its power so egregiously as the Trump administration. Republican politicians deserve to also have lost many seats in the Senate in 2018 - - and since then in 2020 and 2022 -- and should continue to be relegated to minority status for their egregious assaults against democratic fairness, inclusive egalitarian values, diversity, the rights of people in racial minorities, the reproductive and healthcare rights of women, the rights and dignity of gay people, and sensible protections of the environment.

We must wage hard-fought battles for fairer representation because domineering incumbent Republicans fight tooth and nail for their positions of power, and they will push their selfish agenda with the blaring help of gargantuan sums of system-corrupting campaign cash from the Kochtopus political machine and wealthy people whose Big Bucks finance an ugly and poisonous barrage of devious spin, lies, character assassinations and dirty tricks to achieve their anti-democratic goals. Supreme Court conservatives must stop being accomplices!

#### An Aside on the Vital Importance of a Non-Partisan Supreme Court

The political shenanigans are reprehensible that have given an excessively narrowly focused, backwards and rightward tilt to the Supreme Court. All Americans today rely on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and fair-minded rules of law to assure us of the current degree of freedom we enjoy in the USA. But freedom requires vigilance, and we need more honest lawmakers and real patriots to strongly support fairness in our society.

Republicans are gloating over their success in having altered the Supreme Court for a generation or two, thereby helping undermine fair decision-making. When Trump announced that Brett Kavanaugh was his Supreme Court nominee to replace Anthony Kennedy, upon his retirement, attention was suddenly focused on the implications of having a more politicized and excessively conservative Supreme Court, and one more lenient with regard to Donald Trump misusing presidential power. Not long after the announcement, concerns spiked that health care, reproductive rights, voting rights and the rights of workers would all be at risk if the Senate approved such a Republican partisan. "What we know of D.C. Circuit Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh's judicial record is troubling. Kavanaugh has consistently ruled against environmental protections, struck down EPA protections under the Clean Air Act, opposed efforts to fight climate change, and stood against protections for clean water. Kavanaugh has also favored limiting the power of federal regulatory agencies and has argued for restricting the rights of people to access our court system."

A "breathtaking documentary" titled *Justice* premiered at Sundance in January 2023 to shed bright light on the illegitimacy of the process by which the "I like beer" judge managed to lie himself into a lifelong tenure making rulings against the best interest of the people. What's up, FBI?

A revealing barrage of 5-4 rulings was made at the end of the Supreme Court's Oct. 2017 to June 2018 session. A detailed analysis of decisions made confirmed that political conservatism has yielded negative outcomes for the majority of American people. Ever since the *Bush vs. Gore* ruling gave the presidency to George W. Bush instead of Al Gore, despite Gore having decisively won the popular vote, it could be seen that a partisan right-leaning majority on the court yields decisions that are, on the whole, contrary to the general welfare of the people, and antithetical to democracy, and subversive of honestly expansive guarantee of personal freedoms. This was again demonstrated at the end of the Supreme Court session that ended in June 2019 with their 5 to 4 decision to do nothing about extreme partisan gerrymandering, so it was clear that the conservative Justices do not care about fair representation, and in effect favor political extremism and polarization over unity.

We stand at a pivotal point in the history of our democratic republic, and with conservatives having succeeded in cementing a hard right hegemony on the Supreme Court, this check on abuses of power by the Executive Branch has somewhat become more like a rubber stamp of complicity. The political partisan Kavanaugh was chosen for the court because manipulative Big Money has corrupted our politics. Then after McConnell Republicans rammed through the rushed confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett while early voting was already underway in October 2020, this seemed like the last straw, because it will further prevent decisions that would help reform the anti-democratic and anti-progressive domination of our national decision-making by rich people and cash-flush giant

corporations and Christian nationalist religious fundamentalists.

The worst aspect of this situation is that corporate-friendly decisions by the Supreme Court are threatening the providential boon of natural ecosystem services with an ominous intensification of assaults. "Conservative" Justices misguidedly favor giving a green light to giant corporations and their prerogatives to pollute and foist huge amounts of externalized costs onto society. We need a more progressive court system, especially because MAGA Republicans are failing the majority of the people by imposing anti-egalitarian dictates on them. The arrogant Trump regime worked overtime to pander overly exclusively to its political base, which they are playing for fools by supercharging their emotions and hyping up their resentments while implementing policies that are contrary to their proven true best interests.

Additionally, with the Supreme Court likely at the time to decide cases that involved investigations into malfeasance by Donald Trump and members of his administration, Kavanaugh's extremely partisan role in obsessively investigating Bill Clinton's sexual improprieties in the 1990s is seen through the eyes of infamy. Kavanaugh even expressed an absurdly expansive view on presidential powers by questioning the high court's unanimous decision in the 1974 case *U.S. vs. Nixon*, which forced President Nixon to turn over the Watergate tapes to a federal district court.

All concerned citizens should demand that their Senators protect people's rights and oppose any Supreme Court nominee in the future that would support criminalizing abortion, rolling back health care, decimating civil rights, harming workers or damaging the environmental commons. Or undercutting rules of law that protect people from the predations and cost externalizing schemes of big corporate entities and banks and their lobbyists.

Those who know Brett Kavanaugh say it is difficult to vilify him personally. Hey, I trust that he may be a good guy. But the American people should demand a moderate tilt to the Supreme Court, not a rightward one. It is revealing that Kavanaugh's father was a lobbyist for the cosmetics industry who used money and connections to fend off demands for consumer protections and safer products -- and fought better transparency about ingredients in cosmetics. While this may have been real good for his well-heeled clients, and a boon for industry profits, it was inimical to the public health, especially of women, and it was subversive of the common good.

All the names on Trump's list for possible nominees to the Supreme Court had been provided by the arch-conservative Federalist Society. The implications of having a more rigidly conservative Supreme Court are frightening. What precedents will be overturned? First to go was federal protections for women's rights to have an abortion. What other civil rights and civil liberties are at stake? According to Wikipedia, Federalist Society members generally choose not to criticize Trump. *Politico* described the Society membership as "elite, conservative lawyers who have generally chosen to give Trump a pass on his breaches of long-cherished legal norms and traditions, in exchange for the gift of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch." That particular gift is proving damaging to *We the People* and our general welfare.

During the battle to get another extreme conservative on the Supreme Court in 2018, Brett Kavanaugh cunningly tried to evade questions focused on determining if he respects precedents like *Roe vs. Wade*, which gave a fair guarantee to all woman that they could get a safe and legal abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy. In photographs of the Supreme Court Justices, they all stare toward the camera, and conservatives among them seem to be disdaining the common law legal principle of *stare decisis*, the idea that a judge is bound by, or should give considerable respect to, decisions of earlier judges that render issues as "standing decided".

Recall that during the nomination approval processes by the Senate of Chief Justice John Roberts, and also of Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch, these judges proclaimed that they respect long-established precedents of fair-minded laws. Yet once they succeeded in gaining their prestigious lifelong tenures on the high court, they have overturned precedents on what can accurately be seen as politically partisan grounds. They have thus used deceit to gain lifelong positions of power, and are using this power to betray the American people by siding with religious zealots and corporate interests instead of fairly representing the best interests of the people, especially in rulings like *Citizens United* that are undermining our democracy by allowing Big Money to continue to corrupt our government. I enthusiastically encourage people to listen to Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's

extraordinary remarks about the narrow decisions made by the "Roberts Five", which he gave in the opening proceedings of the Senate Judiciary Committee's confirmation hearings for Brett Kavanaugh on Sept. 4, 2018.

Sensationally, 83 ethics complaints had been filed against Brett Kavanaugh, yet he was not held to account. Many of the complaints allege he made false statements under oath during hearings on his nominations to the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in 2004 and 2006, and to the U.S. Supreme Court.

These serious allegations were made by lawyers, doctors, professors and concerned citizens. But Kavanaugh got off the hook. First, a judicial council in Denver dismissed all 83 misconduct complaints in December 2018, citing a lack of jurisdiction. This council was led by Judge Timothy Tymkovich, a man with real conflicted interests because he was on Trump's list of potential conservatives to possibly be appointed to the Supreme Court. Then in August 2019, a committee of federal judges dismissed all the complaints again, this time because Supreme Court justices are not subject to the judiciary's ethics review process. These are convenient technicalities for Kavanaugh, but the issue should not just fall by the wayside. The only body that can discipline him now is Congress, and it should rightly look into the facts. Scandalous accusations are also now being made into the FBI's failure to look into allegations about Kavanaugh's sexual misconduct towards several women.

### Opening a Modern Pandora's Box of Inequities

Ideas as old as the hills reverberate through the arcane interstices of my mind, buffeted by conceptions as young and vibrant as a gusty wind that heralds the coming of a tempestuous storm. Charles Ferguson's ideas come to mind from his book *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. The images evoked by this in-your-face title might make one think that this is probably a book chock full of suspiciously partisan invective and conspiracy theories, and maybe even a heavy dose of "liberal pabulum." But no! It turns out to be a fascinatingly insightful perspective.

In a startling contrast to the sensible trust-busting era led by President Theodore Roosevelt in the early 1900s, corporatocratic proponents of laissez-faire ideologies gained traction when Ronald Reagan's came into office. Charles Ferguson relates this story in *Predator Nation*: "The era of deregulation pioneered by the Reagan and Clinton administrations removed virtually all restrictions on trading, mergers and industry consolidation; the few remaining restrictions were then quickly stripped away by the Bush administration, along with any threat of sanctions from either criminal prosecution or civil suits to recoup illicit gains." ... "And, in fact, bad things started to happen almost immediately. Beginning in the 1980s, the United States began to experience financial crises and scandals in a scale not seen since the 1920s. But deregulation continued, culminating in major laws passed in 1999 and 2000. Once completely freed, the bankers very quickly ran their institutions off the cliff, taking much of the global economy with them. Not only did they create and sell a huge amount of junk, but they turned the financial system into a gigantic casino, one in which they played mainly with other people's money."

"When Ronald Reagan became president, tax cuts and deregulation were the order of the day. Even from the start, though, there was a big element of dishonesty in Reagan's strategy. He cut taxes, but not government spending, so America's economic recovery came in part from unsustainable deficits. Administration officials claimed that tax cuts would pay for themselves, which they knew was a lie. And what they called 'deregulation' was often simply political corruption. Lobbyists and industry executives were appointed to run government agencies, and several industries sharply increased their spending on political donations, lobbying, and revolving door hiring. Nowhere was this clearer than in finance. It was in financial services that Ronald Reagan initiated America's descent into criminality, financial crisis, political corruption, inequality and decline." That is scandalous -- ludicrous lies, radically exacerbated inequalities and unscrupulously propagated harms!

"Criminality, financial crisis, political corruption, inequality and decline!" These words may sound like outrageous hyperbole, but when you read the actual details of the many financial scams perpetrated in the past 40 years, this characterization doesn't seem like an exaggeration at all. Charles Ferguson continues: "It was in large measure the financial sector's political activities that gave us deregulation, abdication of white-collar law enforcement, tax cuts for the wealthy, huge budget deficits, and other toxic policies. These are the aspects of our econopolitical system that have allowed the U.S. financial sector to become a rogue industry."

The financial sector began a period of astounding consolidation when sensible regulations like the Glass-Steagall Act were repealed. "The amorphous shark-like octopus of the oligopoly began a feeding frenzy. Every segment of the financial sector was affected, creating huge financial conglomerates. And the main source of this broader consolidation was not the organic growth of the successful; rather it was mergers."

The radical ramping up of deregulation efforts led directly to economic power becoming increasingly concentrated since 1980. This is true particularly in banking, energy, telecommunications, automobiles, agribusiness, retailing and the media. This trend has been the result of abuses of influence as corporate money has neutered antitrust policy and corrupted our political system, and even swayed the supposedly objective expert opinions of a minority of people -- but all too many -- in academic institutions. Such concentrated power undermines the power of *We the People*, and it contributes to the sadly increasing and politically dangerous extremes in income and wealth inequality -- and personal security! -- between the top 1% and the other 99%.

Rich people and top corporate managers together exert an unwarranted influence on our country by using wealth and solidarity of selfish purpose to wield political power that shelters themselves, their families, their personal assets and their businesses from competition, proper corporate governance, effective regulation, legal prosecution and taxes. This situation is unfair and will eventually prove to be disastrous for most people.

Beneath the intensely rancorous sound and fury of partisan strife, the nearly unassailable battlements of a political duopoly system monopolize our national decision-making. The actors in this duopoly stand resolute in dictating rules that establish a Great Bargain for rich people and a Bad Deal for everyone else. The overriding success of our representatives is astonishing when it comes to policies related to giving tax breaks that heavily favor wealthy people. Conservatives excessively succeed in preventing sensible common good reforms, reducing regulations, and facilitating an on-going consolidation of corporate power through mergers and acquisitions.

Perhaps this should be no surprise, because influence peddling is not only legal, but a fundamental facet of the way our political system operates in modern times. So, sadly, the Supreme Court, by a vote exclusively by partisan conservatives, might declare null and void the entire substance of these remarks. They continue to refuse to overturn the wrongly decided *Citizens United* ruling that has helped wealthy people corrupt our elections and pervert our national priorities and distort our decision-making. And they offensively overturned constitutional guarantees to pregnant women in June 2022, many of whom are being forced to deliver unwanted children as abortion bans have spread across a dozen states, and are malignantly expanding. They are in effect championing sexual abstinence as the preferred method of family planning. In this consequential deliberation, conservative judges keep foremost in mind their own narrow politically partisan biases and personal power.

Charles Ferguson has commendably created an evocative new exploration of what happened with the Watergate scandal in a thought-provoking film titled *Watergate: Or, How We Learned to Stop an Out-of-Control President*. This documentary debuted at the 2018 Telluride film festival. Watch it! -- and think about "Tricky Dick" Nixon and what should be done now as new crisis-provoking MAGA Republicans continue to abuse power. Understand the treacherous role played by former Attorney General Bill Barr in his disdaining of Congress and the American people, and in Trump evading accountability, obstructing justice and revealing his contempt for rules of law.

### The Fox Propaganda Machine

Trump spoke laudable words in his 2016 election victory speech, but they rang hollow in light of the scurrilous tactics he used to get elected. His words provided a momentary ray of hope that, perhaps, he really might try to act as a fair-minded president for all Americans and heal the country, but this hope sure didn't last long, for he set about soon thereafter to choose the most extreme Cabinet and federal agency officials ever.

How can the American people help ensure that common sense will prevail? The mainstream media and right-wing news outlets like Fox News have been complicit in creating a misinformed public. Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have become prominent influences in our elections, and they undesirably suffer from being dangerously unbalanced and simplistic. Too, they often serve to promote fake news and slanted points of view. Every faction has its own media now, where partisans can be "affirmed, not informed," as pollster Frank Luntz once put it. The outcome is that our great nation is being held together only "by the

thinnest of threads", and the USA seems to be devolving into being a conflict-torn Idiocracy.

Max Boot, in an article *The right-wing media's contempt for truth has never been more dangerous*, recommends that readers go to the homepage of Media Matters for America to see how "conservative" media continues to infect their followers with misinformation, increasing the dangers of spreading the coronavirus.

The intentional propagation of misinformation has contributed to this serious assault on fair representation of the best interests of the people. Part of the problem causing this state of affairs is that the FCC Fairness Doctrine for media that was in effect from 1949 to 1987 was eliminated, facilitating the rise of unbalanced and seriously skewed alt-right media. The Fairness Doctrine was a federal policy in the U.S. that required television and radio broadcasters to present contrasting viewpoints on controversial issues of public interest and importance -- and to do so in a manner that was balanced, honest and equitable. The ending of this Fairness Doctrine was a contributing factor to the increase in divisive party polarization in the United States.

It is proving to be exceedingly difficult for social media to control devious misinformation -- or to want to, because platforms like Facebook are making huge profits off the neglect. Twitter, in fact, finally first hid from view a Trump tweet during violent nighttime looting after the killing of George Floyd, on the ground that the tweet was "glorifying violence". This was the first time Twitter had taken such action against a political leader. The divisive and inflammatory tweet was sent out as Minneapolis was engulfed in riots. Trump described protesters as "THUGS", and attacked the city's "very weak Radical Left" mayor, and declared that when "the looting starts, the shooting starts." Facebook, for its part, is facing harsh criticism and even internal headwinds because its CEO Mark Zuckerberg has pandered to Trump and demonstrates an unwillingness to take strong steps to make the Internet a more positive force in society.

Trevor Noah gave brilliant insights into how the media needs to improve its performance in saving our nation on a November 2017 *Daily Show* segment, *Adapting to Donald Trump's Lies*. Watch it right now for some good laughs and illuminated understanding of Trump's often juvenile thought processes.

It is human nature for people to psychologically identify with those within their 'tribal' in-groups, and to regard those in out-groups with suspicion or hostility. Right-wing politicians exploit the out-group status of immigrants and related anti-immigrant sentiments to gain power.

Ever since Trump took the down escalator into contention for the presidency in June 2015, he used divisive tactics and offensive rhetoric to gain media attention. His scandalous behaviors have been "normalized" by media outlets that are more interested in ratings and profits than in important big issues and honestly comprehensive Big Picture assessments of these issues. Trump is now continuing to try to claw his way back into power in 2023, and attention fatigue has set in somewhat. But dangers lurk, and many people in the mainstream media and conservatives on social media and white supremacists are attempting to normalize MAGA Trumpism and engage in historical revisionism, most consequentially about the January 6th insurrectionary riot.

We must recognize how essential a free and independent media is in our democracy. Trump is trying to destroy that freedom and independence by using seven of the principal unprincipled techniques that despots have employed throughout history to undermine media independence. Robert Reich provides this list::

1. Berate the media. Trump called two-dozen TV news anchors and executives to the Trump Tower soon after he was elected in 2016, to chew them out about their reporting during the election. This included Lester Holt, Charlie Rose, George Stephanopoulos and Wolf Blitzer.
2. Blacklist media that criticize them. Trump favors Fox News, and hates CNN and MSNBC. He maintained a blacklist of news outlets to which he refused to grant press credentials during his time in office.
3. Turn the public against the media. Trump refers to journalists as "dishonest," "disgusting" and "scum."
4. Threaten the media. Candidate Trump said he'd "open up our libel laws, so when they write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money." And sure enough, he repeatedly abused the judicial system with more than 60 frivolous lawsuits in pushing his Big Lie about election fraud after losing the 2020 election.

5. Block media access. Trump prefers rally events to news conferences, and often blocks the media from traveling with him, or knowing whom he's meeting with, or what is said in secretive meetings like the instantly infamous one with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki.

6. Establish alternative media. Trump sends emotion-manipulating narratives through the unfairly unbalanced Fox News and hard-right talk radio show hosts and "alt-right" mediums like Breitbart News, and through his Orwellian-named Truth Social, in which he is trying to get his "megaphone" back after being banned from Facebook and Twitter for repeatedly violating their policies.

7. Bypass the media and communicate with the public directly. Trump tweeted incessantly, until he was denied access to the Twitter platform for having repeatedly violated its rules. The devious demagogue tortuously twists the truth, and tells incredible numbers of falsehoods and outright lies.

In 1980, there were thousands of independent media outlets in the United States, but today, there are only six multi-national global media mega corporations in control of more than 90% of the content that Americans see on TV, hear on the radio, watch at the movies, and read in books, magazines and newspapers. These corporate entities are Time Warner, VIACOM, CBS, the Walt Disney Company, News Corp and General Electric. All of them are colossal businesses, and together they own television and radio broadcast networks, cable and satellite channels, financial news publications, movie studios, sports entertainment, magazines, book publishers, the major entertainment theme parks, integrated telecommunications and communications satellites, video games software, electronic media, record labels and the music industry.

Almost everything you believe, more or less, is influenced by the establishment of media moguls who run these corporations. The CEOs of these giant companies "play golf together. They plot and scheme together. They are members of the same clubs and organizations." And they decide what the American people "should believe and what attitudes they should have about everything".

The best way to counter propaganda is to understand the methods and techniques being used to sway public opinion. George Orwell explained some of the many shrewd tactics and powerful techniques that are used to "catapult the propaganda", as George W. Bush put it. They can be read online to understand this important influence on our worldviews and national decision-making. See Orwell's *A citizen's guide to understanding corporate media propaganda techniques*. These techniques are being used on the American public, and on people around the world, by corporate mainstream media and the "alt-right" fringe media, and by many political influencers on social media. "Having familiarized yourself with these techniques," Orwell wrote, "you will be able to spot them as they are being deployed against you."

