

Earth Manifesto

A Clear-Eyed Patriot Issues a Clarion Call for a Second American Revolution

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In times of trouble
Seeking words of wisdom
Let it be. Let it be.

Friends, Washingtonians, countrywomen and countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to champion good ideas, and to constructively criticize all the bad ideas and shortsighted expediencies and abuses of influence that have gotten us into the perilous straits we find ourselves in today, in our marvelous world.

Twelve score and seven years ago, our Founding Fathers declared independence from the despotic hegemony of the British Empire. These courageous colonists then fought an American Revolutionary War against the imperious "redcoats", using effective early guerilla warfare tactics, and eventually won the war. After achieving victory, they set about working together to bring forth upon the North American continent a new nation, dedicated to liberty and the idealistic Enlightenment Era proposition that "all men are created equal."

To secure the "unalienable rights" that they had declared to be self-evident for all citizens, they commendably convened a Continental Congress of representatives of the people. Having asserted that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, our Founders assumed the important responsibility of hammering out a master plan for a new form of democratic governance that was to be guided by a Constitution and a Bill of Rights, and an evolving framework of theoretically equitable rules of law. Importantly, the Constitution contained critical protections from tyranny in the form of strong constitutional checks and balances in government.

The colonists' experience with the despotic rule by King George III had left them with a powerful distaste for abuses of power, so they created a sensible balance of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and between it and the various States. They did this in an effort to assure the American people that they could enjoy liberty and would be forever free from despotic abuses of power, and that they would be represented reasonably fairly in all national decision-making. Today, I say, Let it be.

In the many years that have passed since those formative times, much progress has been made in expanding basic concepts of justice, equality, guarantees of liberties and fairer representation that includes women and people in racial minorities. These initiatives were designed to strengthen our Union in these United States of America, and to ensure that considerations of the general welfare are not ignored in the fierce competition between greed-driven individuals and narrowly-focused interest groups vying to gain control and advantages for themselves.

In the course of human events, and with the passage of time, corrupting influences have crept into our system of governance, and they have come to dominate our national decision-making. Our political representatives have been bought -- relatively cheaply! -- and they now mainly serve rich people and corporate executives and shareholders, NOT the best interests of the majority of Americans. Most of the politicians that are supposed to represent us are self-serving pragmatists who are afraid to tell the simple truth that our economy and political system are rigged to be unfair to most people, especially including women, Blacks, Latinos, poor people and the young -- and downright perfidious to the best interests of people in future generations.

Here is a provocative perspective from my 2009 essay *The Bailout Blues and Gut Check Soul Revue*: "The U.S. has been driving a hard bargain for the poor for decades by scolding them for lacking personal responsibility. Welfare

rolls and payments have been reduced, taxation has been made more regressive, and harsher and ever more costly punishments for crimes have been put into place. The influence of workers in determining their own fates has been insidiously reduced by corporations torpedoing collective bargaining rights. Many public schools and inner cities have been discriminatorily neglected. Businesses and millions of jobs have been moved abroad, and corporate prerogatives and profits have been enhanced, contributing to inflation in the costs of healthcare, food, electricity, gasoline, rent and homes. In contrast, no such hard bargain for the rich has been undertaken. Give us a break -- this is a democracy, folks! We've got 'em outnumbered!"

The challenge of how to deal fairly with extreme levels of inequality is one of the defining issues of our times. Lamentably, conservatives lusting for domineering control have been wielding excessive influence, and are derailing our democracy. They are in the process of abusing authority to accomplish goals that are making economic, financial and healthcare inequalities much worse, and exacerbating social and environmental injustices.

Common sense tells us it would be wise to avoid the revolutionary strife associated with extreme desperation and violent "politics in the streets". Let's strive to reach a bold and broad-minded consensus on how to honestly actualize the ideals and values we hold in common. Backroom decision-making, crony favoritism, structural injustices, harm-engendering discrimination, right-wing media spin, religious conservatism, machine politics, and undue influence of Big Money have been allowed to dominate our government for too long.