Trump's time in office ended badly, especially for democratic fairness and Blacks and white working class people who were deceived into supporting Trump, thinking he would "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C. Instead, he opened the floodgates to a retrogressive cadre of swindlers, operatives and ideologues. As a candidate Trump claimed he would end corruption, but look at what happened. A narrowly focused electorate, deceived by Machiavellian intrigue, voted to keep almost all the corrupt alligators in the swamp in Congress, and Trump filled his Cabinet with loyalists who represented a perpetuation of the policies that have hurt and angered the populace. And his policies were almost exclusively oriented around his own self-interest, not the common good.

Ralph Peters, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who frequently appeared as a strategic analyst on Fox News until he resigned in March 2018, said he felt compelled to explain why he chose to leave Fox News. "Four decades ago, I took an oath as a newly commissioned officer. I swore to 'support and defend the Constitution,' and that oath did not expire when I took off my uniform. Today, I feel that Fox News is assaulting our constitutional order and the rule of law, while fostering corrosive and unjustified paranoia among viewers. Over my decade with Fox, I long was proud of the association. Now I am ashamed. In my view, Fox has degenerated from providing a legitimate and much-needed outlet for conservative voices to a mere propaganda machine for a destructive and ethically ruinous administration. When prime-time hosts -- who have never served our country in any capacity -- dismiss facts and empirical reality to launch profoundly dishonest assaults on the FBI, the Justice Department, the courts, the intelligence community (in which I served) and, not least, a model public



servant and genuine war hero such as Robert Mueller — all the while scaremongering with lurid warnings of "deep-state" machinations — I cannot be part of the same organization, even at a remove. To me, Fox News is now wittingly harming our system of government for profit."

Peters incisively continued: "As a Russia analyst for many years, it also has appalled me that hosts who made their reputations as super-patriots and who, justifiably, savaged President Obama for his duplicitous folly with Putin, now advance Putin's agenda by making light of Russian penetration of our elections and the Trump campaign. Despite increasingly pathetic denials, it turns out that the 'nothing-burger' has been covered with Russian dressing all along. And by the way: As an intelligence professional, I can tell you that the Steele dossier rings true -- that's how the Russians do things. The result is that we have an American president who is terrified of his counterpart in Moscow."

Another strategy Republicans favor is to use wedge issues to rile up people's emotions in a classic bait-and-switch scheme of pathetic proportions. The Trump base is being sold a pathologically deceptive bill of goods by apologists who say Trump kept his promises. But his loudest promise was to build a huge wall between the U.S. and Mexico -- and force Mexico to pay for it. He continually exploited this divisive and distracting plan, even though American taxpayers had to pay billions of dollars for portions of the wall that were built. Meanwhile, with all the sound-and-fury of partisans up at arms over this issue, Trump treacherously pushed through large debt-financed Tax Cuts that mainly benefitted the wealthy, and he pushed an agenda that sacrificed the environmental commons to further enrich the rich. He also tried to cut spending on social safety net programs and other things that are hallmarks of a civilized society, while building up the military and police forces and deportation forces, and he lied through his teeth about making people safer. And he broadly undermined the economic prospects and collective bargaining rights of working people.

Roman hands and Russian fingers -- and lying eyes -- don't inspire confidence in the righteousness of these schemes, which are maniacally targeted to usurp power and get big bucks. These wanton abuses of authority and despotic control, and righteous zealotry, discriminate against the majority of Americans, especially including women and people of color. For this indulgent skullduggery and these base qualities, they deserve condemnation of those who are being fooled and taken advantage of. Powerful people who heartlessly exploit vulnerable people through a wide variety of scams, swindles and public health failures are displaying a deep ethical rot.

To really see what is going on, "Watch what they do, not what they say." Trump claimed he wanted to Make America Great Again, but a close analysis of his actions reveals that what he really meant was to Make America More Favorable to the Few, and to give white males more power at the expense of everyone else. To accomplish this goal, Republicans stacked federal courts and the Supreme Court with partisan conservatives. And under cover of the support they receive, they rigged the tax structure to be more regressive and stimulated economic activities through a debt-financed mortgaging of the future, and gave undemocratic corporations more power to exploit workers, deplete natural resources and externalize costs onto society. They imposed tariffs, waged trade wars, and scapegoated Latinos, Muslims, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They deceived people using misinformation and repetitiously told lies, and used inflammatory rhetoric, and exploited hot button wedge issues to stay in power. And they demonize liberals, hoping to resume holding fervent emotion-manipulating Nazi-like political rallies, and condone police misconduct, and incite gun owners to fear, suspicion and vigilantism. While Trump was in office he strengthened ties with undemocratic strong man autocrats abroad while weakening ties with democratic allies. It was treachery for Trump to fight with our allies and cozy up to authority-abusing foes of democracy like Putin in Russia, Kim Jong Un in North Korea, Erdogan in Turkey, Modi in India and Duterte in Philippines. All of this is wrongheaded!

#### The Role of Deregulation in Enabling Malfeasance

The reason Republicans promote deregulatory propaganda so fervently, and with such lavish financial backing, is to make it easier for corporate polluters and corrupt con men to succeed, along with those who take advantage of expanded opportunities to engage in benefitting from conflicts of interest. They ignore and deny how much harm they engender. These rogues notably include Trump family members and persons in his Cabinet who peddled influence to operatives that used Big Money, Dark Money and political corruption enabled by the

*Citizens United* ruling.

Republicans demonstrate an unbalanced zeal for deregulation, as Trump did in appointments made to lead the EPA. They do so to give big benefits to a relative few by artificially inflating profits of fossil fuel and mining companies and chemical conglomerates, despite harms such actions do to large numbers of powerless people. This causes a tragic array of heedless Tragedy of the Commons outcomes. It is wrong to allow big companies to foist terrible costs onto vulnerable people in the form of respiratory ailments or exposure to toxic chemicals, or to fail to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases that are having detrimental impacts on billions of people, and will cost trillions of dollars. Short-term expediencies are inimically imprudent for the future.

The remarkable and great thing about scientific understandings is that they are progressively adaptive, always improving through the investigatory mechanisms of the scientific method. The latest best understandings are true whether or not deniers with self-serving interests believe them. When pathological deceivers and greedy Merchants of Doubt have big vested interests in persistently questioning whether there are harmful and consequential cumulative greenhouse effects on climatic conditions due to about 100 million tons of greenhouse gases being spewed into the atmosphere every day, this effort to deceive people for private profit does not alter even one iota the science of physics and our unfolding knowledge about how greenhouse gas emissions are causing worsening impacts on people worldwide, and negative impacts on most species of life on Earth. When they shift strategies to cast shade on solutions, they obstruct efforts to help solve the problems.

One thing the Trump administration was good at was trying to roll back protections of the environment. Fortunately, though it is true that Trump's first EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt tried to weaken or get rid of more than 40 rules, he wasn't very successful due to strong challenges in courts to many of his attempted rollbacks. "If all these deregulations actually came to pass, we'd see astounding effects on public health: an additional 80,000 deaths and well over a million cases of respiratory illness over the next decade. And that's an 'extremely conservative' estimate, according to Harvard professors who tabulated the numbers in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*." (This was before the pandemic.)

In a notable victory for environmental protections, after Scott Pruitt declared his intention in June 2017 to reverse methane emission limits placed on the oil and gas industry in 2016, the Environmental Defense Fund and partners filed a motion challenging this action. Courts subsequently ruled that the EPA could not suspend the methane emissions rules for new oil and gas wells. They cited Pruitt's decision as "unreasonable, arbitrary and capricious", and the D.C. Court of Appeals overwhelmingly upheld that decision.

There are unfortunately all too many radically irresponsible ideological extremists who are eager to continue Trump's environment-assaulting agenda and weaken environmental protections and deny the reality of climate change, and to undermine the very purposes for which the Environmental Protection Agency was established. Their eagerness stems from their narrow self-interest in power and profits, and comes at the expense of having polluters spew toxic wastes into the air and streams. It is folly to allow profit-maximizing corporations to foist the terrible costs of their activities onto countless numbers of people right now -- and many more in the future.

In the summer of 2020, the Trump cabal used the pretext of the pandemic to roll back climate rules and pollution regulations, and to speed the opening of public lands to industry, and to weaken laws like the Endangered Species Act. A cynic might conclude that the main expertise needed to be employed in Trump's administration was the ability to succeed in implementing a deregulated, private profit maximizing, inequitable and insidiously anti-environmental agenda, and to help impose it on the masses. And the main character quality desired was unquestioning loyalty to Donald Trump, even when it involved blatantly betraying the greater good.

Just after July 4, 2018, Scott Pruitt was forced out of his job as EPA chief. That was a positive step. It was high time that this worst-ever Cabinet member was removed from power. Unfortunately, Pruitt was replaced by a climate change denier and coal industry shill, and most of Trump's Cabinet secretaries were guilty of multiple misdeeds, from extravagant and excessive use of taxpayer dollars to cronyism and nepotism, to using their position to increase their personal wealth. At the time, the question arose, "What are Republicans in Congress doing about this? Why, investigating Hillary Clinton, of course!"

Richard Painter, the chief ethics lawyer under President George W. Bush, declared, "Goodbye Scott Pruitt, the worst Administrator in EPA history and perhaps the worst cabinet member ever. Fake science, fake ethics and fake religion (complete with a cultish theology of planet destruction) all rolled into one." The worst scandal of the Pruitt era was not the numerous brazen instances of unethical personal corruption -- "not the millions spent on personal security or the thousands spent on a soundproof phone booth. No, the enduring scar left by Scott Pruitt is the political dismantling of the EPA itself. In year one, he rolled back regulations protecting clean water. He scrubbed away references to climate change and stopped collecting data on methane emissions. He blocked regulations designed to cut emissions from cars and power plants."

"Making America Great Again did not, to him or to the Trumps, extend to protecting the land, the waters, the oceans, the forests, the wildlife, the air we breathe or the stability of climatic conditions on Earth."

Upon his resignation, Scott Pruitt sent a cravenly flattering letter to Trump, stating: "It is extremely difficult for me to cease serving you in this role, first because I count it a blessing to be serving you in any capacity, but also because of the transformative work that is occurring." Really?! In reaction to this bizarre utterance, Mark Sumner incisively observed, "That transformative work includes allowing coal mines to dump waste into streams and rivers, relieving oil and gas companies of the pesky business of letting anyone know when they leak huge plumes of methane into the air, allowing factory farms to flood streams with animal waste without even having to report on water or air quality. All of which is *truly* transformative for people who live downwind or downstream. And there are the pesticides that Pruitt saved from cruel regulation, the power plants now free to produce more acid rain and bring the blessing of holy mercury to the nation's diet. Yea, verily, these are blessings which are expected to leave 88,000 Americans transformed to the state of holy deadness over the next decade, and leave millions more with the gift of asthma or nerve damage."

Pruitt continued in his obsequious letter, "My desire in service to you has always been to bless you as you make important decisions for the American people. I believe you are serving as president today because of God's providence. I believe the same providence brought me into your service." Wow! Mark Sumner scoffed: "Scott Pruitt didn't just spend millions on first-class travel to spread the gospel of how to turn the planet into a soot-stained outhouse, it was a holy calling. That wasn't a private army he built, it was soldiers of the lord-what-a-load." ... "If you were wondering why Pruitt lasted so long in a White House where the average tsetse fly exceeds the lifespan of a cabinet officer, take a look at that note again. That's some serious shiny-knees knob polishing. It's that level of suck-up-i-tude that allowed Pruitt to weather almost any storm. Because you can imagine just how much Donald Trump loves hearing this crap. ... Other cabinet officers should keep this around as a handy reference." With this letter, Scott Pruitt's most notable accomplishment was to rise right up there with VP Mike Pence's look of vacuous adoration at hearing the Commander-in-Chief deviously pontificate.

### Political Observations

With inequality becoming more extreme than almost ever before in history, we should think about these words in *Common Sense Revival*: "Thomas Piketty states in his prominent economic tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* that Karl Marx's principal conclusion was what one might call the 'principle of infinite accumulation'. By this, Karl Marx meant the inexorable tendency for capital to accumulate and become concentrated in ever fewer hands, with no natural limit to the process. It was for this good reason that Marx predicted an apocalyptic end to capitalism. As it turns out, things are more complex than that, and technological progress and increasing productivity and progressive political reforms have served, to a certain extent, as a partial counterweight to the process of wealth accumulation and the concentration of private capital and a monopoly on power. But today, with regressive debt-financed tax cuts and the accumulation of wealth growing to new neo-Gilded Age extremes, this state of affairs is becoming excessively destabilizing -- and is likely to result in either revolutionary unrest or authoritarian repression that would be required to perpetuate the corrupt status quo."

The Republican push to pass a tax cut plan in 2017 before they lost their one-party monopoly on power revealed how corrupt our political system is, and how treacherous their grotesquely scheming basket of priorities really is. This partisan plan, designed to lavishly reward rich people and corporate shareholders, was made more unfair by creating a structure that make it excessively easy for wealthy people to claim new lower tax rates designed

for "pass-through businesses". This is another feature that redistributes wealth upward, at a big eventual cost to the majority of Americans -- and to all in the future when this devious scheme falls apart with an economic recession, extreme volatility in artificially-inflated stock prices, a calamitous debt crisis, harsh austerity measures, rancorous strife, an ecological collapse, or whatever other disastrous outcomes will be delivered by this hard right, short sight, hubris-exposing, scurrilously divisive, inequality stoking, greed driven, anti-precautionary-principle swindle. It makes matters much worse that this agenda is designed to deplete resources, take unfair advantage of working people, rashly run up the national debt, ruin *Our Planet*, fail to deal with critical problems, and sabotage the potential well-being of everyone in future generations.

### Save the World!

We liberty-loving Americans sure do need a healthier two-party system to ensure that more people are fairly represented. It is negative for society as a whole to have our representatives so outrageously beholden to the rich. We do not need -- OR WANT, damn them! -- authority-abusing control freaks who repress the populace and cheat us, lie to us, put us at greater risk, perpetrate various frauds at our expense, corrupt our politics and mislead us with naked untruths, bad management, poor preparedness and shortsighted foolhardiness.

P.J. O'Rourke's famous remark has always resonated with me about Republicans saying government doesn't work and then managing to get elected and making sure that government doesn't work well for the vast majority of the people. But in the last three years, a new confirmation of this understanding has been materializing. Yes, conservative politicians have strived with monomaniac zeal to gain power and domineering control, and used illegitimate means, and they certainly seem to be showing inadequate interest in governing fairly or honestly, or inclusively, or at all well. They have fallen for a very low type of man to win power who is masterful at exploiting divisions, but he is fragmenting the nation as if trying to push a fragile Humpty Dumpty off a great wall -- and it is proving to be increasingly hard to put America back together again. Trump and the MAGA schemers he has inspired, and his enabling cronies, are serious threats to the security and well-being of the American people, and to the liberty-loving republic for which we yearn. This is on account of their desperate deficiencies of trustworthiness, integrity, self-discipline, empathy, commitment to egalitarian inclusiveness, humility, fiscal responsibility, and visionary understanding. Donald Trump demonstrates egomaniacal narcissism and a lack of respect for rules of law and norms and codes of conduct -- or seemingly for women, other than as sex objects! These pathetic qualities make him a terrible leader. And those waiting in the wings to assume power once disappears from the political stage are almost more dangerous for their culture war tactics, extremism and fervent obedience to a hard right agenda and catering to wealthy donors and deluded grassroots supporters.

Politics has sadly and necessarily become an outsized factor in the lives of people living in the USA. Good God, politics! Black Lives should matter more. It seems wrong for our leaders to rudely sow division and antagonisms between people through manipulative propaganda, dastardly demagoguery and an underhanded hijacking of people's emotions -- and to then push wrongheaded national policies and priorities.

In theory, our representatives are the ones *We the People* have entrusted with setting our national priorities, and we should demand that they work to actualize the best interests of the people. How, then, has it turned out that the political leaders we choose are so preposterously prepossessed with the drive to satisfy their own selfish ambitions and power drives? Why are these priorities more important than helping to improve people's lives? FOLLOW THE MONEY! Our representatives give the heaviest emphasis to getting their own outsized portion of the spoils of the on-going Corrupt Conniving Crony Capitalist Con. This is what is described as "the biggest financial swindle in history" in *Demagoguery and the Definite Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*.

An investigative reporter at Truthout named Mike Ludwig identified a correlated problem in *Trump's Plan to Crush the EPA is a Symptom of a Bigger Problem*: Polluters refuse to pay for pollution controls and clean up, and leaders of both parties lack the courage to hold them accountable. Another facet of this corporate scheme is the push to shift more costs to local and state governments by slashing federal government spending. This ruse ratchets up the instability of the already dangerously fragile social safety net that keeps millions of people out of desperate degrees of deprivation and poverty, and exacerbates risks to their health and security.

The pandemic recession drastically amplified inequalities between the prospering fortunate and the desperately disadvantaged unfortunate. And Republicans in Congress are opposing federal help for state and local governments severely challenged by the coronavirus and economic fallout.

Privatization schemes are another way that profits are often made at the public's expense. Donald Trump's conniving 2017 plan for infrastructure spending, for instance, would have been based on a two-for-one scam of giving huge tax incentives to private corporations to undertake infrastructure improvements at taxpayer expense, and then it would have allowed the private businesses to make money on the projects by adding tolls or other fee-generating income from the public each and every year, often at an inflating rate.

It is ominous for the future that progressives in the U.S. were largely sidelined after Trump's 2016 victory through many ruses that include structural ones of extreme gerrymandering, blatant voter suppression in states led by Republican politicians, and excessive purges of voter rolls. A big contributing factor is the brazen misuse of Big Money, right-wing propaganda and spin by often dishonest shells like Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity at Fox News, and Rush Limbaugh (for decades before he died) and his nodding "dittoheads", and crafty manipulators of people on social media through misinformation, negative ads, and false conspiracy theories.

Let's save ourselves! We know how. Throw the bums out of office! "Indivisible" groups are fighting Republican abuses of power and overreach by organizing together in every single congressional district in the USA, and they are using protest and pressure tactics to fight Republican corruption and malfeasance. They helped Democrats gain 40 seats in the House of Representatives in the 2018 elections, so reforms and checks on power abuses were given greater standing. Unfortunately, they encountered extremely fierce Republican opposition. And in the U.S. Senate, Republicans betrayed their solemn hand-on-the-Bible oaths of office by helping Trump get away with unconstitutional abuses of power.

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE INDIVISIBLE GUIDE

"Donald Trump is the biggest popular-vote loser in history to ever call himself President. In spite of the fact that he has no mandate, he will attempt to use his congressional majority to reshape America in his own racist, authoritarian, and corrupt image. If progressives are going to stop this, we must stand indivisibly opposed to Trump and the Members of Congress who would do his bidding. Together, we have the power to resist — and we have the power to win."

"We know this because we've seen it before. The authors of this guide are former congressional staffers who witnessed the rise of the Tea Party. We saw these activists take on a popular president with a mandate for change and a supermajority in Congress. We saw them organize locally and convince their own Members of Congress to reject President Obama's agenda. Their ideas were wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism -- and they won."

"We believe that protecting our values, our neighbors, and ourselves will require mounting a similar resistance to the Trump agenda -- but a resistance built on the values of inclusion, tolerance, and fairness. Trump is not popular. He does not have a mandate. He does not have large congressional majorities. If a small minority in the Tea Party could stop President Obama, then we the majority can stop a petty tyrant named Trump."

Republican politicians are acting treacherously against the true best interests of our democratic republic, and definitively deserve to be relegated to minority status for generations to come due to their right-wing agenda, arrogance, mindlessly unempathetic and in effect malicious malfeasance, failure to prevent a drastic spike in the public debt, and resource-wasting environment-damaging climate-altering ways. The price to be paid for putting our great American values at risk must be paid now, before accelerating harms excessively worsen.

Columnist Thomas Friedman wrote in June 2018, "The U.S. Republican Party has blown up in all but name, going overnight from an internationalist, free-trade, deficit-hawk party to a protectionist, anti-immigrant, deficit-dove party -- all to accommodate the instincts of Donald Trump and his base. As the former House Speaker John Boehner noted: 'There is no Republican Party. There's a Trump party. The Republican Party is kind of taking a nap somewhere.'" (This was in Friedman's article *Why Are So Many Political Parties Blowing Up?*)

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain January 24, 2023



## AMAZING DISGRACE

A Save the World Publication

by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, creator of the online Earth Manifesto  
and publisher of the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto  
June 2018 (with several updates through June 1, 2021)

A beautiful rendition of the hymn *Amazing Grace* rings through my mind as these words precipitate into the public arena of broadening awareness.

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
T'was blind but now I see.

The lyrics to this great song were written by John Newton, a former captain of a sailing ship engaged in the slave trade from Africa to the American colonies. Newton had suffered a traumatic experience during a severe storm off the coast of Ireland in 1748, and subsequently found religion after having prayed desperately to God to save him -- and miraculously surviving the scare. So he converted to evangelical Christianity and became a clergyman. Having once been lost as a crude and unprincipled reprobate in his younger years, he resolved after this crisis of conscience to repent and be found, having been blind and then suddenly seeing. It was thus that he changed course and became more respectful, morally responsible and willing to embrace true Right Action. He later penned a polemic opposing slavery titled *Thoughts on the African Slave Trade*, and his song *Amazing Grace* became a highly respected anthem to hope, courage and transformation -- a song that is often sung at times of a social crisis of conscience.

Black Africans, after being captured and sold into slavery and brought in miserable conditions across the Atlantic Ocean to a land where they were accorded no rights, were often sold down the river to harsh fates in the Deep South, with or without their families, and for many generations. Harriet Beecher Stowe used the lyrics from the song *Amazing Grace* in her sentimental 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, which opposed slavery on moral grounds. The character Uncle Tom was a long-suffering black slave in this novel that depicts the harsh reality of slavery while also asserting that Christian love can overcome something as destructive as enslavement of fellow human beings. Perhaps love is all we need?

Today, despotic acts are being perpetuated that are much worse than those imposed by King George III in the years leading up to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Revolutionary War that followed, and modern "conservatives" are betraying the well-being of the American people and undermining the hopes of hundreds of millions of folks in considerably more consequentially harmful ways than levying taxes on tea imported to the colonies or rigging the colonial system to deprive the people of fair representation.

Humanity is increasingly in desperate need of a better modicum of salvation in the here and now, and our leaders are horribly missing the mark -- a real sin! -- so we must seek salvation and redemption through greater honesty, honorable principles, inclusive understanding, and a greater respect for democracy, broad fair-mindedness, reason and precautionary wisdom.. This is a more providential plan than to complacently wait for an imagined

afterlife of eternal bliss in the presence of God in Heaven. In these efforts we should be guided by the Golden Rule reciprocity principle, and should embrace the farsighted provisions of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as proposed in this manifesto.

### The Disgrace of Extreme Short-Termism

In the Big Picture, the most astoundingly disgraceful state of affairs is the stubborn embrace of economic and political expediency and extreme ecological short-termism. The profit motive, unshackled and laissez-faire unrestrained, zealously sells the vast majority of the people down the river to an unnecessarily harsh fate, as seen by fossil fuel corporations refusing to take steps to prevent the destabilization of the global climate, and by giant pharmaceutical companies ripping off tens of millions of vulnerable folks in order to maximize profits, and even by such virtue-spouting corporate goliaths as the search engine Google and technology giant Apple, which are treating society shabbily by evading taxes. Facebook, for its part, can be seen to have been perniciously taking advantage of people's desire to communicate and be liked, and then selling our personal information and allowing manipulative demagogues and extremist groups to tear us apart -- in order to make bigger profits off advertising and propaganda messages and falsehoods that contribute to the shredding of unity and social cohesion in our communities.

We humans are reaching a condition of Peak Profligacy, and must choose to adapt rapidly by embracing new national and global priorities as soon as possible -- ones that respect precautionary principles and offer more powerful incentives for sustainable modes of living. We simply must make more effective efforts to conserve non-renewable reserves of many crucial natural resources, especially including fossil fuels and the mineral phosphorous, which is crucially important for fertilizing crops -- and tropical rainforests, which serve as "the lungs of our home planet". This necessary change should involve making a much faster transition to cleaner renewable sources of energy from our dangerous dependence on climate-disrupting oil and natural gas and coal.

The early history of efforts to protect the environment in our democratic republic was remarkably bipartisan. Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican, was one of the greatest presidents ever for his laudable efforts to establish protections of public lands and the environment. After he became president early in the 20th century, he sought to protect America's national resources from the greed of exploitive business entities, and one of his best accomplishments during his time in office was to conserve the nation's forests, fresh water resources and wildlife habitats. His conservation convictions were so strong that he succeeded in having 230 million acres of land set aside to be protected for the public in the form of 5 National Parks, 18 National Monuments, 24 fresh water reclamation projects, 150 national forests and more than 50 federal game preserves and bird sanctuaries.

Then in the 1960s and 1970s, truly broad bipartisan leadership helped enact all the bedrock environmental laws, including the Wilderness Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act. In the book *Getting to Green* by political independent Frederic Rich, the author explains that starting in the 1980s, a "Great Estrangement" began, with conservatives beginning a hard tack to the right and the Green movement drifting to the left. The sad result was that environmental issues underwent a disastrous transformation "from common cause to divisive wedge." And in recent years, federal spending on environmental protections and conservation has been significantly reduced. The status in the Trump era was shockingly worse, and dumbfounding in its backwards impulses.

We surely are in "a race between education and catastrophe," as the English writer H.G. Wells declared back in 1920. And this race has become increasingly urgent since his day. Canaries in the global mine are dropping dead left and right, along with roughly two-thirds of the populations -- since 1970! -- of a representative selection of 10,000 species of mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians and fishes, as the 2020 version of the Living Planet Report confirms. And we are "baking in" an increase in global average temperatures that guarantees excessively high costs of coastal flooding and extremely harsh natural disaster events. To mitigate these costs, we should rightly make bold efforts to alter this trajectory. We are already seriously threatening many species of life, including many in coral reef communities that are likely to suffer eternal extinction during coming decades.

The great David Attenborough intones in the extraordinary documentary film *Our Planet*, "For the first time in



history, the stability of nature can no longer be taken for granted." Nonetheless, "the planet can recover. Never has it been more important to understand how the natural world works, and how to help it." Film critic Nick Schafer wrote about this eight-episode Netflix documentary miniseries, "That ethos guides *Our Planet* from frigid tundra to bountiful forests to arid deserts to glistening oceans, adhering to a template that maximizes wonder, and then exploits it for both mournful critique and hopeful advocacy." Check it out!

Nick Schager provides scientific understandings in his article about *Our Planet*: "The notion of symbiosis — of the interdependence of man, animals and ecosystems — is fundamental to *Our Planet*. Not an episode goes by that Attenborough isn't explaining how one species' behavior (or existence) is dependent on another's, as well as how the environment works to sustain them all, and vice versa. It's in that crucial respect that the series underlines humanity's deleterious effect on Mother Earth. Awe-inspiring vignettes routinely double as cautionary tales about man-made climate change's radical restructuring of age-old natural orders. From the snowy wastelands of Antarctica, where diminishing stretches of ice are impacting polar bears' ability to hunt, to the arid plains of Africa, where draughts now force hippos to cover themselves in mud rather than water, to the Congo's shrinking rainforests, where gorilla populations have been halved by poachers, the destructive impact of our own actions is always front-and-center."

We are near a peak maximum of wasteful ways, in aggregate, not because humans are going to suddenly clearly see the existential folly of these behaviors. We are near Peak Profligacy not because we are going to soon achieve zero population growth and are likely to bring our human numbers into a sustainable balance. We are simply approaching limits in the amounts of finite reserves of fossil fuels, fresh water and other critical natural resources available, and we are exceeding natural carrying capacity constraints. It is foolhardy to continue spewing climate disrupting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. We are nearing the point where limiting factors will make it far too expensive for us to go on treating our home planet like a business in liquidation.

We can no longer be so exaggeratedly extravagant and unconscionably irresponsible with our resource uses, and we can no longer myopically allow greedy investors and big corporations to wreak havoc on the natural world. And we must find a way to prevent anti-conservation forces from ruling nations worldwide, and to remove demagogues and abusers of authority from power in many countries. Reactionary nationalist movements are corrupt in their essence and contrary to positive unifying features of social cohesion and collaborative efforts to make our existence fairer, healthier, safer and more sustainable.

The brilliant physicist Stephen Hawking once declared, "Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change." By that evaluation, the cowardly self-serving politicians who go along with Donald Trump's retrograde environmental policies are downright stupid in their efforts to promote the burning of increasing quantities of fossil fuels, for this will irreversibly increase the costs and risks of extreme weather events and the destabilization of the global climate. It is insane to continue policies and priorities that disrupt normal patterns of temperatures and precipitation in locales around the world, and to stand in the way of smart actions taken to mitigate and adapt to global warming trends, ocean acidification, coral bleaching and rising sea levels.

A political cartoon surfaced on Facebook showing a big blue crowd with three black faces in it, with the words:

HERE'S THE PLOT: 97% OF THE WORLD'S SCIENTISTS CONSPIRE TO CREATE AN IMAGINARY ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, ONLY TO BE EXPOSED BY A PLUCKY BAND OF BILLIONAIRES AND SENATORS AND OIL COMPANIES.

Here's the bottom line, as reported by Tim Radford in an article titled *Washington's political lobbying shackles science*. Lobbyists in Washington D.C. have spent billions of dollars to push their narrowly-focused corporate agenda and prevent legislative action that would mitigate climate disruptions. They brazenly spend dozens of times more than environmental organizations and the renewable energy sector. The upshot is clear: "when it comes to influencing climate legislation, money talks more urgently and effectively than evidence."

It is an extraordinary disgrace for *We the People* to be subjected to the ambitions of master manipulators dividing people so that they can irresponsibly impose an agenda of extreme short-termism on the world. The main characteristics of this crazy short-termism include: concerted efforts to maximize resource extraction,



facilitate cost externalizing schemes, give top priority to wealth concentrating plans, allow scandalously corrupt pay-for-play political ploys, sacrifice public health, ignore scientific understandings, torpedo sensible climate action, implement misguided national policies, and promote elite-favoring scams that are highly inequitable and morally bankrupt, all in conjunction with spiritually deficient materialistic consumerism.

It is a violation against concepts of Right Action for current generations to engage in extreme degrees of ecological short-sightedness that will leave a legacy of depleted resources, damaged habitats, decimated animal life, clear-cut forests, paved-over wetlands, dammed rivers, polluted skies, contaminated waters, spiking strife, and excessive debt incurred for wrongheaded reasons.

Conservative propagandists like Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Rush Limbaugh and Koch-backed organizations, in league with cunning Trumpian politicians, have been excessively successful in promoting falsehoods and demonizing progressives to advance their avarice-addled, corrupt and control-obsessed agenda. This is sadly ironic because of the disgraceful truth that their tactics have rationalized anti-democratic, anti-environmental, fiscally irresponsible and broadly inequality-increasing stances that are stupidly sacrificing the greater good in favor of allowing wealthy people to gain unconscionably generous short-term benefits.

The wise statesman Solon is known as "the father of democracy" for the fair-minded reforms he was able to put into effect in the city-state of Athens more than 2,500 years ago. At that time in history, revolutionary discord was spiking between members of the wealthy aristocracy and an increasingly angry populace. Solon was a skillful negotiator who was able to forge moderate and fair-minded compromises between the hubris-filled rulers and the people, thereby saving the republic from destructive conflict. It should be noted that the democratic rabble had good reason to be angry at that time, for the government was in the hands of elite factions that were abusing their power by doing things like corruptly stacking the courts with judges willing to decide every consequential issue against the masses.

Today, the federal Office of Government Ethics has declared that it is essential to the success of our republic that citizens can trust that good decisions will be made by our representatives -- ones motivated by considerations of the public interest, not by private gain of politicians and political parties and rich people. Yet the American people have compelling reasons to distrust the domineering Trump Republican Party, for it is generally striving to enrich insiders rather than to take the high road of working for the common good.

Professor Robert Reich makes it crystal clear in the film *Inequality for All*, and in his book *Saving Capitalism - For the Many, Not the Few*, that we should be striving to create a more inclusive and moral economy in which a virtuous circle reigns, not a vicious circle. The American people should stand up together and declare that they are as mad as hell at despotic power-abusing politicians, and that they are not going to take it anymore, and that they want a peaceful progressive populist revolution that is eminently egalitarian, and as soon as possible. I call on all people to make their voices heard in favor of fairer national policies and smarter national priorities.

Abraham Lincoln stated that all the people could not be fooled all the time. Today, many millions of Americans seem to be being bamboozled, and their voices and best interests are being deeply disrespected and ignored and betrayed in the zeal of rich people to grab bigger portions of the income and wealth generated by exploiting natural resources and taking advantage of working people. Inequality is more extreme than it has been since before the Depression of the 1930s, and the top 1% of households in the United States now owns more wealth than the bottom 90% combined. Any honest tax plan would be structured so as to be highly graduated and really reduce this extreme level of wealth inequality, instead of making it worse. Scheming power-prepossessed conservative politicians, however, took a pivotal step with their egregiously devious Tax Cuts Act in December 2017 towards further redistributing wealth upwards and entrenching inequalities of income and wealth.

The devil is in the details, as they say, and the details of the Republican tax plan scam are downright diabolical in their extreme partisanship, naked pandering to the rich, deceitfully brazen anti-egalitarian nature, and the insidious degree to which the plan burdens all taxpayers in the future with riskily high levels of debt.

How is it possible in a democracy for power-abusing politicians to get away with this? The reason is basic -- because the vast majority of the American people effectively have little measurable influence on public policy.

This stark conclusion was confirmed in early 2014 by Professors Martin Gilens of Princeton and Benjamin Page of Northwestern University, who analyzed 1,800 policy issues and found that "the preferences of the average American appear to have only a miniscule, near-zero and statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." Let's demand better! The Biden administration, and control of both houses of Congress by Democrats, now give us a better chance to begin righting our ship of state, even in the face of radical opposition by Mitch McConnell and Trump Republican loyalists.

These are tragic times for the American people, as pathologically manipulative and deeply dishonest Republican politicians delivered great gifts to the rich with their Tax Cuts plan con job, along with dirty coal in the Christmas stockings of the vast majority of Americans when the plan was rammed through without a single vote by any Democratic representatives near the end of 2017. These sycophants to the donor class are rigging the economy ever more extremely in favor of wealthy people, and achieving this grotesque top priority by pitting folks in red states against those in blue states, and sabotaging greater good goals, trying to shred the social safety net, displaying a severe deficiency of empathic understanding, sacrificing the environmental commons, favoring dirty non-renewable sources of energy over clean renewable energy, driving up the risks and future costs of climate disruptions, and undermining the well-being of all in future generations.

It would be much smarter for us to create a rainy day fund to help pay for natural disasters like destructive hurricanes and "devil wind-driven wildfires" and other foreseeable probabilities. There will certainly be many more costly surprises as this century unfolds, so it is a calamitous Trump Folly to have imprudently put the pedal to the metal on driving up the national debt in order to slash taxes on corporations and rich people.

John Steinbeck tells a marvelous story about cormorants diving off the pier in Cabo San Lucas, concluding with the observation that they were "subversives" for having upset the established order. Scholars who study John Steinbeck indicate that the modest and soft-spoken author was sensitive to creatures being considered subversives for a cogent personal reason. His novels, like *The Grapes of Wrath*, had achieved great fame, and this had brought him notoriety, hate mail and even surveillance by the FBI. His literary themes were unsettling to the privileged, who feared anyone poignantly pointing out the social problems related to poor people and the plight of immigrants and farm workers. Likewise they despised voices that emphasized startling contrasts in economic inequities in America or other failings of the ruthless dog-eat-dog capitalist system. Great literature evokes universal themes and images, so it provides deeper contexts in which readers can more viscerally understand. It is sometimes 'subversive' of the status quo, but it is even more valuable for being so!

### The Reasons Why the Current State of Affairs is an Amazing Disgrace

The USA is no longer a fairly representative democratic republic. An overarching reason for this is because the American people have been deeply divided by rashly scheming deceitful politicians and manipulative demagogues who managed to gain domineering power from 2017 through 2021 through a disgracefully corrupt litany of illegitimate means, as set forth in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*. These treacherous frauds sold the people down the river to unnecessarily harsh fates with their deeply unjust debt-financed Tax Cuts scam, and they are betraying the best interests every person in the future.

The arena of tax law is the most politically driven arena in government because it involves money and greed, and is thus a primary focus of abuses of influence and power. Tax law is the most intense area of law for egregious political corruption, and Republican politicians have devised and pushed through a devious and uncompromising tax plan that is a sad compilation of unfair, wealth pandering, inequality stoking, resource squandering, clean energy undermining, anti-conservation, debt burdening and future betraying schemes.

Political scientist Norman Ornstein of the conservative American Enterprise Institute declared of the Tax Cut plan in a tweet, "There has never been a more outrageous, revolting, unfair process to pass a corrupted bill in the history of Congress." He expressed this opinion eleven years after he co-wrote a book with Thomas E. Mann that blamed "both parties, equally" for the dysfunctional nature of Congress and politics in Washington, D.C. They then wrote in late 2017 about "asymmetric polarization" in *How the Republicans Broke Congress*, "... over the past decade it has become clear that it is the Republican Party -- as an institution, as a movement, as a

collection of politicians -- that has done unique, extensive and possibly irreparable damage to the American political system."

Think about this. After dishonest Republicans betrayed the American people with their one-party tax plan, the beautiful sounds of refrains of *Amazing Grace* again drifted into my consciousness, and a recognition dawned.

Humankind is now in the midst of perhaps our highest stakes gamble of all -- deciding what to do, or what not to do, about the climate crisis. Scurrilous Republican leaders are rejecting prudence and precaution, and do not seem to have any viable backup plan to deal with the disastrous unfolding costs and damaging impacts of their wrong-headed opposition to necessary action. Scientists tell us that we should leave something like 80% of known reserves of fossil fuels in the ground during the 78 years remaining in the 21st century, to prevent increasingly catastrophic and costly extreme weather events, including more intense heat waves, apocalyptic hurricanes, hellish wildfires, creeping desertification, coral reef bleaching, widespread coastal flooding and severe winter weather snaps like the three nor'easters that buffeted the Northeast in March 2018 and the destructive floods in the Midwest in the Spring of 2019. But Republican politicians are working to prevent action designed to protect humanity from damaging outcomes like these. What part of this do they not understand? Compulsive greed can obviously trump common sense and morality.

Scientists keep being surprised at how rapidly environmental conditions are being altered by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Many of them are especially concerned with how fast ice sheets and glaciers are melting, and how severe episodes of coral bleaching are becoming in tropical oceans. Denial is a dumbly irresponsible course of action! Professor Garrett Hardin's words from his 1968 treatise on the Tragedy of the Commons resonate resoundingly: "Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons." For an in-depth assessment of the best understandings of this extraordinarily consequential issue, see my essay *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity and Population Overshoot*.

Here is another amazingly disgraceful fact. In December 2009, Donald Trump and his three oldest children, Ivanka, Donald Jr. and Eric, signed an open letter printed in the New York Times, along with 100 prominent business executives, which urged President Obama and world leaders headed to Copenhagen for international climate negotiations to act on climate change. The letter ominously stated that, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." Most unfortunately, once there was a huge amount of money and power available to the Trump family by aggressively siding with the fossil fuel industry, they demonstrated a reprehensible eagerness to pander to polluting companies, oppose climate action and appoint climate change deniers to positions of power. They thus betrayed common sense, the common good, integrity, precautionary wisdom and the moral good by contributing to the probabilities that humanity and planet Earth will suffer catastrophic and irreversible consequences. This is a grotesque failure to act in responsible ways!

The cost and consequences of INACTION on climate issues are both economically unacceptable and morally indefensible. Climate science has reached the point that it can definitively say that failure to very aggressively try to "solve" climate change is neither a rational or moral option for a nation or humanity as a whole. And, according to Joe Romm in his fascinating article *It's Not Too Late To Stop Climate Change, And It'll Be Super-Cheap*, **"The \$44 trillion additional investment needed to decarbonize the energy system ... by 2050 is more than offset by over \$115 trillion in fuel savings -- resulting in net savings of \$71 trillion."** Wow! Let's do the smart and responsible thing, and save an incredible amount of money!

In insightful writer Naomi Klein's provocative talk at a TEDWomen Conference in 2010, she gave a brilliant presentation titled *Addicted to Risk*, indicating that we have become far too willing to gamble with things that are precious and irreplaceable. How can this collective recklessness be explained? There are, of course, many contributing factors, as Naomi Klein noted in her talk, which she gave right after the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. These factors include greed, hubris, a surfeit of confidence in the righteousness of close-minded convictions, a male eagerness to take risks, and the perils inherent in believing in excessive privileges for the few. All these factors are rationalized by archetypal narratives that tell us that we humans deserve to

reign supreme over every living thing, and over Nature. But tools and technology designed to control Nature will ultimately fail, so we should work with Mother Nature, NOT against her.