This situation makes it clear today that it is our right, indeed our duty, to throw off the hegemony of the misguided influences that have come to dominate our Union. It is time to put progressive policies in place, and limit Big Money in elections, and enact policies that make the vast majority of Americans more secure. We must adopt initiatives that provide all Americans with adequate healthcare and fairer opportunities to flourish and achieve prosperity and happiness. And the white establishment must treat folks in racial minorities more fairly.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower made a provocative declaration that should inform our understanding: "If a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power." Unfortunately, unprecedented challenges arose to the separation of powers in our government during the Trump regime, and personal liberties and the freedom from abuses of power -- and democracy itself -- have been under especially concerted assault.

The philosophic historians Will and Ariel Durant provide many thought-provoking *Lessons of History* that they had teased from two lifetimes spent writing an eleven-volume outline of world history. One of the most germane and important of their ideas is that a failure of elite factions to fairly compromise with the people has episodically led to violent revolutions, unless sensibly headed off by reasonable proactive reforms. Think about this incisive synopsis of everything the Durants had learned in a lifelong study of history (remember, these observations were made in 1968): "If our economy of freedom fails to distribute wealth as ably as it has created it, the road to dictatorship will be open to any man who can persuasively promise security to all; and a martial government, under whatever charming phrases, will engulf the democratic world." That's stunning -- and ominous! A consequential reckoning is coming as Trump and his zealous loyalists try to regain control through ruthless means. The remedy is easy: Vote for political representatives committed to reversing the harms that Republicans have been doing! And pass the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to overcome voter suppression, and force Republican politicians to actually honestly compete for their jobs by trying to fairly represent the majority of the American people, not just zealots and the wealthy donors class.

Wise Guys Speak Out

The honorable Abraham Lincoln waxed eloquent about the ideals of our great nation after the bloody Battle of Gettysburg near the end of the terribly uncivil War Between the States. He made one of the greatest ever speeches, on a battlefield in southern Pennsylvania in November 1863, proclaiming his vision of the importance of representative democracy and governance "of the people, by the people, for the people."

In 2002, the progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota stated that politics should be about much more than power, money and winning at any cost. He expressed the quite commendable opinion: "Politics is about the

improvement of people's lives, lessening human suffering, and advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world." I salute this important concept and vision!

The plain truth of the matter, however, is that idealistic understandings are not the main forces that guide our national policies. Inertia and motives of narrower vested interest groups drive most of the efforts made to codify into law the collective and often sadly skewed impulses of constituencies that compete for ascendancy in our society.

The renowned journalist Ambrose Bierce, a contemporary of Mark Twain's, created a pithy satirical dictionary in which he defined words with witty and incisive perspicacity. Here is one of his smart definitions that provides a relevant and intriguing insight: "Politics, *n.* A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles."

Ambrose Bierce was "right-on" in this definition. All the high-falutin' rhetoric during U.S. election campaigns about vision, righteousness and the moral good -- and caring about the middle class -- is betrayed by the fact that the current intense competition for control of our government is largely a conflict between greedy rich people and "conservatives", on the one hand, and people with more broadly concerned, empathetic, inclusive and future-respecting perspectives, on the other. Ambrose Bierce was an investigative journalist who dared to take on the railroad "octopus" controlled by the infamous Big Four -- Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker and Collis Huntington -- a monopoly that wielded enormous power and influence in Bierce's day.

Political commentator David Sirota corroborates this perspective that wealthy people and giant corporations exert too much control over our government. In *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government -- and How We Take It Back*, he makes it clear that special interest groups are working to make governments operate in their own best short-term interests, and not in the best interests of the people. Both major political parties in our duopoly system pander to financial elites in society above all else, and they all-too-infrequently dare to take any action that displeases the richest 1%, or influential CEOs in big corporations.

This confirms Ambrose Bierce's second definition of politics in *The Devil's Dictionary*: "The conduct of public affairs for private advantage." This common sense evaluation expresses a much truer reality than most of the rhetoric we hear from our political leaders today. Yes, siree!