Corporations are abusing the power of their domineering influence in ways that are contrary to the greater good. These organizations are betraying the public trust and often the people who use their products, as well as taxpayers, their employees, the health of the environment, people in other countries and everyone in future generations. Many companies illegally dispose of hazardous wastes or defy health and safety standards, or engage in price-fixing, or gain socially detrimental advantages through lobbyist shenanigans or one of many other unscrupulous schemes. Corporate violations of laws and regulations cost hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of lives every year, and the magnitude of their offenses becomes clear when one considers that a single corporate offense may run into millions of dollars in losses, while the average cost of a burglary or larceny is less than \$1,000. In some cases, the cost of a single case of corporate or banking misconduct may exceed a billion dollars, and corporate corruption is contributing to a widespread breakdown of ethical rightness, societal well-being and the providential boon of social cohesion.

Our national priorities should reflect higher values, not just a mish-mash of power-abusing expediencies and race-to-the-bottom profiteering enabled by a profoundly corrupt agenda. Budgetary decisions should be guided by considerations of ethical fair mindedness, true moral rightness, ecological intelligence, and greater respect for the farsighted provisions in an ultimately responsible Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

It is a crippling fault of our political representatives in the world today that instead of Right Action, we are almost exclusively engaged in pandering to exceedingly narrow interest groups and facilitating Tragedy of the Commons outcomes, and foisting externalized costs onto everyone. Budgets proposed by scheming Republicans were an affront to fiscal responsibility, inclusive concepts of fairness, truer justice, and the prospects of everyone yet to be born. The Right Action for us to take would be to emphasize better national planning that is more responsible, ethical, humane, just, empathetic and ecologically aware, and thereby to make greater commitments to farsighted precautionary principles, peaceable coexistence and sustainable courses of action.

Let's save the world! Together, let's rekindle that admirable revolutionary spirit of our liberty loving Founders, with their fairness-oriented democratic principles and Enlightenment Era ideals.

#### Seven Theoretically Simple Steps to a Saner Society

This is a digression to recapitulate the most important things we need in order to really honestly and fairly Make America Great Again.

- (1) Defend the independence of the judiciary from excessively partisan and uncompromising ideological stances in legal decision-making.
- (2) Defend the independence of the media from manipulation and suppression. Make sure we live in a world that accepts evidence and facts, not fake news, conspiracy theories, disingenuous misinformation and deeply biased reporting. We cannot let our world become a "post-truth" society fragmented by social media platforms that propagate lies, facilitate emotional hijacking and exploit people's fears and deep insecurities to win elections. Independent investigative reporting is crucially important in our democracy, especially with secretive leaders who play loose with the truth and make extremely partisan and excessively corporate-friendly decisions behind closed doors and in ways that are distinctly contrary to the common good.
- (3) Implement a much more egalitarian national tax plan that intelligently features Solon-wise taxation rates that are more progressively structured by being more steeply graduated, with lower rates for everyone on the first \$75,000 in income and higher rates on all income over \$250,000.
- (4) End the practice of extreme partisan gerrymandering by creating non-partisan commissions of political independents in every state to re-determine Congressional district boundaries. Take this responsibility away from partisan state legislatures, like some states have done, including New Jersey, Iowa and California. When the responsibility for redistricting lies with partisan state legislatures, the outcomes are generally contrary to the public interest, and often produce congressional districts in which politicians choose their constituents,

rather than the other way around. This redistricting action would make running for office more competitive, so more people's interests will be taken into account and respected. Our representatives would therefore strive to appeal to broader constituencies, and necessarily become more responsible to all the citizens they represent. This would be one way to honestly and effectively make America greater!

(5) Prevent the trend of accumulated wealth becoming dynastic and selfishly aristocratic, like it did for many oppressive centuries in kingdoms of yesteryear. Keep inheritance taxes in place at rates like those in effect before the December 2017 Tax Cuts bill, for reasons set forth in Postscript Two of the essay *Core Values of Democracy* (see pages 145-146).

(6) Get Big Money out of the driver's seat in determining who will represent us in our elections and governance. Do this by instituting Clean Elections methods and making sensible reforms of campaign finance laws. Take the step advocated by the Move to Amend Coalition to accomplish this goal. This would be a good way to achieve the greater good, properly understood. Republicans tend to all but claim that God regards corporations as being people. Back in 2011, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney smugly declared, "Corporations are people, my friend". I thought, "Oh, is that so?" Well, let's call in the political economists, sociologists and historians, and the psychologists and psychiatrists, and let's analyze exactly what kind of person most giant corporations resemble in their actions. Conveniently, the insightful professor Joel Bakan has already done clear-eyed research for us on this topic, and he had a *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* handy by his side. Due to their behavior and inherent tendencies, he insightfully concluded, corporations would be pathological psychopaths, if regarded as actual persons. This is because they often act in ways that are socially irresponsible, manipulative, lacking any sense of empathy, and practically incapable of guilt, remorse, moral rectitude or genuine responsibility for the greater good.

(7) Enact true lobbying reform. There are currently more than 12,000 registered lobbyists in Washington, D.C. who frequent corridors in the halls of power, all of them intent on influencing one of the 535 members of Congress to support some special deal for themselves, often in ways contrary to the common good. And these lobbyists are highly compensated for their amazing success in turning hundreds of millions of dollars of corporate money and Koch billionaires' money and other rich people's money into *hundreds of billions of dollars* of tax cuts and special deals just-for-them, always at the opportunity cost of a fairer modern New Deal for *We the People*. WHAT A GREAT RETURN FOR THEM ON THEIR MONEY. But this is a tragedy for the people! All American citizens are affected by *The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Unfairly Rigged*, so it is high time we all better understood these corrupt aspects of the status quo, and demanded positive reforms.

We need sensible rules and regulations, adequate enforced. We need greater protections of human rights. We need greater freedom from adversities caused by polluters, corrupt dealings, financial fraud, Casino Capitalist ruses and Shock Doctrine Disaster Capitalist outcomes. We cannot afford to "deregulate" by reversing smart established protections of public health and safety and the environment, nor should we support ruthless efforts that will predictably create a tragedy-of-the-commons capitalistic free-for-all in which humankind treats planet Earth like an enterprise going-out-of-business and in liquidation, rather than a going concern. For better long-term guidance, we need to ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

#### Roguish Developments and the Rise of the Kakistocracy

The Republican Party seems to have gone rogue. Republican politicians and the shrewdly opportunistic crony capitalists they represent blatantly ran a scandal-ridden kleptocracy during the Trump reign, and succeeded at this by imposing domineering rule over *We the People* with a "kakistocracy" -- a Greek term that means rule by the worst, least qualified or most unscrupulous persons. One salient characteristic of this anti-democratic kakistocracy is that it seeks to impose some of the worst possible policies on the people, and to focus on some of the worst possible national priorities. The top goal for these money-obsessed and power-mad Mammonites is to give more tax cuts to rich people to gain their support. These facts inextricably mean that common good goals and the general welfare are violated in a seriously consequential manner. For more details about the swamp denizens in the kakistocracy, see *Postscript One, Meet Members of the Kakistocracy*, at the end of this essay, and *Postscript Two - The Top Ten Worst Aspects of Rogue Republican Rule*, which follows.

This modern-day kakistocracy was led by a Twittering Demagogue-in-Chief and his cronies who were actually well qualified in one terribly retrogressive regard -- they are effective in their opposition to the common good by violating the principles, founding purposes, moral rightness and guiding missions of the government agencies they were charged with leading. How could they possibly have acted in such unconscionable ways, and get away with it? They should be ashamed to be so amazingly eager to fulfill the expectations of the corrupting persons and entities that have bought their allegiance. This is an especially bad category of unscrupulousness. Ideological extremists should be completely disqualified when they act as corrupt exploiters who want to "serve" by acting as shills for the rich, divisively undermining social cohesion, saddling the nation with more debt, and contributing to a profoundly unprincipled environmental Tragedy of the Commons of the first order.

One of the most amazing aspects of Republican disgrace is their extremely male chauvinistic, virulently anti-choice and effectively misogynistic national policy preferences and their boorishly sexist willingness to trade their souls for power by letting male leaders get away with lying brazenly about sexual misconduct against women, and even, in the case of Alabama's Roy Moore, apparently against a succession of teenage girls. Matt Gaetz, the Trump-supporting representative from Florida, is the latest culprit, and could go to prison for his indecent activities with underage girls. And Donald Trump, who famously bragged on tape about grabbing beautiful women "by the pussy", is a notorious offender.

The Emperor wannabe has no clothes, and it's an exceedingly ugly spectacle! Recall Hans Christian Anderson's famous tale, in which two conniving weavers sell a suit of clothes to the Emperor, saying it is invisible to those who are stupid or incompetent or otherwise unfit for their positions. As the Emperor parades before the populace in his new clothes, no one dares to say they don't see any new suit of clothes on him, for fear that they will be seen as stupid, but then finally a child cries out, "But he isn't wearing anything at all!"

#### Let's Move Forwards, Not Backwards!

The Goddess of Irony flashes in the night sky. A main focus of Donald Trump seems to have been to undo every accomplishment achieved by the smart black man who preceded him in the White House, especially with regard to the most consequential issues like those involved with environmental damages, socialized costs, resource depletion, protections of clean air and clean water, fuel efficiency rules, greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, family planning, and protections of public lands, endangered species and biological diversity. This seems to be a curiously racist-tinged whim, and it is sad that this egregious stance can accurately be seen as vindictively bigoted, myopic, obtusely selfish, grotesquely contrary to the general welfare, and insidiously treacherous to young people and all in future generations. The simple fact of the matter is that the Biden administration is now required to undo the damages done, and alter course from irresponsibly short-term-oriented schemes, unethical scams, divisive swindles, discriminatory executive orders, immoral family separation policies, and allowing corporate abuses of power, offshore oil drilling and assaults on the vulnerable Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, National Parks, National Monuments, BLM lands and other public property.

We need progressive action, like the implementation of ideas espoused by Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris and Pete Buttigieg. We should act intelligently, keeping eminent fair-mindedness foremost in our considerations, and elect significantly more women to office. We owe it to them, many of them having been cheated in recent elections out of the opportunity to lead -- outstanding potential representatives like the former state environmental chief Katie McGinty in Pennsylvania in 2016 and the Fordham University Associate Professor of Law Zephyr Teachout in New York. We can no longer afford to hew to righteously wrongheaded policies and priorities.

After a broad repudiation of Trumpian discriminatory demagoguery in the November 2017 elections in Virginia, New Jersey and the state of Washington, observers noted that the Trump era may one day be remembered as a last desperate power grab by white males who expect to have dominion and be allowed great perks and privileges that excessively favor them at the expense of the vast majority of others. Demographic trends are against them, and within a few decades their numbers will slip below 50% of the populace, so it is actually an excellent time for them to support the decent goal of recommitting our nation to respecting rights of minorities.

Instead, of course, Trumpian champions of white male privilege want to ratchet up discrimination against immigrants, asylum seekers, women, Blacks, Latinos, Muslims, gays and poor people. This is disgraceful.

Republican politicians have succeeded in wielding excessive power, and in being able to abuse authority, by exploiting resentment-stoked populist sentiments and anti-immigrant fervor, and by invoking religion and God. They misuse power for personal gain, engage in naked political malfeasance and corruption in office, use the power of the legislature for unscrupulous private advantages, abuse government power to hurt political opponents, and rationalize injustices like racial discrimination, hostility to the rights of women, class warfare, mass incarceration, instances of police brutality and the violation of environmental policies, laws and regulations.

Republicans triumph over the common good by riling up the masses with emotion-manipulating advertising and excessively simplistic, divisive, deceitful and demagogic propaganda designed to gain support from people their plans are formulated to betray. How could they have succeeded at this? Well, by following tradition, ever since Ronald Reagan showed them the way -- with his folksy anti-union, socially unjust, inequitable, Golden Rule violating, fiscally irresponsible, deficit financed, anti-environmental and authority-abusing way of pandering to the wealthy few and their organizational corporate tools. Reagan too gave special sway to Wall Street and military Keynesian hyper spending to benefit entities involved in the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex.

Another attribute of Republican politicians is their broad betrayal of the American public by pretending to be concerned about people in the middle class and "the forgotten man" -- while pushing policies that primarily benefit the top dogs in our country and irresponsibly incurring more debt to provide big tax breaks to top income earners and cut spending that benefits the masses, like that on healthcare, public education, nutrition programs, environmental protections, and a hundred other initiatives that characterize civilized societies.

The Republican Tax Cuts plan is a naked manifestation of this cunning corruption. Republicans have lied through their teeth about how their law will help people in the middle class, because in fact the scheme is foisting a disastrous new degree of inequality and unfairness and burdens on we denizens in the land of the free.

There is only one way that such a deviously disgraceful and despicably disingenuous tax plan, with its huge benefits for corporations and rich people, could possibly have been imposed on the American people by a partisan phalanx of hubris-filled politicians exclusively from one political party. There's only one way this plan with its radically unfair hard-right social engineering provisions could squeak through into law when this narrowly-focused generosity is financed using more than \$1.5 trillion of borrowed public funds. There's only one way that this legislation could have been passed that requires big cuts in spending on social safety net programs, environmental protections and a host of other common good goals. There's only one way possible that these Republican politicians could succeed at this without any public hearings in Congress and using rashly anti-democratic tactics, and doing so in an all-fired hurry because the illegitimacy of their scandalously achieved electoral coup was being exposed by journalists and multiple investigations by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York investigating financial fraud, election finance violations, public corruption, money laundering, foreign bribery and organized crime.

The only way these things are possible is because Big Money has domineering influence in our politics. Sadly, the Supreme Court has effectively sanctioned this outcome with its wrongheaded 5-4 decisions in the *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* rulings, and our country's politics have been rashly corrupted by billionaires like Charles Koch and the Mercers and the recently deceased Sheldon Adelson and their ilk.

Republican politicians have very good reasons to have been in such a big hurry to deliver this lavishly generous *Amazing Disgrace* boondoggle to their intensely expectant donors. The illegitimacy of the ruses they used to gain power is being exposed, and the time is approaching when the top echelons of their leadership are likely to be run out of town. The ethical rot of their abuses of authority and obstruction of progress and justice are coming to light, so ramming through this future mortgaging, anti-democratic, common good-betraying, secretive abomination of vested interest giveaways and Forgotten Man takeaways was a now-or-never proposition.

Remember the sentiments and perspectives articulated by Thomas Paine during tumultuous times in *Common Sense*, his revolutionary pamphlet published in January 1776. After famously declaring that we have it in our

power to make the world over again, sure enough, guided by his courageous counsel and driven by people's love of liberty and their antipathy toward despots who wield abusive power, our ancestors in the American colonies sought common purpose in gaining liberation from British tyranny. By July 4, 1776, Thomas Paine's clarity of conviction in the cause of independence from despotism had catalyzed into a new form of fairly representative governance that better suited a liberty-loving people. Our Founders came together to bring forth a new nation, collaboratively concocting a farsighted Constitution and fair-minded Bill of Rights, and they put rules of law into place and a brilliant flexible governing structure that has progressively adapted ever since.

Let us once again stand up for independence from tyranny, and remember that true legitimacy of governance can be found only in the fair consent of the governed. Well-informed consent is, of course, better than poorly informed consent, and worst of all is coerced consent, along with the sad acquiescence to misguided priorities of deceived voters due to misleading propaganda, devious spin, false conspiracy theories and brazen lies.

As the noose tightened on scandalous Republican malfeasance with criminal investigations, more details were revealed of the cover up of coordinated efforts with Russia to interfere in the 2016 elections to help get Republicans elected. The main reason that Republicans demonstrated such a fervor to end all the investigations and exonerate Trump in two impeachment trials was that they saw a heightening probability of their tenuous monopoly on power coming to an end.

Trying to play offense, eleven far-right Republican politicians in the House introduced a bill in late July 2018 to impeach then Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. This was part of an intensifying effort to discredit the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 elections in favor of Trump. Incisive observers say that this was also a shrewd attempt to attract Big Money donations to their reelection efforts, like Trump absolutist Devin Nunes has done in collecting large sums of money from Super PACs and out-of-state Trump supporters.

Trump himself desperately attacked the Mueller investigation on Twitter and at his ranting rallies. He sensed, it seems increasingly obvious, that his guilt was being exposed, and perhaps Nemesis, the Greek Goddess of Retribution, might be getting ever more agitated at his hubris. This was not a mere "witch hunt".

Trump once tweeted, "Russia continues to say they had nothing to do with Meddling in our Election". Really?! The President of the United States was eager to swallow Vladimir Putin's devious assurances, despite the unanimous conclusions of all American Intelligence agencies. So it was ironically suspicious that Donald Trump concluded that tweet with these words: "So many questions, so much corruption!" YES, INDEED!

There is overwhelming evidence of unconstitutionally unfair influence of extreme gerrymandering by Republican legislatures across the USA, a ruse that has helped give socially disastrous domineering power to Republican politicians. Such system-corrupting tactics are letting scheming politicians egregiously abuse their excessive and unmerited influence by disenfranchising millions of Americans and imposing reactionary policies, social and environmental, on the populace. Satirist Andy Borowitz made the humorous observation, "Vice-President Mike Pence has requested that Jesus Christ rapture him up before the special counsel Robert Mueller can indict him." These leaders should be thrown out of office, and replaced with more honest and fair-minded representatives.

Only those who are adequately repentant for egregious sins are deserving of the amazing grace of forgiveness. By deviously designing a tax bill that makes winners of a narrow minority -- and relative losers of a vast majority -- Republicans are trying to further "divide the blue states from the red, the Democrats from the Republicans. It is evil in the extreme", declared California Governor Jerry Brown. Evil is not good!

Jerry Brown also accused Republicans of "acting like a bunch of Mafia thugs" by targeting rich, high-tax and largely Democratic states in their tax cuts plan so that they could curry favor with their political base and redistribute money to poorer Republican-leaning and Republican-run low-tax states. The unscrupulous Mafia-like Republicans in the Senate and the House managed to get an extremely narrow majority of votes to pass tax cut bills without a single representative of Democratic districts included, and then engaged in "reconciliation" in a conference committee to put final touches on the different schemes hatched in tax cut legislation narrowly passed in both chambers. An accurate understanding of this process, according to an astute observer, was that they were "negotiating among themselves to find the tricky combination that can win over various GOP factions



in both chambers without losing others, all the while keeping the projected increase in the deficit below \$1.5 trillion." This whole process was not only tricky, but a devious trick: the tax cut scam was a dishonest and risk-laden trick upon all taxpayers in every future year.

John Maynard Keynes, "the father of macroeconomics", was famous for advocating stimulative spending by the government during recessionary times to get the economy growing again, but he strongly advocated taking the proverbial punch bowl away by running offsetting budget surpluses during boom times to keep debt from ballooning and the economy from overheating in a risk-laden bubble. When there was with very low unemployment, before the pandemic, and a surfeit of national debt, it was the wrong time -- the exactly wrong time -- to hyper-stimulate the economy by giving huge tax breaks to rich people and power-abusing corporations, and to rashly run up deficit spending.

Remember that the top tax rate on individuals was 70% or higher for 45 years before Ronald Reagan became president and managed to get the top tax rate slashed to 28% during his tenure in office. Since then, budget deficits have been incurred almost every year, except during the final two years of Bill Clinton's presidency. This has driven up the national debt to record levels that are dangerous because they represent a historically high percentage of GDP. This level has been seen only once before in U.S. history, which was in connection with the huge effort of the U.S. in fighting the exceedingly costly Second World War against fascist aggressors. Today, the top tax rate is still less than 40%, and wealthy people make most of their money on capital gains that are taxed at very low rates. And most wealth is passed on tax free to heirs after they die. Due in large part to tax cuts on the highest levels of income and on inheritances, and due to tax evasion schemes by corporations and rich people, the national debt has soared from less than \$1 trillion in 1980 to over \$28 trillion in June 2021.

Republicans crowed about their tax cut strategy, brazenly claiming it would be a win-win for everybody, despite the fact that it was designed to choose big winners and wreak disadvantages on countless millions of others who will be left behind. In all probability, their actions will have harmful lose-lose consequences for the majority of Americans and almost everyone yet to be born. Republican politicians, after causing budget deficits to spike, sounded the alarm about the debt, before the pandemic, and cynically began using this as justification to impose reductions in spending on healthcare, public education, protections of public lands, and the safety and security of the people, including safety net programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Florida Senator Marco Rubio admitted this fact that the Republican tax plan was merely a first step before "instituting structural changes to Social Security and Medicare", slashing benefits or privatizing the programs in order to reduce the federal deficit that their tax cut plan has made significantly worse. Senator Bernie Sanders had predicted this outcome when he wrote, "Mark my words. If passed, the Republicans will then rediscover the 'deficit crisis,' and push aggressively for massive cuts in Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education -- higher education in particular -- nutrition, affordable housing and more. They will seek to undo every major piece of legislation passed in the last 80 years designed to help working families, the elderly, the children, the sick and the poor." This is pathological treachery against the American people!