True patriotism consists of questioning and opposing abuses of power in one's country, not merely accepting them without question. As Mark Twain wrote: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." Trump cult followers, become disillusioned, and break free!

My own modern sensibilities regard fierce nationalism as alarmingly anti-social, and far-right "patriotism" as frequently fraudulent. It would be better for us to seek a kind of humanism that is consistent with Golden Rule reciprocity -- and loyal to equitable principles -- and gives a fuller respect to the great ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Patriotism should not be unthinking obedience to the politicians and influential factions that wield domineering power. Patriotism in America should really be an honest commitment to principles, ideals and values this country holds dear. This includes the main concerns set forth by our Founding Fathers: unity, social justice, the general welfare, peaceable domestic tranquility, assured personal liberties, guaranteed civil rights, sensible limitations on the intrusiveness of government, and fair representation of the best interests of all the people.

An Echo of Wise Solon Reverberates through the Airwaves

Economics drives politics. In Athens more than 2,500 years ago, disparities of wealth between the rich and the poor created a dangerous upheaval. One faction favored democracy; another favored oligarchic rule by the wealthy few; a third preferred a mixed form of rule with a strong constitution. Clan rivalry and many regional conflicts also played a role in the strife of Athens in the 6th century BCE.

According to Will and Ariel Durant in *The Lessons of History*, the historian Plutarch wrote that, in the Athens of 594 BCE, "the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor had reached its height, so that the city seemed to be in a dangerous condition, and no other means for freeing it from disturbances ... seemed possible but despotic power." The poor found that their status got worse every year because the government was in the hands of elite

factions, and the courts were corrupt, deciding way too many issues against the masses. Talk of violent revolt reverberated through the Athenian city-state. The rich were outraged at the brazen challenge to their privileges, property and power, so they prepared to defend themselves by force.

As these conflicts escalated between various factions vying for perks, power and control, many recognized the need for a transformative leader who would seek fair compromises between all competing groups, and would do so in an equitable and peaceable manner. Providentially, good sense prevailed and moderate elements secured the selection of a wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker named Solon, who was known for having demonstrated the wisdom to fairly mediate between concerned parties. He was given extraordinary wide-ranging legislative powers to negotiate fair compromises.

Solon made a number of laudably fair reforms of the Greek political system and its economy that saved Athens from destructive conflict. He also addressed a wider agenda of moral issues like slavery, debt bondage, and abuses of the system of inheritance. One of the most important reforms he made was the creation of a steeply graduated income tax plan that made wealthy people pay taxes at a rate 12 times as much as the poor. This idea forms the basis for sensible proposals to reform the U.S. tax code by making it more steeply graduated. THAT action would result in broad benefits that really would trickle down -- even to those who desperately need it!

My fellow Americans, make no mistake about it; with the disparity of fortunes between the rich and the poor in the U.S. reaching unconscionable new extremes right now, the nation is in a dangerous tinderbox condition. The lessons of history provide us with an excellent alternative to gathering risks: choosing honorable leaders who are committed to making decent and egalitarian progressive reforms. Those who fail to heed lessons of history are more likely to be doomed to repeat them, so let's heed the lessons -- for authoritarians wait in the wings.

A few years ago, Robert Reich expressed optimism about the future of our great country. He pointed out that U.S. history has a progressive trajectory, despite periods of backward influences. He stated that reformers will eventually succeed in making our country a fairer place than it is today. We are at a critical juncture where we need to listen to and respect the will of the people, and refuse to believe BS or accept the vulnerabilities and hardships that result from the right-wing agenda. It's time to stop the why-isn't-it-trickling-down debt-financed swindles that assess low taxes on the rich. We must act to create a healthier, fairer nation.