A first instance of coming spending cuts came to light as Republicans were laser focused on ramming through this wrong-headed assembly of shrewdly targeted tax cuts. Nine million children were on the verge of losing their health care because funding had not been re-authorized for the Children's Health Insurance Program, a low-cost health insurance plan for children from low-income families that expired in October 2017. During a debate in early December on the Republican tax bill, Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio asked about the future of this program, and Orrin Hatch of Utah, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee that presided over the tax cut hearings, claimed the program had not been renewed "because we don't have money anymore" -- two weeks BEFORE they finally pushed their tax cuts into law. This sad negligence was occurring even though there was bipartisan support for renewing the program rather than abandoning children. What was happening was that Republicans were again using vulnerable persons as bargaining chips in their winner-take-all gamesmanship.

An advocate for deficit-financed tax cuts, a man who is a smart investment executive of a ultra-high-net-worth wealth management firm, actually asserted that the Tax Cuts bill would not make inequality worse, and he echoed the dubious claim that the plan would prove to be a good thing for most Americans because tens of

millions of Americans have investments in the stock market through their 401(k) retirement plans. But a little research revealed the truth: only 32% of Americans are saving for retirement in a 401(k), and the perception that stock market gains would be broadly shared is misleading. While more than 45% of American households do have direct or indirect investments in the stock market through 401(k)s, mutual funds, trusts, pensions or direct purchases of shares, the top 10% of households own more than 80% of the total value of those investments, while the vast majority of shareholders have relatively meager holdings.

Disaster capitalism, as Naomi Klein sees it in her incisive book *The Shock Doctrine*, is amplifying itself by morphing into the most crazed Trumpian casino capitalism that can plausibly be imagined. It suffers from the fault of being value deficient, due to its astonishingly wasteful materialistic consumer craziness. For whom does the bell toll? It tolls for us all. Let's pay attention! Let's sharpen our wits. Casino Capitalism, Inc. has its doors wide open for speculation, and hubris-filled conservatives are making an all-out gamble that they can get away with engaging in idiotically arrogant overreach by exploiting people and ratcheting up the national debt. Both the intended and unintended consequences will eventually be very ugly.

### Retrogressive Leadership

Think again about Donald Trump's crude efforts to reverse every action taken by President Barack Obama, in what was an apparently reactionary and egomaniacal whim tinged by racial prejudice. Because Trump's actions are so self-centered, self-serving, rashly shortsighted, broadly unjust, ecologically unsound and blatant in their disregard for future well-being, it will be necessary for new leaders sometime soon to responsibly reverse all the inequality-stoking and inequity-stimulating actions imposed on the world by Trump and his crony sycophants in Congress. Their "America First" policies simply give too little respect to other "constituencies", and in effect put life on Earth and the prospects and well-being of all people in future generations last.

Abraham Lincoln echoed the Bible during the Civil War, one of the most divisive times in American history, when he warned that a house divided cannot stand. Today, master dividers wield too much power through election cheating strategies like voter suppression and gerrymandering, and are making stark efforts since the 2020 elections to pass numerous laws in almost every state that would allow legislatures to override the expressed will of the majority of voters. They are trying to abuse power by exerting domineering control over the people and rigging the economy and tax law ever more radically in favor of the few and against the common good. We should, as a consequence, rightly stand up and throw these treacherous politicians out of office, and replace them with leaders who are much more honest, fair-minded, inclusive and justice championing, and who are truly more respectful of women and peaceful coexistence, precautionary principles, protections of a healthy environment and other important values. Moderation in all things!

When the prospects for well-being for every being in future generations are betrayed by greedy apologists for outrageous abusers of power, this is not good. When the common good is undermined through the use of deceitful ideological arguments, this is anti-American. When the schemers who are perpetrating these outrages are working overtime to brazenly grab domineering power, no matter what the cost, and to stack the courts with "conservative" collaborators, these zealots deserve the deep disdain of those who they betray.

Republican politicians, drunk on power and exhibiting coldly calculating hubris, are busy rigging the rules in our country in backwards ways that will reward their generous benefactors. But they are doing this at a terrible cost to the vast majority of Americans, and of all persons in future generations. They are cynically using the slogan "Make America Great Again" and taking outrageous advantage of anti-immigrant fears and antipathies to promote a bait-and-switch agenda, and to deceive their base into supporting anti-egalitarian outcomes.

Instead of promoting truly fair and honorably principled national policies, they are pushing reactionary plans to engineer society into a more repressive one that is inimical to broader personal rights and freedoms, especially for women and people in racial minorities, and immigrants and desperate refugees and asylum seekers. And they are misusing religion and fostering divisive propaganda in order to implement an unacceptably narrow agenda. This is having consequentially detrimental impacts.

Let's not allow these schemers to hijack our emotions and manipulate us so easily, and let us not fall for the

distractions and swindles that corrupt politicians are using to take advantage of the people.

Men's souls are being tried today, as Thomas Paine declared they were during Revolutionary times, and too many of them are being found guilty. Dante regarded fraud and treachery to be the worst of his nine circles of Hell, and if there is a judgmental God, "He" is looking down with burning disapproval upon those who perpetuate highly consequential crimes against humanity, and who betray principles of cohesive Golden Rule fairness, decency and environmental sanity. We are not lost, and we need now to be found; we have been blinded by deceivers, charlatans and demagogues, but now we can see. 'Tis grace that hath brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

#### Postscript One: Meet Some Members of the Kakistocracy

Who were the main members of the misguiding Trump kakistocracy, these members of "the worst or least qualified or most unscrupulous citizens" who were put in positions of power? Let's meet some of them. Among the worst of these characters was the top legal authority in the country in the Department of Justice, Attorney General Jeff Sessions (until he was fired right after the 2018 midterm elections). Sessions apparently lied through his teeth about his and the Trump campaign's collaboration with Russia to throw the election to Trump Republicans. This man was one of the main persons responsible for pushing "zero tolerance" immigration policies. He also offensively wanted to make the costly War on Drugs even harsher, selectively deciding that overreach by the federal government is a good idea, as evidenced by his decision to ratchet up the extremely unjust and oppressive criminalization of the use of cannabis by engaging in a harsh crackdown on existing marijuana laws in states that have legalized it. This is a bizarre inconsistency with what was once a core Republican value of defending states' rights, and it reveals soul-less and unprincipled aspects of the Party. Sessions was also an exceedingly lousy representative of fair criminal justice reform or honestly dealing with racial discrimination inherent in national policies that have made our system of excessive criminalization and mass incarceration extremely unjust.

Jeff Sessions was replaced by Matt Whitaker and then Bill Barr, highlighting another shortcoming of the leadership of the Justice Department: these men acted like their duty was to be loyalists to Trump, rather than properly and honorably representing the American people. Bill Barr deserved to be impeached, but as the November 2020 elections approached, it was an excellent reason to throw Trump Republicans out of power!

Also among the worst members of the kakistocracy are both the current and former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, an agency created through common sense bipartisan agreement during Richard Nixon's years. These sycophants brazenly favor short-term-oriented profiteering by fossil fuel businesses and a rash foisting of costs onto the public. These wide-ranging "cost externalities" include air pollution, water pollution, adverse impacts on millions of people's health, the unsustainable depletion of resources, and spiking costs related to emissions of greenhouse gases and the rapidly worsening conditions being caused by the climate crisis.

These reckless efforts undermine conditions that would help guarantee fairer treatment to young people and all people yet to be born in future generations. In keeping with this misguided ecological policy, the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, favored private education at the expense of more generously funding public education, and showed inadequate concern for the heavy burden of debt imposed on students and their parents due to our system of student loans that have high interest rates and oppressive terms.

The Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin came from a private bank where he became known as an unscrupulous "foreclosure king" for his ruthless actions toward victims of the credit crisis of 2008, and he is one of the drivers behind the highly regressive and fiscally irresponsible tax cut plan that Republicans rammed through into law without any input from representatives of well over half of all Americans who did not vote for them.

Also, it turns out that Wilbur Ross, a billionaire nicknamed "the king of bankruptcy" who had been appointed as Secretary of Commerce, had many conflicts of interest. He suspiciously failed to disclose investments during

his confirmation hearings in a shipping company he once controlled that has significant business ties to the son-in-law of Vladimir Putin and a Russian oligarch who is subject to U.S. sanctions, according to the "Paradise Papers". This leaked trove of more than 7 million internal documents of a Bermuda-based law firm provide "a rare insight into the workings of the global offshore financial world, which is used by many of the world's most powerful companies and government officials to legally avoid paying taxes and to conduct business away from public scrutiny." Where the sun never shines, you can bet the shenanigans are scandalous, and sure enough, more than 120 politicians and royal rulers around the world are identified in the Paradise Papers as having ties to offshore tax havens. Also, Wilbur Ross lied to Congress about his role in a Trump administration effort to add a politically manipulative citizenship question to the 2020 census, according to House Democrats.

Another way that Trump Republicans betrayed the best interests of the vast majority of Americans was by stacking the courts with ideologically extreme "conservative" judges. The Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett Supreme Court is making its impact by siding with amoral corporations over people. And they will no doubt look with narrow favor on things like Republican efforts to strike down a sweeping rule that would have allowed millions of Americans to band together in class-action lawsuits against arbitrary arbitration clauses in all manner of banking and commercial contracts. By forcing people into private arbitration, such clauses in effect take away one of the few tools individuals have to fight predatory and deceptive business practices. Republicans overturned this rule only by having Vice President Mike Pence break a 50-to-50 tie. Their intention is to further loosen regulations on Wall Street and roll back Obama-era policies enacted in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis to protect people. By this action, Republicans were dismantling a major effort of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the watchdog agency created in the aftermath of the mortgage mess.

In the big picture, there is a gaping disconnect between Trump's populist rhetoric and the more conventional reality of how he governed. In signing a bill to kill the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Arbitration Agreements rule, it made it harder for folks who are gouged by big banks or subjected to discrimination to seek redress in the courts. When Trump put Mick Mulvaney, an outspoken opponent to banking regulation, in charge of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, it demonstrated blatant antagonism to the common good. "This is not the type of change most Trump voters were looking for. Perhaps that's why he signed the measure behind closed doors and with no fanfare."

Mick Mulvaney also served as Trump's budget director and acting White House Chief of Staff. So it was particularly onerous to hear him frankly admit that he champions what is in essence corrupt pay-to-play politics. Speaking to a group of executives from the banking industry in April 2018, he made it clear that he planned on helping them financially, and for proof he pointed to his past behavior as a Republican congressman who sold influence to the highest bidders. "We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress," he confessed conspiratorially. "If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you." This was pathetic and alarming!

Trump's Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai tried to kill "net neutrality". This corporate friendly move was contrary to the best interests of the American people. Ajit Pai, a former lawyer for the conglomerate Verizon, tried to change the policies of the Federal Communications Commission to create a more pro-Trump media landscape by pushing through rule changes on media ownership to help right-wing Sinclair Broadcast Group gain an ever-larger monopoly on local television stations around the country.

#### Postscript Two: The Top Ten Worst Aspects of Rogue Republican Rule

1. Arrogant leaders are mindless ramping up assaults on life on Earth, despite the fact that humankind has already been decimating the population of almost all other forms of life on the planet. They are doubling down on plans that have contributed to wiping out more than two-thirds of the populations of 10,000 representative species of mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians and fish, as ominously reported by the World Wildlife Fund in its sadly revelatory and sensational Living Planet Reports.

2. Meanwhile human numbers have more than tripled since 1950, increasing from 2.5 billion to nearly 8 billion today. And yet Republican politicians are making it harder and less affordable for women to get contraceptives,

and they instituted a version of the Global Gag Rule that is monstrously wrongheaded by being much more severe and far-reaching than ever before. In this action, they expanded prohibitions on abortions abroad to make them significantly more onerous than when Ronald Reagan first instituted this rash rule. The population explosion is a driving causative factor behind the shredding of the web of life on Earth, because increasing numbers of people are wreaking damage on wildlife habitats, poisoning ecosystems, changing normal patterns of temperature, precipitation and storm intensity, and altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere and the acidic-alkaline balance of the oceans, and causing sea levels to insidiously and ominously rise.

3. They are pushing policies that serve to squander natural resources at the fastest possible rate without any discernable shred of adequate concern for either sharing the spoils more broadly or conserving these critical resources on behalf of all persons in the future.

4. They are stubbornly refusing to take strong action to reduce carbon emissions or mitigate the increasingly severe damages and risks associated with the worsening climate crisis.

5. They are pushing a variety of scams, schemes and swindles to facilitate the socializing of externalized costs and increase inequalities and concentrate wealth ever more narrowly in the hands of the few. The sordid details of these shrewd ruses and con games are revealed throughout the sensational essays contained in *See Clearly*.

6. They are working to undermine public education, goose private profits and oppose sensible steps to reduce student debts, and failing to strengthen protections of women from sexual assaults.

7. They are trying to maximize profits for the few by rashly undermining sensible protections of Clean Air, Clean Water, public lands, National Parks and Monuments, oceans, Wilderness Areas and endangered species.

8. They are ruthlessly using extremely divisive tactics to gain and maintain power, and abusing this power by disdaining broader efforts to expand inclusivity and social cohesion. Instead of honoring Golden Rule principles of mutual reciprocity and working to achieve common good goals, they are sowing division in order to control and dominate, and they are exploiting resentments, anger, fears, anti-immigrant sentiments and racial biases of their political base to discriminate against almost everyone in the USA who is not a white male.

9. They refuse to take steps to limit access to gun purchases by people on the terrorist watch list or known to be suffering from mental health problems, and they obediently march to the drummer of the NRA, a front group for arms manufacturers and assault weapons pushers. The NRA has nefariously produced a series of rabble-rousing videos using inflammatory rhetoric by a scornful spokesperson named Dana Loesch. These are darkly manipulative videos that seem to be designed to provoke people's fears and hatred of advocates for sensible controls on gun sales, and of protestors in general, and even to incite violence against them.

10. The top priority of Republicans is to cut taxes on corporations instead of more honorably promoting the general welfare or insuring domestic tranquility or leaving a fairer legacy to people in the future. To achieve these tax cuts, which are designed to primarily benefit the rich, they want to slash spending on programs that help old people and poor people and tens of millions of Americans whose voices are being ignored -- programs like Medicare, Medicaid, protections of the environment and a hundred other hallmarks of a civilized society.

History has witnessed Republican politicians trying to gain and maintain power through election skullduggery and catering to the rich and dark money groups. It is becoming clearer that these operatives are overreaching in their efforts to satisfy a driving lust for money and authority through this modern master plan of pandering to a corrupt coalition of corporate crony capitalists and wealthy conservatives, and manipulative demagogues, resentment-filled right-wing populists, religious fundamentalists, anti-choice zealots, white supremacists, male chauvinists, Q-Anon pushers of absurd conspiracy theories, opponents to sensible gun safety regulations, and anti-environmentalists. This is amazingly disgraceful.



## A Bill of Rights for Future Generations

June 1, 2021

"The status quo has many guardians, but the future is an orphan."

--- Timothy Wirth, United Nations Foundation and Better World Fund

Congress passed the original Bill of Rights in 1789 to guarantee essential human rights and personal liberties to the American people. This great Bill of Rights consisted of the first Ten Amendments to the Constitution. As stated in the Preamble to the Bill of Rights, former colonists, weary of despots, expressed an insistent protective desire "to prevent misconstruction or abuse" of the powers of the federal government over its citizens. They viscerally recognized the value of extending "the ground of public confidence in the Government", and sought reassurances in these guarantees that our democracy would generally be directed toward "beneficent ends."

Our Founders gave Congress the power in the Constitution to provide for the "general Welfare". In the long run, the general welfare and the common good are completely dependent on fair institutions, equitable laws, principled social policies, honest economic accounting, sensible fiscal discipline, the conservation of resources and a healthy natural environment. These needs can be satisfied in the long run only by a rigorous framework of respected rights for our descendants in the future. This, salubriously, just happens to coincide with our ultimate human moral imperative.

People tend to compete ruthlessly to gain advantages. Many interest groups seek a variety of goals in our society, and a lot of them strive to get more perks and benefits from the government. Some groups are exceedingly well represented, like rich people and big corporations, while tens of millions of others are miserably poorly represented. The interest groups that are most under-represented in our politics are young people under the age of 18, because they cannot vote -- and every one of the countless multitudes of voiceless persons to be born in the future.

This disenfranchisement results in extreme inequities and injustices. It is our ethical obligation to collectively make an overarching commitment to fairer guiding principles in the form of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

"Each generation, sharing in the heritage of the Earth, has a duty as trustee for future generations to prevent irreversible and irreparable harm to life on Earth and to human freedom and dignity."

--- Jacques-Yves Cousteau

Let us eat the fruit of one of those sublime Trees of the Awareness of Right and Wrong, and share it universally, and acknowledge together that the ultimate moral good is to leave a fairer legacy to our descendants in the future than current trends portend.

Today, let us be mindful of the fact that the well-being of all people in the future is seriously threatened by extremely short-term-oriented activities and present-day expedencies, and by excessive consumerism and the rashly profligate greed-driven exploitation of natural resources. This new Bill of Rights should be designed to ensure that the legacy we leave to all persons in the future will be one of reasonable prospects for health,

prosperity, financial security, dignity and a fair quality of life. And this Bill of Rights should help prevent damages to our home planet's vital biosphere and ecosystems that are causing numerous species of life to be driven toward eternal extinction.

To make it clear that we are vitally committed to the greater good in the long run, Congress and leaders in nations worldwide should "pay forward" some good deeds by ratifying this new Bill of Rights. This is how we will improve the prospects of leaving a livable world to our children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs to the Seventh Generation, and beyond. This Bill of Rights could propitiously provide better confidence and trust in our governing institutions -- by succeeding in keeping system-rigging scoundrels in check, along with their influence abusing enablers.

"The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."

--- Theodore Roosevelt

## PROPOSED BILL OF RIGHTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS:

### Article 1. Sustainable Resource Use

Enact an Ecological Sanity Initiative that includes powerful incentives and smart green fees designed to encourage a cleaner energy regime, resource conservation, sustainable agriculture, healthier forests, reduced reliance on non-renewable resources, good protections of Clean Air and fresh water supplies, robust fisheries, the preservation of biological diversity, urban renewal, and beneficial protections of open spaces, parks, National Forests, BLM lands and wilderness areas. This Initiative should give priority to safeguarding the health of natural ecosystems and the crucially valuable services they provide to humanity. This goal would best be achieved by investing in stronger protections of public lands, national forests, wetlands, marine sanctuaries and other wildlife habitats, and by striving to restore the resilience and symbiosis inherent in healthy biological diversity.

Conservatives should naturally ally themselves with those who champion the conservation of resources. But instead, these folks tend to be looking backwards and throwing their lot in with right-wing authoritarian politicians whose top priority is to gain narrow advantages for themselves while imposing more oppressive control over others. To achieve these goals, they are treacherously willing to deny scientific facts and act in ways certain to be harmful to people in the future, and to evade individual responsibility for their harmful impacts and the broadly detrimental influence of their overly selfish agenda.

This Ecological Sanity Initiative would salubriously have 12 primary provisions, as enumerated in *Three Bills of Right: A Triumvirate of Responsible Actions for the Greater Good*. See this essay in the Earth Manifesto online, or in *Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews - Book Five of the Earth Manifesto*.

### Article 2. Prevention of Anthropogenic Climate Disruption

Levy a cost on carbon emissions to deal with the adverse impacts of global warming caused by greenhouse gases, and of related changes in storm intensity and patterns of weather, temperatures and precipitation. Create a progressive plan by fully offsetting the higher costs to everyone in the bottom 50%. And use funds generated by this plan for two primary purposes: first, to create a "rainy day fund" that covers the costs of natural disasters associated with climate disruptions, including intensified and more frequent hurricanes, floods, droughts, destructive wildfires, heat waves, cold snaps, ocean acidification and sea level rises; and second, to provide generous financing for the incipient and necessary 'green transition' to a cleaner and more renewable energy future.

Remember: "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and the planet."

### Article 3. Pollution Control and Mitigation

Require corporations that pollute rivers, lakes, oceans and the atmosphere to pay for prevention and mitigation measures to offset the harmful impacts caused by their polluting activities. These costs should be included in prices of all products and services, rather than being allowed to be externalized onto the public and persons in the future. Strong and effective steps should furthermore be taken to ensure that big corporations and governments adhere to precautionary principles that require cost-effective measures to be implemented to prevent the degradation of the environmental commons.

"As people alive today, we must consider future generations. A clean environment is a human right like any other. It is therefore part of our responsibility toward others to ensure that the world we pass on is as healthy, if not healthier, than we found it."

--- The Dalai Lama

#### Article 4. Peaceful Coexistence

Strengthen international institutions to build peace between nations, and to prevent violent conflicts between countries over resources. Finance this effort to minimize wars by levying a surcharge on all U.S. sales of arms abroad. Target this surcharge to raise a total \$100 billion per year. Also, seek to ratify nuclear arms control agreements with other nations, and dial down belligerence toward other countries like North Korea and Iran.

#### Article 5. Sensible Family Planning and Women's Reproductive Healthcare

Significantly increase funding at home and abroad for women's healthcare clinics, family planning services, AIDS prevention, and free contraceptives for all women and men who want them. Support sex education programs that are truly comprehensive, and make sure they are medically accurate and socially sensible so that they will be successful in preventing sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted teen pregnancies.

Honor the primacy of ORIGINAL CHOICE. At some point in human history, after thousands of generations of evolution, a realization dawned on females that there is a direct correlation between a sex act with a specific male and the birth of a baby 9 moons later. This awareness altered instinctive drives, and motivated females to become much choosier about what male they would accept as a mate. Dr. Leonard Shlain labeled this biological prerogative "Original Choice" in his fascinating book *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*.

This Original Choice cannot now be overridden by social conservatives who want to deprive women of any right to get a safe and legal abortion, even if the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest. This hubristic prohibition deprives females of agency over their lives and their destinies.

See that the Roe vs. Wade ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 was an eminently reasonable decision that established a fair balance between the natural rights of females to exert a measure of control in their own lives and an implied right of a fertilized egg and incipient clump of cells to be nurtured until it becomes viable. The revolution wrought by the birth control pill and the morning after pill in the 1960s altered the "dance of selves in relationship", causing women's liberation movements to blossom, and social reactionaries cannot now be allowed to turn back time and ruthlessly impose the hegemony of their false moralities on females.

By the end of their childbearing years, something like one out of every seven U.S. women in current times will have never had any kids. Think about these women. A good portion of them freely choose to never reproduce, so it is particularly offensive to have dogmatic "be fruitful and multiply" Bible believers come along and insinuate themselves into power, and then conspire to force women to have a child she does not want. This is wrong!

Making matters worse, "conservatives" have clearly used this emotion-hijacking hot button issue to galvanize zealous support from single-issue anti-choice voters, and pathologically parlayed this subterfuge into rationalizations for structural gender discrimination, concerted efforts to undermine democratic fairness, flagrant abuses of power, wealth concentrating scams, an overly harsh war on the poor, scandalously corrupt governance, national debt swindles, vast cost externalizing schemes, and ominously consequential justifications for sacrificing the environment and the biosphere on the altar of greed and profligacy.



"Freedom is not license but responsibility -- the gift we have received and the legacy we must bequeath. Although our sojourn in life is brief, we are on a great journey. For those who came before us -- and for those who will follow -- our moral, political and religious duty is to make sure that this nation, which was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are equal under the law, is in good hands on our watch."

--- The honorable journalist Bill Moyers

Aretha Franklin soulfully sang out, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find out what it means to me!" See Postscript for critical perspective.

#### Article 6. Stabilization of the National Debt

Prevent the federal government from using the expediency of deficit spending to mortgage the future. People today should not be allowed to saddle future generations with high interest cost obligations on rapidly accumulating sums of borrowed money. This goal should be accomplished by establishing an effective mechanism that reduces the U.S. national debt to less than 100% of annual GDP, as it had been from a few years after the end of World War II until recently. Such a proposal is outlined in a Balanced Budget Initiative proposed in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*. This initiative would have a profound influence on the primary drivers of our national policies -- rich people and giant corporations -- by pressuring them to SEEK COMMON CAUSE with the American people rather than being stubbornly opposed to equitable and sensible solutions to our daunting budgetary challenges.

A significantly positive impact could also be achieved by implementing the proposals made in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues*. These proposals contain detailed plans on how we can help solve our tax, budget deficit, Social Security and healthcare challenges.

#### Article 7. Social, Environmental and Intergenerational Justice

Increase the fairness of economic opportunity and security for all people by creating a more level playing field in our currently winner-take-all societies. This would have a collateral benefit of reducing desperation, crime and the costs of mass incarceration. Also, improve environment justice to assure that the disadvantaged poor do not bear such undue burdens of exposure to toxic wastes, air pollution, environmental damages and "natural disasters" that are being exacerbated by climate change. Provide fairer treatment and generous foreign aid to people in developing countries around the world to mitigate harms caused by excessive profiteering by multinational corporations. Ratify this Bill of Rights for Future Generations -- in the United States and in countries worldwide -- in order to protect the interests of those in the future from need-driven and mindlessly materialistic and irresponsibly greed-driven consumerism.

#### Conclusion

OK, here's the deal. We Americans supposedly have the right to choose good governance that truly represents government "of the people, by the people and for the people." And we should demand that the leaders we choose genuinely represent us, and demonstrate greater concern for liberty and justice for all. Let's act to make ours a nation united, indivisible, rather than one whose citizens are divided against each other by master manipulators who exploit antagonisms and resentments to take advantage of circumstances for their own personal gain.

Social cohesion is a public good, and when prosperity is more broadly shared, that is the surest path for creating unifying bonds. The sad nature of the deeply corrupt status quo is proof that our representatives care more for their own ambitions (and wealth) than for the public good. Elections have consequences. Let's choose more wisely! And the citizenry should be alert to scams and swindles and public graft, and foreign intrigue treachery. The time has come for a radical revolution of values, informed by a strong commitment to this Bill of Rights for Future Generations!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain    June 1, 2021 (See important expansive Rationalizing Reasoning to this essay online.)



## One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies

Earth Manifesto proposals by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
October 2017, with updates in through June 21, 2020

Professor Jared Diamond made a valuable observation in his insightful book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. He wrote that we need a paradigm shift in how our leaders think and act. America needs leaders with "the courage to practice long-term thinking and make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions." We should rightly give stronger support to honest and effective leaders who will act accordingly!

We need leaders who are sane, decent, compassionate, responsible and committed to leaving a healthier legacy of a sustainable future for our children and theirs, and theirs, for countless generations to come. We need good leaders who understand human nature and motivations and needs, and who work with this knowledge to achieve greater good goals. Even before the pandemic, humanity has been facing an existential crisis in the world due to a convergence of serious challenges that include the inexorable exhaustion of natural resources, the encroaching condition of a diminishing carrying capacity of the Earth to provide for a human population approaching 8 billion persons, millions of species of life being threatened with eternal extinction, the global climate being dangerously destabilized, and other adversities being caused by ecological overshoot by our needy and greedy kind.

When good sense prevails, moderate leaders pass fair-minded reforms, but when rashly uncompromising courses are pursued, bitter discord can result in protracted class conflicts and serious civil strife. Recognizing that a greater modicum of social justice is required to improve social cohesion and create more peaceable coexistence, the twelve detailed proposals that follow should be formalized by our representatives to create a healthier, more secure and more sustainable society. These are, in effect, needed social insurance policies that are surprisingly affordable -- and vastly preferable to stimulated inequality, antagonistic conflict and chaotic instability.

The gap between the wealthiest Americans and the poorest is wider in the USA today than it has been since the Roaring Twenties or the tawdry Gilded Age before it, with their excessive conspicuous consumption and greedy robber barons. The richest 20 Americans have more wealth right now than the bottom 50% combined, and the top 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 90%. *The Lessons of History* teach us that such a condition of really excessive concentrated wealth creates an increasingly critical situation that should be addressed by enacting laws that make our society significantly fairer. Otherwise, social strife and revolutionary fervor will likely create a redistribution of poverty and insecurity for all, according to the philosophic historians Will and Ariel Durant.

Laudable pro-democracy movements since colonial days around the world have given broader freedoms to billions of people, and it is sad that ambitious and corrupt politicians are now trying to drive this movement in reverse. It is becoming too risky to allow politics-as-usual to be perpetuated without far-reaching reforms, or to accept any further steps backwards. What the world really needs now is farsighted, forward thinking and inclusive-minded collaborative problem solving, not leaders who exploit anti-immigrant sentiments and engage in emotion-hijacking fear-mongering demagoguery to gain and abuse power in ways that are deceitful, discriminatory, anti-egalitarian, retrogressive and repressive. We should strongly support representatives who champion truly civilizing forces of fair trade, democratic governance and fair-minded principles, and reject leaders who are dangerously reactive

and authoritarian. There are already far too many plutocratic and oligarchic, totalitarian and dictatorial governments ruling in countries around the planet, like in Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the Philippines, China, India, Poland, Hungary -- and the United States.

These proposals are set forth to honor the hopes and prospects of humankind for fairer and saner societies. These ideas would help create a real Better Deal that would make all Americans more secure, and would work better for all, not just those who are the most privileged. These ideas should be regarded as well-considered ideas of a relatively objective observer, and a providential example of the "straggling thoughts of individuals" that Thomas Paine referred to when he offered his cogent ideas in *Common Sense*, as the basis for wise and able leaders to use in creating a fairer new form of governance.

These plans are particularly important in the USA today due to the terribly backwards, anti-progressive, anti-Black, anti-egalitarian and anti-inclusive directions in which our corrupt "conservative" leaders are driving us.

To Do the Right Thing, or Not To Do the Right Thing, THAT is the Question!

"Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person;  
my country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

--- Thomas Paine

1. MIDDLE CLASS FAIRNESS. Strengthen and expand the middle class and improve opportunities for social mobility. To do this, commitments should be renewed to policies that benefit the majority of people, not just policies that mostly benefit rich people. The health and well-being of the middle class and the poor have been significantly undermined in recent decades by unfairly regressive tax and spending policies. To strengthen this vital segment of American society, we must once again implement strategies that helped build the middle class in the first place: (a) govern Big Business so that it primarily benefits "We the People", not just CEOs, investors and wealthy people; (b) create a social safety net of universal healthcare, and reduce the severe inequities that currently exist in medical care; (c) enact and enforce laws that give workers more influence in their struggle against the abuses of capital; (d) make higher education more affordable for everyone by providing cheaper financing and an expansive program similar to the G.I. Bill after World War II; (e) invest more money in improving our nation's crumbling physical infrastructure, and less in a bloated military; (f) restore taxation that is more progressively structured; and (g) provide for a true Social Security retirement insurance program that protects retirees from having their payroll taxes squandered by the government.

To finance this providential plan, assess a 2020 Excess Profits Tax on every company making more than 112% of the profits they made last year. Design the plan with steeply graduated rates. This will help ensure that we do not treat people in the future "meanly and pitifully", as Thomas Paine put it in *Common Sense* by "running the next generation into debt" to solve the problems of today. This would make the plan truly fiscally responsible.

2. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN. Implement an immediately effective Climate Action Plan to address the unfolding climate crisis by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Assess a Pigouvian Green Fee of \$1 per gallon on every gallon of gasoline sold. Design this Green Fee on usages of fossil fuels so that it will gain broadly-based support by because it is progressive, beneficially egalitarian and eminently fair. Ensure that this will actually make the bottom half of people in our society a bit better off financially, through fee-and-dividend provisions. This Green Fee plan will thus avoid opposition to increased fuel taxes like that experienced in France by people in the Yellow Vest movement.

Use some of the money generated to invest in cleaner energy alternatives, which fortuitously happen to be indefinitely renewable instead of being limited in global reserves and tragically harmful in use.

This fee-and-dividend feature could resemble that proposed by the Citizens Climate Lobby, which would make the bottom 50% of the populace better off with the dividends they will receive in excess of the cost of carbon taxes incurred for an average usage of gasoline. Also dedicate funding for relief and recovery efforts from natural disasters around the globe that are becoming more and more costly as increasing numbers of people are in harms way, and as more extreme weather events are taking place with increasing frequency, intensity and

disastrous potential, due to the destabilizing impacts of atmospheric greenhouse gases on the global climate and communities worldwide.

This plan will serve providential purposes and have a dramatic positive effect by reducing the use of fossil fuels because the higher cost of oil will stimulate large investments in conservation, improved energy efficiency and clean energy alternatives. If such a plan had been put into effect in 2016, it would have raised about \$125 billion on the 3.2 trillion vehicle miles driven in the U.S. (in total during the year), assuming an average mileage of 25 mpg. The projected \$125 billion in revenues generated from this green fee should be allocated as follows:

(2A) Give a new tax credit of \$500 per household to everyone filing a tax return that has a net income of less than \$75,000. This allowance will offset the higher cost of gasoline for these people to drive 12,000 miles per year at an average 25 miles per gallon, plus a \$100 bonus for supporting the implementation of this new Good Deal plan. For those who don't drive, or drive less than 12,000 miles per year, or get better gas mileage, then "bully for you"! Keep the tax credit, and thanks from everyone for contributing less to traffic woes and excessive emissions. Annual allocation: \$50 billion.

(2B) Invest enough money in carbon-offset programs to make the USA carbon neutral for all miles driven each year. It will cost just 9 cents of the \$1 Green Fee per gallon for the USA to go "carbon neutral" by investing in carbon-offset programs. This will help the USA move toward independence from its addiction to the finite existing amounts of non-renewable fossil fuels, which happen to be odiously polluting when burned, in addition to being climate destabilizing. Model this program on the outstanding organization Cool Effect, which that offers a dozen specific carbon reduction projects around the world, some of which have marvelous win/win collateral outcomes such as dramatically improving the respiratory health of thousands of appreciative people in Uganda who are given cleaner energy cook stoves for preparing their meals. Annual allocation: \$12 billion.

(2C) Make investments in good public transportation, clean energy innovation, and subsidized international sharing of the latest and best technologies for renewable energy alternatives and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, along with better protections of tropical and temperate forests worldwide. Invest \$12 billion each year under this program.

(2D) Make contributions to a Climate Disaster Relief Fund and the Green Climate Fund to pay for some of the costs of weather-related disasters both in the U.S. and abroad, as advocated by the "Group of 77" developing nations (established in 1964 -- it currently includes 135 countries). Poor countries in the developing world have a persuasive argument when they assert that richer developed nations have a moral obligation to shoulder more of the costs of extreme hardships being suffered due to climate disasters in their countries. These natural disasters include more powerful hurricanes, typhoons and tornadoes, torrential rains, coastal flooding, heat waves, disappearing arable lands, intensifying wildfires, and expanding desertification. Rich countries, after all, have spewed the most emissions into the atmosphere in the last 150 years, and thereby have contributed most to the accelerating climate crisis. Invest \$40 billion each year in this program.

(2E) Increase U.S. investments in humanitarian foreign aid, and in international family planning programs and women's health clinics worldwide. Invest \$12 billion each year in these programs. Cost summary:

#### Green Fee Investment Recap

Tax credits to offset higher gasoline taxes	\$ 50 billion
Carbon offsets to make the USA carbon neutral for all vehicles	12 billion
Investments in green technologies and reforestation	12 billion
Weather disaster relief funding for people in communities worldwide	40 billion
Foreign aid, family planning programs and women's health clinics	<u>12 billion</u>
Total (rounded)	<u>\$ 125 billion</u>

3. FAIR TAXATION INITIATIVE. Give every taxpayer a tax cut on their first \$75,000 of income by making our system of taxation more steeply graduated. Offset the reduced revenues caused by this change with increases in taxes on all higher levels of income. In keeping with the sensible compromise of the wise ancient Greek lawmaker Solon, the incomes of the wealthiest people should be taxed at rates that are 12 times the rates on the lowest income taxpayers. Calibrate this reform to ensure that it generates enough revenue to balance the budget and not add to the national debt in normal non-pandemic years.

It should be recognized that lower tax rates on the first \$75,000 of net income for every taxpayer are very fair because they give tax cuts to each and every taxpayer. The rates on incomes over \$151,900 that are proposed below are higher, but they are still a relatively good deal for high-income earners, considering that the top rate was at least 70% for every single year from 1936 to 1981. During that period, broadly shared prosperity prevailed, and the rate of economic growth was much higher than in the years since then. This may be a surprise, and it refutes the trickle-down propaganda that rationalizes regressive changes in taxes as being desirable because they supposedly contribute to stronger economic growth. (The top tax rate in 1980 was 70% on all incomes over \$600,000 in current dollars. The lower 60% rate proposed below generously applies only on incomes over \$25 million.)

These egalitarian changes in tax tables could be called the **Social Justice Taxation Act**. Here is a providential recommendation for this restructuring of income tax rates:

<u>Taxable Income</u>	<u>2016 Federal Tax Rates on Net Income *</u>	<u>Proposed 2020 Federal Tax Rates on Net Income *</u>	<u>Net Change</u>
\$ 0 to \$ 18,550	10%	5%	Lower by 5%
\$ 18,551 to \$ 75,300	15%	12%	Lower by 3%
\$ 75,301 to \$ 151,900	25%	25%	Unchanged
\$ 151,901 to \$ 231,450	28%	30%	Higher by 2%
\$ 231,451 to \$ 250,000	33%	36%	Higher by 3%
\$ 250,001 to \$ 413,350	33%	38%	Higher by 5%
\$ 413,351 to \$ 466,950	35%	40%	Higher by 5%
\$ 466,951 to \$ 1,000,000	39.6%	45%	Higher by 5.4%
\$ 1,000,000 to \$ 25,000,000	39.6%	48%	Higher by 8.4%
\$ 25,000,000 and above	39.6%	60%	Higher by 20.4%

\* Note: These rates are for people who have the status of "Married, Filing Jointly". The Tax Tables should be adjusted in a consistent manner for all the current categories of taxpayers.

Taxes on capital gains and on heir's inheritances from rich parents should also be revised to be more steeply graduated. Here is an Estate Tax reform proposal: Allow a generous exclusion of a non-taxable amount for each estate of \$2,500,000. For estates worth more than \$2.5 million, a 30% tax should be assessed on the amount of estates between \$2.5 million and \$5 million, 40% on amounts between \$5 million and \$10 million, 50% on those amounts between \$10 million and \$25 million, and 60% on any amounts in excess of \$25 million.

Three other strategies should be used to ensure that tax inequities are reduced, as adduced in *Three Bills of Right - A Triumvirate of Responsible Actions for the Greater Good*. These include: (1) the elimination of tax loopholes that allow giant corporations to evade tens of billions of dollars in U.S. federal income taxes each year; (2) a new requirement for hedge fund managers to finally pay taxes at regular rates instead of ridiculously low capital gains rates; and (3) a reduction in tax advantages that investors receive for dividend income and capital gains in excess of \$12,000 in any given year.

This tax reform plan should be designed to result in a net increase in tax revenues that would generate \$50 billion per year to be used to reduce social and environmental injustices that exist in our society today. Provisions should be included that will prevent costs from being externalized onto society that are creating terribly harmful environmental injustices against poor people and minority communities. Wasteful spending should be cut from the military budget, and anything suspiciously like price gouging contracting or crony capitalist pork barrel spending should be better controlled. Corporate welfare subsidies should be eliminated, and bureaucratic red tape should be evaluated and streamlined, consistent with long-term greater good values.

4. **ECOLOGICAL SANITY.** Make a revolutionary commitment to sustainable existence and a better quality of life for people today and in the future. To accomplish this goal, a farsighted Ecological Balance Initiative should be enacted that gives higher priority to smart ideas like those articulated in *Three Bills of Right*.

5. **ETHICAL POLITICS.** Politicians and our government should be made more responsive to the needs of the people, and to the longer term greater good of the largest number of people over the longest period of time. One way to accomplish this would be to enact effective campaign finance reforms to reduce the corrupting influence of Big Money in our elections and in the lobbying of our representatives in Congress. We should put into effect publicly financed "Clean Money, Clean Election" legislation nationwide. Additionally, Congressional district lines for all gerrymandered districts should be redrawn by independent people or politically balanced commissions before the 2020 elections, because extreme gerrymandering in the 21st century has given unfair over-representation to conservative partisans who completely control the redistributing process in more than half the U.S. states. Such exercises of extreme partisanship in drawing gerrymandered congressional districts are done to disenfranchise the majority of Americans, so they are egregious abuses of power.