To achieve the common good, we need clear-eyed understandings, and a hearty measure of broad-minded resolve. Now is the time for us to insist that our representatives begin to work together with an overarching goal of pursuing healthier, wiser, more just and more peaceable national priorities. For good guidance, it would be positive for us to responsibly give heed to the provisions of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

Victor Hugo importantly pointed out, "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

This is the counsel of the shade of Virgil, a veritable voice of reason, and of the spirit of beautiful Beatrice, whose inspiration of an empathetic heart could provide us with the motivation to embark on more virtuous, redemptive and morally honorable paths into the future. For an interlude of fascinating introspection, see the Earth Manifesto essay *The Odd Brilliance of Dante's Epic Poem, The Divine Comedy*, for it provides additional understanding of Dante's great poem and its personal, religious, historical, political and moral underpinnings.

One belief Dante essentially expressed in *Inferno* is that the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality -- or act in league with authority-abusing schemers. Let's not be complacent with inequities and injustices in our world today. Reject power abusers! Dante chose to consign those who commit acts of fraud to the eighth circle of Hell, so he placed them only slightly above the worst of his nine circles of *Inferno* where those who committed cold-hearted intentional acts of treachery and treason were to be found. Conservatives and Republican politicians, shape up, or get out. Be aware.

Women, Ride to the Rescue!

Mark Twain once observed, "You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

In times of trouble, we need leaders to speak words of wisdom to us -- true words, well-informed words, honest words, and responsible words. Women, it turns out, often make better leaders than men, as was demonstrated in

the global pandemic crisis. "From Germany to New Zealand to Taiwan and beyond, women executives are showing that compassionate, intelligent, and truthful leadership has proven essential in saving lives and stopping the spread of Coronavirus. Instead of laying the blame on others, these women are taking action and enforcing necessary safety precautions. They use policies grounded in facts and the latest technology. They listen to experts and don't let political issues affect decision-making. They show grace and humanity in thinking about how this virus affects *all* of the people in their countries."

Donald Trump and the male patriarchy, in contrast, politicized the pandemic and cunningly hijacked the government to advance a white nationalist agenda that cruelly discriminates against persons in minority groups, immigrants, women, the poor, young people and gays. It is a damning fact that Blacks and Latinos have suffered and died at terribly disproportionate rates from the miserable COVID-19 disease, much in excess of their proportion of the populace. This reveals systemic racial injustices and regimented socioeconomic stratification in our country, which are partially a result of a lack of fair representation due to restrictive voting measures and partisan gerrymandering. In turn, racial oppression continues, year after year after decade after century.

"Women who seek to be equal with men", ironically declared Timothy Leary, "lack ambition."

It is sensationally relevant to us today that our nation's Founders stated in the Declaration of Independence that whenever government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, 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 the ungodly triumph of Trump and conservatives in Congress in 2016, it became clear that Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have been right all along. What the USA needs is a peaceful revolution that brings big positive structural change to our rigged system. We need to radically alter the wrongly rigged provisions that burden taxpayers and students with record levels of debt while stoking an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. The few, of course, always seem to be in the process of ratcheting up their great advantages to the detriment of everyone else. This is happening, ironically, at the same moment that more than three years of the pandemic have sickened and killed large numbers of people, and the divide between the fortunate and the unfortunate has become a horrifically gaping chasm. (And Trump figuratively flipped the finger at other people worldwide, trying to shift blame and evade responsibility, and refused to contribute to supporting the World Health Organization.)

At a time when we clearly need unifying leaders who will honestly work to make our society fairer and more inclusive, and respect Golden Rule ethics of reciprocal fairness, Republicans have employed divisive tactics, and are arrogantly violating common good values. It would be best for the American people if folks in the MAGA base would see the light and stop helping enable abuses of authority, and unite in common cause to support reforms that would be beneficial to the 99%. This, after all, would also be an excellent means of saving the 1% from the proverbial pitchforks, which are being readied as the prospects of desperation and social turmoil spike, and repressive despotism flexes its muscles with things like "dress rehearsals for martial law" that took place in Portland, Oregon and other cities during protests against racial injustices in the summer of 2020.