Truly bipartisan initiatives should be implemented to reduce the influence of *Dark Money* and institutionalized bribery. In addition, a far-reaching Government Ethics Act should be enacted to prevent politicians in Congress and the White House from engaging in shady dealings and conflicts of interest in our Crazytown capitol, with its unconscionably proliferating "culture of corruption". Perverse incentives and wrongheaded subsidies should be eliminated. The overarching power that big corporations have in Congress should be reduced, as advocated by the sensible Move to Amend Coalition. And the interests of workers, women, children, minorities, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and future generations should be more strongly protected.

Our American democracy should also be strengthened by ensuring greater media diversity, and by protecting voting rights, and by reducing influence-peddling scams and wanton profiteering schemes. Deceptive practices, rash risk-taking, favoritism for the rich, crony conspiracies, short-term-oriented profiteering, media manipulation, nepotism and outright fraud should be more effectively constrained.

6. **CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS.** Our Constitution and its checks and balances should be defended from excessive infringements by the Executive Branch. The responsibilities of Congress and the civil liberties of citizens must not be unreasonably curtailed by aggressive expansions in the power of the Presidency, and the current administration must be forced to comply with subpoenas.

Also, Congress should start abiding by the Constitution in matters of war, as set forth in Article I, Section 8, Clause 11, which gives Congress, and only Congress, the power to declare war. The President is not given this power; the Constitution gives the President the power to direct the military after Congress declares war, in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief. Congress has been derelict in its War Powers responsibility ever since the last time they actually did declare war, right after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor. The good reason this provision was established by our Founders was to avoid undesirable foreign entanglements, and to ensure that the President does not get the country into a war without public debate or broad assessments of ramifications, consequences and risks. In our political duopoly system, our elected representatives have deferred to the president in many wars, like those in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, and done so out of expediency and cowardice, and for one overriding unprincipled principal purpose -- profiteering! Follow the money!!

Citizens should be assured of reasonable privacy protections, and unwarranted secrecy should yield to greater openness. Those who exploit public fears and anxieties to divide people, and who gain power using treacherous deceit and misleading propaganda, should not be allowed to rule despotically, or to suppress dissent. Rampant spying on the American people with warrantless monitoring of communications should be curtailed. Violations of international treaties on torture should be renounced, and any future uses of "extraordinary renditions" of prisoners to offshore prisons should be prohibited. Secret military tribunals, the abridgement of habeas corpus rights, the obstruction of oversight and investigations, and disdain for human rights should be circumvented, and the military prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba should be closed.

**7. A VIBRANT AND SOUND ECONOMY.** Protect the economy by sensibly regulating banks and the financial industry to prevent harms done by overly risky speculation, debt leveraging, corporate conglomeration, and unchecked conflicts of interest. It is high time that the unaccountable power of big corporate entities is more intelligently limited, and that loopholes are closed and deregulatory improprieties reversed that allow corporations to evade paying taxes and externalize costs and risks onto society. Broadly shared prosperity should be promoted, and effective steps should be taken to reduce the concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of the few. Stronger efforts should be made to prevent abuses of power and excessive privileges for insiders and cronies. Our leaders should adhere to economically sound policies, and adopt auspicious innovative ideas. Sensible public investments and greater transparency should be encouraged. Human concerns and ecological values, not profits alone, should be given serious consideration in all economic decisions.

The overarching goal of the economy should be economic justice and farsighted environmental policies and the sustainability of our aggregate activities. We should stop pandering so exclusively to wealthy people and CEOs, speculators, economic fundamentalists, the reactionary religious right, investors, war profiteers, polluters and stock market beneficiaries who often oppose common sense regulations, oversight and accountability. Trends in our society and government should be reversed when they create serious systemic risks, such as highly leveraged speculation, fraudulent swindles, fiscal irresponsibility, deceptive and discriminatory practices, dishonesty, and extreme partisanship. Government bailouts should be used only to safeguard the greater interests of the mainstream public, and not mainly the interests of investors and Wall Street banks. All economic stimulus and recovery efforts should contain just provisions and ecologically sound plans.

The practice of maximizing profits by externalizing costs onto society should be constrained to help prevent serious misallocations of resources. Here is a fair recommendation for how to immediately begin accounting for real costs that are being unfairly and irresponsibly externalized onto society. An estimated \$400 billion in costs are being incurred in the U.S. every year related to pollution, respiratory diseases (before COVID-19), toxic wastes, harms to the environment, and natural disasters like intensifying storms, heat waves, wildfires, flooding and crop failures -- which are being made worse by global warming-exacerbated changes in natural weather patterns. This \$400 billion represents about 2% of the annual U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

**Proposal:** Establish a Future Viability Assessment on all products and services. This action would require real costs to be included where they should properly be reflected. This should be done on a progressive scale with higher assessments for polluting industries that are involved in unsustainable practices, and lower assessments for greener industries. All industries should be classified by a panel of independent-minded economists according to the degree the industries contribute to unsustainable production and consumption. For instance, the most polluting industries should be required to pay a 4% assessment, while the greenest industries would be charged a 0% assessment. Deal with the regressive impact of resulting price inflation on people who are least able to afford it by partially offsetting the higher costs by giving a new \$300 tax credit annually to every American taxpayer. This would offset the 2% higher costs on every taxpayer's first \$15,000 of spending.

Use the funds generated from this Future Viability Assessment to invest in pollution prevention and mitigation activities, cleaning-up pollution and toxic wastes, covering medical costs related to asthma and other health adversities caused by environmental damages, and making efforts to mitigate costs associated with climate change impacts and correlated natural disasters. Also, create more robust protections of forests, wetlands, rivers, oceans, coral reef communities, fresh water resources, National Parks, open spaces and wilderness areas.

**8. BALANCED BUDGETS INITIATIVE.** Stop the federal government from recklessly indulging in the short-term expediency of borrowing enormous amounts of money to squander it on tax breaks for rich people, ramping up military spending, financing pandemic relief measures and bailing out big businesses. Make a binding commitment to reduce the spiraling use of debt, and to stop the lavish waste of taxpayer funds and borrowed money. To achieve this positive goal, a new mechanism should be established that that will be effective in discouraging our expedient inclination to live beyond our means. We should create a Fiscal Responsibility Act that will force lawmakers and the executive branch to set honest priorities and end shortsighted government



"borrow-and-spend" tactics that result in wasteful spending on pork barrel-like projects or misguided subsidies and socially irresponsible profiteering, as well as on wars of aggression and unaffordable entitlements.

The following five-year plan is proposed to begin on January 1, 2021, as clarity over pandemic debt comes into focus. This plan would be effective because it would give powerful motives to the primary deciders in our system -- wealthy people and big corporations -- to support annual budgets that are more nearly balanced. This plan should be implemented gradually over the next four fiscal years according to a fair-minded methodology: Require Big Businesses and the highest income earners to be assessed for federal deficits at the end of every fiscal year. For the fiscal year running from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021, assess 25% of any federal budget deficit as follows: half of this obligation will be assessed to businesses that earn net incomes of more than \$1 million, and the other half will be assessed to individuals with taxable incomes above \$1 million. Allocate these assessments on a progressive scale with higher percentages for higher incomes. Then, in the following fiscal year, assess 50% of any deficits using the same methodology; and in the year after that, assess 75%, and then 100% of any such deficits.

This plan will give the powerful vested interests that have been primary beneficiaries of the short-term-oriented and irresponsible expediency of mortgaging the future for narrow benefits a powerful motive to step forward to make our system eminently fairer. This plan would cause these interest groups to shift from supporting deficit spending to finding much better ways of balancing government revenues and spending, and would topple the hegemony of power-abusers vested in the current status quo.

9. WAR AND PEACE. Only with truer justice will we have greater peace, at home and abroad. Our political representatives should courageously commit the United States to peaceful diplomatic resolutions of conflicts between all nations in the world. We need to pursue foreign policies that enhance mutual security for all, and that respect the sovereignty of other nations. We should reject wars for oil and other resources. Effective ways should be found to prevent military aggression, preemptive warfare and endless military occupations of other countries. Policy deciders should be prevented from waging wars to divert attention and money from domestic problems. We can't allow power to be rashly abused under the guise of a misleading and false national security. The use of sovereignty-violating unmanned drone aircraft armed with Hellfire missiles should be more strictly restrained. These supersonic missiles strike targets before the sound of their approach reaches their victims, and kill many innocent persons.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the war hero of World War II and U.S. President from 1956 to 1961, warned Americans about the military-industrial complex and the "disastrous rise of misplaced power". He emphatically and wisely counseled: "Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together." Security and liberty prospering together is good!

Full funding should be restored to State Department diplomacy missions, and a Cabinet-level Department of Peace should be created to promote collaborative problem solving and smart statesmanship on the international stage. This would help responsibly resolve current armed conflicts and prevent ones in the future. Stronger international institutions, agreements and laws should be supported to prevent wars, torture and genocide.

A summit of Middle East countries should be convened to develop good ways for solving conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen so as to be likely to ensure that these nations do not become failed states. A bold new plan should be developed to guarantee a safe homeland for Palestinians, and to make sure peaceful coexistence with Israel is assured. An initiative should be launched to reduce the influence of radical extremism and reactionary fundamentalism in religions worldwide. International social justice, sustainable development and human rights should be promoted as top priorities, along with these proposed peace-building initiatives. Significant taxes should be levied on all sales of guns, ammunition and military weapons, with funds generated by these taxes to be used to create fairer societies and to engage in proactive peace-building programs.

10. HONEST ACCOUNTING. Require the General Accounting Office to improve internal controls and accounting and reporting practices, with the goal of having an unqualified audit opinion rendered on the federal



government to Congress and the American people. This audit opinion should certify that the financial statements of the federal government are fairly stated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. In connection with this audit, the GAO (or newly-created civil Grand Juries of distinguished and responsible citizens) should be empowered to make recommendations designed to make government spending -- and Defense Department spending in particular -- better controlled and more frugal, honest and accountable.

11. **FAIR AND EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS.** Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to give equal rights to women and men. The ERA was first proposed in 1923, and was once ratified by 35 of the necessary 38 states (3/4 of the 50 states). This cornerstone of fairness should be incorporated into our great U.S. Constitution. Likewise, a new Constitutional Amendment should be created to give gay men and lesbian women fairer treatment, equal civil rights, and reasonable protections under the law. And sensible and comprehensive immigration reforms should be formulated instead of politicizing the issue. And the Constitution should be strengthened to make clear our common agreement that no Church should be able to impose its parochial dogmas on society, and that the First Amendment guarantees are strongly established that ensure a separation between Church and State.

12. **POPULATION GROWTH.** One of the fundamental contributing factors to all our social and environmental problems, and to many of the conflicts in the world, is the surging number of human beings on Earth. Global human population growth needs to be reduced from its current net increase of more than 70 million people every year. To accomplish this, we should provide free contraceptives to women everywhere who want them, including emergency "morning after pills", so that the incidence of both unwanted pregnancies and abortions will be reduced. Better education is needed, along with expanded opportunities for girls and women worldwide. Women's healthcare clinics should be established and generously funded. Initiatives like this would have a great humanitarian collateral benefit of reducing cervical cancer and the transmission of sexually-transmitted diseases like AIDS. Steps should be taken to ensure that the 'Global Gag Rule' never again restricts U.S. support for family planning programs abroad, and the U.S. should double its modest annual contributions to the United Nations Population Fund. Women should be guaranteed the right to make their own personal reproductive choices. Women who do not want children must not be forced to have them. To codify this fair-minded goal, an Amendment to the U.S. Constitution should be enacted that establishes reproductive rights for women, and follows the practical precedent of unrestricted rights for a safe abortion during the first trimester of any pregnancy, as set forth by the Supreme Court in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973.

### Concluding Commentary

To accomplish these twelve big initiatives, *We the People* must demand new political leaders who act as fair-minded, reasonable and honorable representatives of the broadest interests of the American people. Politicians should be expected to keep the best interests of all people foremost in mind in every policy-making consideration. Effective changes need to be made to our political system to staunch the excessive influence of Big Money, and of public trust-betraying wealthy "conservatives". We must take back control of our government from those who represent outsized privileges for rich people, CEOs, war profiteers, polluters, deceitful demagogues, and the reactionary religious right. We should rightly honor and demand greater honesty, and deny power to Machiavellian politicians who intentionally lie to people for personal gain, and who stoke their insecurities, amp up their resentments and take unfair advantage of their fears. We should choose leaders who promote policies that are fiscally responsible and more egalitarian, and who oppose discrimination against people in minority groups, or who espouse exceedingly harsh approaches to vulnerable immigrants and asylum seekers. These leaders should honestly avoid authoritarian abuses of power and unjust military interventions, and reject ecologically unwise courses of action.

When many of these words were first written, this last paragraph concluded, "Specifically, Donald Trump and his grotesque tactics should be soundly defeated in his bid for power in the November 2016 elections." In the chaotic aftermath of the illegitimate Trump/Pence coup, responsible and patriotic folks should now join together to remove from office all the anti-progressive, anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic and anti-environmental politicians in Congress and in the Executive branch of government.

Truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain





## PRESS RELEASE

### **Revolutionary Earth Manifesto Mysteriously Materializes - A Potential Game Changer**

HANNIBAL, MO. --- April 1, 2023

A foresight-honoring Earth Manifesto has been launched into the public arena that contains many wide-ranging understandings designed to spark positive change in the world. All of the more than 125 essays in these writings can be found online, as well as in one of the handsome Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto, which are available from print-on-demand publisher Lulu Press. This compendium of ideas and insights has been set forth by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, an admirer of Mark Twain who fancies herself to be his philosophic soul mate in many matters.

Tiffany Twain passionately articulates an extraordinary worldview in this manifesto, and she believes these ideas and proposed plans for improving our country and the world could help transform our societies into healthier, fairer, saner, happier and more peaceable ones.

The most important collection of ideas in this manifesto is found in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*. These perspectives are a distillation of forceful ideas that emulate the plain truths expressed by Thomas Paine in his influential 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*. They are comprehensive and overarching views that feature an entire constellation of recommendations and supporting ideas for more salubrious policies and priorities that would help ensure a more salubrious future.

A core idea in this manifesto is that it would be a propitious good plan for humanity to begin demonstrating greater respect for Mother Earth by making courageous commitments to effective means of protecting the environmental commons and better conserving resources crucial to humanity's flourishing and survival, while also safeguarding biological diversity. Good ways are also proposed for us to begin to ensure long-term sustainability of vital services provided by ecosystems in healthy condition.

To these ends, a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations* is proposed to help guide our activities and make sure they can be sustained for a longer period of time. Our actions today should not rashly ignore the anticipated needs of people in the future. For this purpose, *Intelligent Precautionary Principles* have been enunciated to help focus our national priorities, giving us clearer guidance to a more propitious future than current trends portend.

Perhaps the most urgently important of the perspectives in this manifesto involve politics, and are included in *See Clearly: Sanity in Insane Times - Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto*. This compendium of understandings spells out how epic swindles have been foisted on the American people, and exposes the bizarre nature of this cunning con job in deliberative detail. This includes such things as "the biggest financial fraud in world history", and *The Con Goes On: A Triumphant Coup by Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalists*. These ruses undermine democratic fairness, and betray the well-being of people today and in the future. These schemes have featured public borrowings of \$30 trillion since 1980 to finance tax cuts that mainly benefit wealthy people, among other often misguided purposes. This indebtedness has adverse impacts that exacerbate detrimental extreme inequalities. Compounding these scams are many schemes that allow giant corporations -- which are organizational tools that help generate wealth and facilitate its concentration in the hands of the proverbial few -- to socialize many costs by externalizing them onto taxpayers and countless numbers of individuals who suffer harms as a result.

*See Clearly* also contains a powerful perspective in "My Country, Right or Wrong?". This essay is about true patriotism, and both Mark Twain's and my own incisive understandings about loyalty and honorably patriotic ways of being. We should embrace the values central to what Abraham Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature."

These understandings have been evolving for many years, and have assumed greater urgency in light of crucial needs to recognize how seriously the political establishment in the U.S. has betrayed the American people in the past few decades by allowing institutional bribery and Big Money, much of it spent under a cloak of secrecy, to make it easier for leaders to engage in a long train of despotic abuses in national policies related to taxation, political representation, personal liberties and fairness in governing. These issues were the main ones our Founders regarded as being most important when they admirably declared independence from Great Britain almost 250 years ago, boldly launching our great American experiment in democratic representative governance.

This manifesto contains farsighted blueprints on how to improve our societies for all by taking our country back from today's opportunistic profit-prepossessed establishment and the power-abusing political right wing. It is appropriate for the vast majority of Americans to feel righteous indignation at the current status quo, and it is our right, indeed our duty, as our Founders asserted in the Declaration of Independence, to throw off despotic rule and take courageous steps to provide new guarantees for the general welfare of the people, and to safeguard our current and future freedoms and security. This is how we will be able to create truer liberty, fairness and justice for all.

A revolving focus has created many entertaining and enlightening essays in these writings. One of the best is *Huckleberry Finn*, the *Forty-Niners Gold Rush*, and *Sensational Related Reflections*. Check it out, and be sure to contemplate the riff on hydraulic mining and environmental legal precedents in the United States. Mark Twain loved to spin greatly exaggerated yarns, and Tiffany Twain uses her own rich imagination to tell some tall tales of her own. Some years ago she took particular pride in *Tall Tales*, *Provocative Parables*, *Luminous Clarity*, and *Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez*. The great philosophic writer John Steinbeck would likely have approved! There are also cogent perspectives in *Tyrants and Damsels* and *Associated Incisive Insights*. And crucial foreign policy understandings are found in *Reflections on War -- and Peace!*

There is a wonky side to Tiffany Twain's introspections into existence, as epitomized by her creation of a 45-parameter *Sustainability Index*. This Index was developed to provide a clear snapshot evaluation of the status of the sustainability of human activities. This Index measures progress or regress with regard to hopes for humanity to live in sustainable ways on our home planet. It began flashing an ominously cautionary red warning signal in May 2013 when measurements of the concentration of heat-trapping carbon dioxide gases in the atmosphere exceeded 400 ppm for the first time in human history, as recorded by sensors at remote Mauna Loa Observatory high atop a towering volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii. This milestone tipped the Status Evaluation rating of the Index to a more dangerous level. Only eight years later, on April 3, 2021, this measure first exceeded 420 ppm, a level not experienced in millions of years. See the Sustainability Index online for valuable and highly relevant perspective, commentary and existential considerations it contains.

We are experiencing epic times of trouble with the pandemic and inflation, and public attention is riveted on the urgent and the immediate, as well as being diverted from critical issues by divide-to-conquer rogues. In the blinding storms lashing out around us, we should strive to not lose sight of important big picture perspectives.

The many essays in the *Earth Manifesto* contain philosophic explorations, incisive insights, penetrating political and economic analyses, feminine perspectives, creative proposals, poetic appreciations, and a fair share of deep ruminations and introspections. Most of these ideas are at least tangentially oriented toward a good marriage of humanism and awareness of human responsibility, and of smart long-term understandings with a clear focus on the ecological importance for us to act as better stewards of Earth's ecosystems and wildlife and habitats.

Perilous times require big ideas, higher purposes, broader perspectives, more responsible leadership, and honest action. The essays in this manifesto grapple with the most important issues that face our nation and the world today. The visionary views they convey serve to creatively combine economics and politics with common sense, progressive thinking, philosophy, psychology and spiritual illumination to propose auspicious ways forward.

In light of the economic, social, political, financial and ecological challenges that confront us today, many Earth Manifesto essays explore Big Picture perspectives of these dilemmas. One of these pieces is a clarion call for smarter planning in *Climate Change Considerations*, *Carrying Capacity*, and *Ecological Overshoot*. Provocatively creative explorations of big issues and entertaining ideas are also made in *Revelations of a Modern Prophet* -- and in *Transcendental Musings: A Bugle Horn Sounds for Solidarity of Purpose*.

Ultimate mysteries permeate existence, so it is appropriate that this manifesto has mysteriously materialized in our midst, springing forth as if fully formed, as Athena, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom, is said to have done from the forehead of Zeus. In actuality, these writings have been evolving continuously since before 9/11/2001 and they have incorporated unfolding events and new perspectives and developments as they transpire.

The eminently respect worthy Dalai Lama said at a Vancouver Peace Summit in 2009, "The world will be saved by the western woman." Many well-qualified women have answered this call to action in American politics, but too many of them have been crushed by the diabolically cunning and corruptly well-financed Republican political machine in recent elections. Let's give females much better chances in all future elections! Women should have fairer opportunities in our political and economic systems, and all our leaders must see and understand issues in more forward-looking, sensible and fair-minded ways. It is not acceptable that less than one-third of our representatives in Congress are women. A strong correlation exists between this fact and gender discrimination, which is built into our political system and corporate-dominated business world, and in media coverage and cultural biases, and in fundamentalist religious conservatism.

It would be wise for us to respect the healthy condition of Earth's ecosystems and adopt an every-day-is-Earth-Day attitude. Policies and behaviors are needed that are more considerate of the general good and broadly-shared prosperity in the long run. Unfortunately, "Change you can believe in" is being subverted by the powerful influence of entrenched interest groups and the overriding impulse of domineering conservatives. It is becoming increasingly clear that our healthcare system, economic institutions and trade agreements should be restructured to eliminate perverse incentives and misguided policies that have been put into place to give an immorally large proportion of the benefits of the economy to the few -- to the radical detriment of the many. Our system of democratic governance itself should be re-invigorated to purge it of the dysfunctional aspects that give overweening power to influence peddling politicians and big corporations, lobbyists and the wealthy.

Regulations that are merely bureaucratic should be reduced, but fair-minded rules and regulations that protect people from pollution and health risks should be strengthened. Smart new incentives and disincentives should be implemented that will serve to foster the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time. The basic criteria for determining what contributes to the public good and the best interests of society should be an honest assessment of what is consequentially most fair, wholesome and sustainable.

One compelling line of thought that underlies the ideas in many of these writings is that the human race is ill advisedly "fleecing the future" with our short-term oriented and unsustainable activities. Powerful interest groups are converting natural resources to cash as quickly as they are able, despite the fact that common sense tells us we should be honestly treating our home planet like a thriving and lasting concern, and NOT like a business in liquidation. We are collectively acting as if we are unaware, or in denial, or lacking in the most basic tenets of conscience and morality. Must we not tread on the Planet more gently? Must we not treat other people more fairly? Wouldn't it be wisest for us to strive with more sustained commitment to finding ways to protect people's civil liberties? Shouldn't we be demanding that our businesses and governmental institutions give fairer consideration to the common good and the well-being of people today AND in future generations?

Insightful billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer made it crystal clear that cultivating "middle-out economics" would be a much more secure and positive plan of action than pushing deceitful trickle-down policies, as expressed in his provocative TED talk and article, *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*. He states: "You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

The Earth Manifesto commemorates the wonders and beauty of our home planet. It strives to advance a bold revolution against the subtle madness that characterizes the world in its compulsive busyness, laissez-faire exploitive capitalism, wasteful consumerism, excessive risk-taking, bubble economic policies, cost externalizing, harsh inequities, reactionary religious fundamentalism, wrongheaded goals, stoked fears, excessive population growth, and policies that provoke terrorism and encourage aggressive militarism and repression in reaction.

We need to look beyond the 'good old boys', and beyond the conflict between the ideologies of conservatives and liberals. We must look deeper than cultural conflicts between stereotypically strong and discipline-oriented, authoritarian, domineering and paternalistic father-figure worldviews, on the one hand, and more cooperative parental instincts that are oriented around fairness and sensible protections and empathetic understanding, on the other hand. Where should we look? -- Directly to the important principles set forth by our Founders. Our true American values are those that have been cherished since the original 13 colonies declared independence from Great Britain. Colonial imperialism by the British had given our forbearers a powerful motive to establish a democracy that more fairly represented all citizens, so a new nation was brought forth upon this continent that was to be governed by a Constitution, Bill of Rights and rules of law that maintain idealistic and humanistic principles of Liberty, Justice and the promotion of the General Welfare. These great founding documents included powerful protections of free speech for all people, and freedom of worship and other guaranteed rights. They also reflected a valid distrust of despots who abuse power, so the Constitution included a robust system of checks and balances within the federal government, and between it and the States.

Many years have passed since the Constitution was ratified. In this eventful interregnum, a commendable number of progressive advances have been made to protect citizens from the worst characteristics of ruthless capitalism. Laws and regulations have been established, agencies created and reforms made to ensure vitally important protections of privacy, public health, safety of the food supply and pharmaceutical drugs, workers' rights, investor protections, civil rights, and the health of our enveloping environment. These progressive advances stand above the opposing influence of entrenched interests vested in the status quo. The purposes of these advances have been to remedy social ills associated with modern urbanized and globalized industrial civilization, and to mitigate the corrupting influence of rich people in our economic and political systems.

Many forces are working against these progressive advances, including unethical dirty tricks in elections, misleading information, deceptive disinformation, shrewdly manipulative micro-targeted propaganda on social media, the drumbeat of ideological brainwashing, legalized institutional bribery, and the emotional hijacking of millions of people who cling to inflexible beliefs. In particular, the insecurities and fears of the American people have been manipulated by "movement conservatives" and the subsequent rise of Trump, who exploited the grievances, fears, frustrations, prejudices, nationalistic impulses, and sheepish gullibility of many people in order to "own the libs" and advance a retrogressive and risky agenda in both domestic and foreign policies.

We simply must begin to heed the best interests of the great silent majority of person in future generations. We are at a crucial crossroads in global politics, and the American people would be wise to demand a repair of relations with the international community that were harmed by Donald Trump and members of his in-many-ways rogue administration. Some of the numerous reasons for this stance are discussed below, and this awareness could help us overturn the retrogressive influence of conservatives in the U.S. Senate and House.

Donald Trump gave powerful voice to millions of Americans who feel well-justified grievances and anger at lost jobs and the outrageous extent to which our economic and political systems are rigged against working people in favor of the privileged few. The American people should thank liberals like Senator Bernie Sanders for their much more honorable form of populism in voicing support for farsightedness and democratically fair representation. Kudos to the passionate concern such folks have expressed for the true well-being of workers and those in the middle class. Outspoken progressives like Elizabeth Warren are to be commended for championing greater fairness toward the disenfranchised and the downtrodden, and for proposals to take action to reduce rash extremes in inequality being foisted on people through wrongheaded national policies and priorities. MAGA Republican politicians are much narrower and more selfish than these more honorable representatives, and they wield excessive influence by dishonorably appealing primarily to beleaguered White

people and the rich. Trump has acted like one of the worst demagogues in history by stoking people's fears, exploiting racial prejudices, scapegoating immigrants, inciting violence, and taking demeaning and rude advantage of sexist attitudes. And he does all of this to greedily gain personal profit and domineering, vindictive power, as well as ego satisfaction and greater celebrity and notoriety.

A top priority of Republicans is to cut taxes on the wealthy. This value is preposterously misguided in light of crucially more important priorities like making our communities healthier and our societies safer, fairer and more sustainable -- and of ensuring a more propitious legacy to all people in the future. This is a distorted value that can only remain entrenched because of the institutional corruption that our political system and the Supreme Court have allowed to moneyed interests. If we want to "take back our country", the place to start is to guarantee fairer representation to people in every state, and prevent ideological crusaders for low taxes on the rich from having deciding influence on our national decision-making, budgetary priorities and law-making. One consequence of Republican propaganda and priorities is that the rich are getting much richer in the USA while American children have the highest level of poverty of almost any major country on Earth, and many young people have excessively burdensome levels of student debt. And revolutionary unrest simmers across the land.

Ideas like these are contained in this manifesto, along with an astonishingly comprehensive array of philosophic perspectives, penetrating psychological insights, farsighted points of view, enlightened recommendations, spiritual revelations, humorous asides and entertaining tall tales -- and even many outstanding recipes for healthy and tasty meals. Check all this out at [www.EarthManifesto.com](http://www.EarthManifesto.com)!

Wake up, my fellow Americans! A serious mistake has been made in allowing Republicans to exert power by demagogic means, scaring people and exploiting their feelings of frustration and resentment, for Trump has acted like a tyrannical despot, engaged in doubling down on election lies and public debt swindles. During his time in office, he caused many economic disruptions by promoting protectionism and import tariffs in international trade. A basic problem with this is "reciprocity". Trade tariffs are an economic gambit that stifles competition and favors crony supporters, and chooses winners and losers, at big costs to consumers, and contrary to fairly shared prosperity. Trade wars and less competition turn out to be bad for all countries, considered in whole. This has NOT helped "Make America Great Again".

Republicans crow about the economic effects of their 2017 tax cut scam, despite the folly of it being financed by borrowing \$2 trillion over the 10-year period to follow. All taxpayers in every future year are obligated to pay for this profligacy. These recklessly regressive debt-financed tax cuts are mainly benefitting rich people and corporate entities, and causing inequality to worsen in our society. This is crazy, given that increases in inequality and associated injustices are among the biggest threats to most people's well-being in the USA and around the world. Surely it is a poor plan for politicians to continue trying to maximize opportunities for irresponsibly accelerating the conversion of planetary assets to cash. The folly of this is being revealed in disastrous fiscal policies, poor preparedness, failures to invest in affordable healthcare, anti-regulation fervor, abuses of power, conspiratorial misconduct and heightened geopolitical risks.

The 2016 elections were a watershed moment in our nation's history, for the competing ideologies of Republican and Democratic politicians have probably never offered a more drastic contrast. The prescriptions proposed by progressives and conservatives are radically different, as seen in the official 2016 Democratic Party platform that was probably the most progressive ever, and in the Republican Party platform, which may never until then have been more reactionary. In addition, Republicans were extremely intransigent in the U.S. Senate by refusing to consider Merrick Garland, President Obama's well-qualified nominee to replace the Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had suddenly died in February 2016. This led to the radical inequity of a replacement justice being forced on the American people in April 2017 who is further right than almost every conservative ever on the high court, including current Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito. This Trump appointee, Neil Gorsuch, is maybe as far right as Clarence Thomas, and even further right than Antonin Scalia was himself. The appointment of Neil Gorsuch, and then of the controversial Brett Kavanaugh and the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett, are proving to be a seriously negative development for the American people.

The 5-to-4 majority of conservatives on the Supreme Court before Antonin Scalia died were responsible for

the *Citizens United* ruling in 2010 that overturned decades of precedent and a century of practice involving limits on the influence of Big Money in politics. That Supreme Court also eviscerated the commendably fair Voting Rights Act of 1965. These actions and others undermined the prospects of legislation aimed at protecting the rights of workers, consumers and citizens -- as well as the health of the environment -- in favor of maximizing corporate profits and prerogatives. "Conservatives" on the Supreme Court have generally favored employers over employees, corporations over individuals, polluters over people, and property owners over less affluent citizens. I strongly believe that *We the People* need to gain greater advantages in this struggle over whether government will be able to serve as a countervailing force to concentrated economic power. To accomplish this, we need a much less politically partisan and more independent judiciary.

Supreme Court Justices should honestly honor the oath of office to which they have sworn, "that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich." Soon after being sworn in, Neil Gorsuch jumped into the job to apply his creativity in rationalizing strict constructionist interpretations of the Constitution in ways inimical to proper guidance of a reasonably sane society. Brett Kavanaugh's controversial confirmation, and then Amy Coney Barrett's, added two more conservatives to the high court, making it even more political and partisan, and less fair. And then anti-abortion activist Justices outrageously and notoriously took away women's Roe rights. or an intriguing analysis of associated issue, see my essay *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts*.

History will judge far right ideologies harshly, just as it has judged Nazi fascism in the light of infamy. The lens of consequential ethics makes it clear that championing policies that exacerbate inequalities and social injustices is wrongheaded, and that antagonism to rights and well-being of women, people in racial minorities and immigrants and asylum seekers is morally bankrupt. History will reveal that excessive exploitation of natural resources is dangerously myopic, and that staunch opposition to precautionary action on climate change is deeply damaging to hopes for future safety, prosperity and well-being. History will also prove that policies that ignore intelligently farsighted adaptive measures that would mitigate ecologically destabilizing impacts of inadequately regulated greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere are foolish because they will subject billions of people in the future to calamitous hardships and costs in increasing numbers of "natural disasters" caused by a changing global climate and distressed ecosystems.

The Department of Defense has repeatedly called climate change a "threat multiplier" that will require far-reaching humanitarian or military intervention because it will lead to more severe storms that threaten cities and military bases, and will cause rising sea levels that will imperil coastal habitation and infrastructure. Early in 2016, the Pentagon ordered its officials to start incorporating probable climate change impacts into every major consideration. In a hard-to-believe contrast, Republican leaders like those in Florida have tried to prevent even the mention of climate change in order to facilitate the maximizing of profits, and Trump told staff in the EPA similar stupid things. This refusal to discuss the significant risks of anthropogenic alterations of the global climate and natural ecosystems is one of the most ridicule-deserving head-in-the-sand denials ever, despite the certainty that precautionary action is well advised to mitigate calamitous climate disruptions and extreme weather events. This is especially ironic in Florida, because honestly responsible actions are needed in this low-lying state, considering that it is one of the most vulnerable places to catastrophic impacts of more powerful hurricanes and rising sea levels.

My philosophic great-grandfather on my mother's side was the estimable writer and humorist Mark Twain, who played an active role in opposing American aggression abroad when he was Vice President of the Anti-Imperialist League. He had become disillusioned about the real motives of the U.S. in the Philippine-American War from 1899 to 1902, and he bemoaned war as "a wanton waste of projectiles", according to insightful correspondent John Nichols. But notably Mark Twain's "deepest disgust was reserved for politicians who played on uncertainty and fear to promote the interests of what would come to be called the military-industrial complex."

General Douglas MacArthur once expressed the conviction, "I believe that the entire effort of modern society should be concentrated on the endeavor to outlaw war as a method of the solution of problems between nations". Shouldn't we give greater weight to these words, and reflect this consideration in our public decision-



making and foreign policies? Shouldn't we strive to be more effective in marginalizing extremism, and dedicate ourselves to creating societies that are more mutually secure by making the world more just?

Intense political turmoil resulted from the 2016 elections and the chaotic reign of Donald Trump. He is a con man who exploited people's insecurities and anger at the establishment to gain power, and did this in more egregiously selfish ways than almost any demagogue in history -- even surpassing red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. Mark Twain would be horrified, if he were still alive, to see how wantonly humankind is wasting the resources of the world on weapons, standing armies and violent conflicts and the global "war on terror" -- and on benefits and largess illicitly given to the wealthy. More than a century after Mark Twain died, and long after a frenzy of fascism caused the most horrific spasm of war in human history, reactionary right-wing movements pushing anti-immigrant agendas are again roiling politics in nations around the globe.

Trump manipulatively milked an insidious strain of ideology and emotional fervor to grab power. He combined absurd promises to build a "beautiful wall" along the entire U.S./Mexico border, to be paid for by Mexico, with stoked hostility against immigrants and Muslims, and added disingenuous ruses that exploit unbridled ethnic nationalism, climate crisis denials and staunch support for increased domestic production of fossil fuels. Politics in France, Germany, Poland, Hungary and other European nations are also embattled by similar right-wing anti-immigrant political parties that are antagonistic to agreements designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect the environment. It is irresponsible to deny and ignore the gathering risks of climate change and rising sea levels, and to thus act as poor stewards of Creation. It is wrong to sacrifice future well-being on the illusion-addled altar of privatized profits and socialized costs, and irresponsible debt financing, and deplorable political expediencies, right-wing social engineering and extremely short-term-oriented materialistic priorities.

Trump's anti-regulation executive actions and stubbornly myopic support for fossil fuel industries undermined protections of the environmental commons that are a foundation of future well-being. So did his pushing of huge new tax breaks for rich people. Trump proved to be one of the most disrespected leaders in the world for his refusal to agree with leaders in every other country on Earth to make efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the incalculably costly impacts of resulting disruptions in the global climate.

Barack Obama once said that the American people need to be told the truth, and he was right. Bigger and more comprehensive versions of the truth need to be told. In bizarre contrast to this vital exigency, con man Trump "tells it like it isn't", and does so with an air of certitude so comically brazen that millions of gullible people seem to think he actually is telling "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." In reality, his proclamations weave simplistic half-truths, misinformation, deceptions, consequential lies and emotionally manipulative insinuations together, and this motivated many people during his 2016 campaign to think he might just be a good leader, despite his long history of unscrupulous business dealings, bankruptcies, tax fraud, economic elitism and dangerously demagogic, devious, narcissistic and reactive character. These nefarious qualities and his antagonism to immigrants and refugees have made the majority of people in nations around the world woe the ascendance of this egomaniacal dictator-wannabe to the most powerful position on the planet.

Trump evoked a dark dystopian vision of the supposedly pathetic state of the U.S. military during his campaign in 2016, and declared that the plight of African Americans was the "worst ever ever ever". Worse than centuries of slavery? He pretended that international trade agreements have been an unmitigated disaster, even though reasonably fair international trade throughout history has had broadly beneficial effects overall. He hyped up the dangers of threats posed by "radical Islamic terrorists", and downplayed dangers of terrorist acts by white supremacists. Additionally, he used "Make America Great Again" sloganeering to set up a "social trap" in which he claimed to be the best and only possible savior, even though his proposals, plans, actions and self-serving agenda proved to be social, economic, environmental, geostrategic and national security disasters.

Trump took this pathetic course of gaining attention, notoriety and power by fanning the flames of white nationalism, racial bigotry, xenophobia, male chauvinism and religious discrimination in pursuit of his ambitions for power. His blatantly unhinged and unethical tactics make it clear that his abuses of power in the presidency infringed on the Constitution, violated rules of law, threatened peaceful coexistence, reduced democratic fairness, torpedoed environmental sanity, tore apart social cohesion and violated the moral good.

Donald Trump is a demagogic power-abuser whose stances, character and reactive temperament made him dangerous to democracy while he remained in office, and too risky for the American people to allow him to ever again grab power. His efforts to deport millions of hard-working immigrants and slash legal immigration make him a double threat, because immigrants actually contribute greatly to many American industries, including agriculture, restaurant services, construction and numerous categories of generally low-paid jobs. Another red flag should be seen in fascist-plot-like efforts he made to significantly increase the power of the military and police and deportation forces. Likewise, there were huge risks in Trump's readiness to crush opposition by using police and military forces to put down domestic protests and use intimidating lawsuits to suppress criticism, deter dissidents and silence those who engage in the freedom of expression to oppose divisive, undemocratic, sexist, racist, discriminatory and retrogressive actions. Trump rashly slashed funding for State Department diplomacy, and additionally represented irresponsible positions on issues like his opposition to reforms that would limit the system-rigging influence of Big Money in politics. And he took a sycophantish stance to satisfy the NRA in opposing sensible regulations on sales of guns and military-style assault weapons like the AR-15.

### General Observations

It has been nearly 250 years since the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. In many key aspects, the years since 2001 have been a fiasco for the USA. It is now a good time, as we struggle to recover from the worldwide pandemic and the January 6 coup attempt, for us to consider how to ensure that our nation really helps foster and preserve social well-being, truer justice and security, expanded voting rights, individual freedoms, civil liberties and human rights. At the same time, it is crucially important that we make committed efforts to achieve a greater modicum of community well-being, more fairly shared prosperity, better governance, intelligent planning, fiscal responsibility and ecological sanity.

The well-being of most species of life on Earth is being threatened by conservative ideologies, unbridled corporatism, excessive greed, wasteful consumerism, economic desperation and the overharvesting of natural resources. The Living Planet Report 2022 reveals that the average population sizes of some 10,000 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish declined by a shocking 69% since 1970. This stunning news should shake us all into alert awareness -- and motivate us to support farsighted action.

This manifesto is foremost about Earth and our ecological interconnectedness with her biological communities and miraculously providential ecosystems. We have profound inter-dependencies with healthy natural habitats and the biological diversity of life on Earth. We are slowly coming to the realization that we simply must give our beautiful home planet much more respect, so as to help assure our own flourishing and survival.

Life on Earth is amazingly resilient, but also vulnerable to rapid changes. The lessons of history tell us that the remarkable diversity of life on Earth should be conserved and protected -- for our own sakes, as well as for the sake of our descendants. We cannot indefinitely sustain wasteful, damaging and depletionary activities the way we have been doing so egregiously, and at an accelerating rate, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

There is an enormous amount of money to be made by ignoring these overarching understandings. A really huge amount. But this fact does not alter -- even one iota -- the transcendent truth that we must give more far-reaching protections to planet Earth's providential terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and to the health of the environmental commons upon which our human prosperity and survival depend.

Such observations -- and many, many more far-ranging ideas -- are explored in this lengthy manifesto. Readers are urged to think for themselves about the ideas it contains, and to do their own part to contribute in some way to the improvement of conditions in the world. We can, indeed must, do better!! As Dr. Seuss' Lorax said, 'UNLESS someone like us cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not!'

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