Ecological Truth

"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them something more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

--- **President Lyndon B. Johnson**, upon signing the Wilderness Act of 1964

One of the basic concerns expressed in this manifesto is environmental. That's why provisions for a proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations include vital ecological ideas. Everything on Earth is naturally inextricably interconnected and interdependent, so considerations for the real health of natural ecosystems cannot be made independent of comprehensive concerns for fairer economic policies and the greater good of society in the long run. Likewise, considerations of economic policies can't be made with little regard for environmental concerns.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. warned Americans back in 1996 not to "treat the planet as if it were a business in liquidation". He astutely told people at a Toronto conference, "To me, environmental advocacy is not just about protecting the fish and the birds for their own sake. It's about recognizing that nature is the infrastructure of our communities. When we actively destroy nature, we diminish ourselves. We impoverish our children."

Sensible business owners know they should operate their businesses using the income they generate, for they cannot stay in business long if they squander their assets and equity. It is folly for us to allow corporations to try to convert natural resources to cash as quickly as possible. Such a strategy may give an illusion of a prosperous economy in the short run, but schemes that allow Big Businesses to externalize costs and deplete resources force our children, in effect, and theirs, to bear the costs of these selfishly shortsighted activities.

Robert Kennedy also pointed out that we should make bigger investments in protecting the environment because that would help assure the well-being and economic vitality of generations of people alive today, and not forget those to come in the future. In our hyper competitive free market crony capitalist system, when we under-value natural resources, we foolhardily contribute to their excessively wasteful usage.

The cogent words of Bill Moyers resonate in the interstices of my brain. Moyers noted that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes it's not as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." As he looked at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, he thought: "We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world." Arguably, it is our greatest responsibility to be good ancestors.

It is our collective duty to act more responsibly. It is for good reasons that Franz Kafka observed, "Nobody wants to introduce as many reforms as children do." Nobody's reforms would be as fair to people in the future as those made in the best interests of young people. Conversely, when we let entrenched interests defend the status quo by focusing on benefits for rich people and older folks, we effectively betray the young -- and are too inhumanely stingy with healthcare coverage.

Smart environmental planning is more necessary than ever in the world today, and it is getting more crucial with every year that passes. This fact makes it absurd that a League of Conservation Voters scorecard that rates members of Congress on how they voted on environmental issues found that the average score for all Republican Senators in 2017 was the lowest ever recorded, at 1%. In praiseworthy contrast, Democratic Senators averaged 93%. House Republicans have voted on hundreds of occasions to weaken protections of the environment and endangered species of life. The time has come for better leadership that demonstrates much greater integrity, and acts more reasonably, so I urge Americans to demand that their leaders acknowledge and emphasize the importance of environmental protections. Insist on better accountability, and remove Republican politicians from office! And outlaw former coal lobbyists from being administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency.

Think clearly about the treacherous nature of the way we are treating the prospects of our children and our grandchildren. We are profligately using up natural resources, failing to conserve energy and water resources, allowing natural ecosystems to be damaged and wildlife habitats to be destroyed, and wantonly foisting the detrimental health and environmental costs of pollution, toxic wastes and greenhouse gas emissions upon people everywhere. And we are irresponsibly borrowing many trillions of dollars to hyper-stimulate these outcomes.

This whole litany of collective short-term oriented activities is being significantly exacerbated by the myopic expediency of promising a cornucopia of unfunded obligations for healthcare and retirement costs for millions of government employees, military veterans, and people over the age of 62. It is estimated that there was more than \$96 trillion in promised but unfunded obligations like this as of May 2021. This far exceeds our national debt, and represents more than \$280,000 for every man, woman and child in the United States.

These facts are all but unbelievable, revealing our national policies to be a form of intergenerational treachery. To allow this heedlessly shortsighted, manifestly corrupt and unfair favoritism is unacceptable, and to facilitate it with financial scams and accounting gimmickry is wrong. These ruses resemble an odd new variant of a Ponzi scheme, on an unprecedented scale, and it boggles the imagination to think we could be acting with such a lack of responsibility toward people in the future. Now is the time for clearer understandings, and for taking much more

courageous stands for a better future. The Dalai Lama is one of the wisest, most spiritually pure and cool, calm, and collected persons on Earth. Yet the cheerful and meditative Buddhist once said: "In order to accomplish important goals, we need an appreciation of the sense of urgency." Hold that thought.

I, Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy and imagined illegitimate great-granddaughter of Mark Twain, have a vision for the greater good of humanity. This vision is informed by overarching fairness principles and ideas of sustainable stewardship of our home planet. It is a vision that encompasses plans that would help foster more collaboration in good faith on the international stage, and attain common sense goals of having less strife and better prospects for health, justice, mutual security, peaceful coexistence and a sustainable future.

Common Sense Arrives on the Scene

Thomas Paine famously wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." Paine was an Englishman who became a consummate American patriot. He helped change the course of history by writing *Common Sense*, a highly influential pamphlet published in January 1776. *Common Sense* originally had the working title *Plain Truth*, and it spoke plain truths and made straightforward arguments about society and government. This was probably the best-selling pamphlet ever published. In it, Paine forcefully advocated independence from tyrannical British rule, and he proposed enlightened ideas about the need and desirability for establishing a new form of government that would be more fairly representative, so that all people's voices would be heard.

It is noteworthy that Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* anonymously because the pamphlet was treasonous from the point-of-view of King George III and British Empire authorities. From our perspective today, this act of treason was one of the most laudably patriotic salvos against tyranny ever written. We now regard the cause of independence of the American colonies as having been central to the freedoms we enjoy. I imagine the stirring music of fifes and bugles and drums accompanying the march of these ideas.

The relativity of patriotism and treason casts a bright light onto our political strife today. Think about this. So-called conservatives want "to drown government in the bathtub", and give personhood rights to corporate entities, thus undermining rights and influence of ordinary people. Most of all, they want to give rich people larger tax breaks, and finance this generosity by borrowing public funds AND slashing spending that helps poor people survive, and middle-class folks to be more secure. Really -- they want to save money by skimping on smart social insurance policies. They want to undermine affordable healthcare and cut funding for Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. They also want to stimulate consumerism, and facilitate the exploitation of fossil fuels and other natural resources. And they want to take away women's rights to make their own personal decisions regarding getting pregnant and their reproductive health, and the number of children they want.

We simply have been avoiding difficult decisions required to fairly compromise between competing interests, and we have consequently used the shortsighted expediency of borrowing huge sums of money from every taxpayer in every future year to achieve misguided priorities. This is exaggeratedly unfair. It would be a much better plan to act fiscally responsibly by creating rainy day funds for natural disasters and adaptive measures, and by investing in better preparedness for public health calamities like the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"Conservatives" have become increasingly unwilling to compromise with more moderate people for the greater good in the last few decades. They have been adamantly insisting that high-income earners should be allowed to pay ever lower rates of tax on the highest levels of their incomes. Many of them undermine efforts to conserve resources, and reduce protections of public lands in order to benefit private interests. Some advocate that we allow national parks and forests and other public lands to be privatized and more easily exploited. And many believe we should spend more on building up the colossal military, no matter how wasteful, misguided, dangerous, or subversive of peace. These are often the same people who used to advocate more aggressive U.S. stances on the world scene -- and who want guns and assault weapons at home to remain easy to obtain by anyone.

These obstinate ideological stances are narrow-minded attitudes that are radically contrary to honorable conservatism, and antithetic to true patriotism -- and downright subversive of the best interests of our heirs. It is also treacherous to the future of humankind, and heedlessly inconsiderate of most species of life on Earth.

A Question of Ensuring National Security and Domestic Tranquility

Edward Stettinius, the Secretary of State in 1945, identified two fundamental components of human security. "The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts," he stated. "The first front is the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear. The second front is the economic and social front, where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace."

Think about the fact that there were a near record number of more than 45 million Americans living below the official poverty level in the USA before the pandemic. And understand that Social Security payments and other programs like food stamps, unemployment insurance and the Earned Income Tax Credit keep an additional 35 million people or so from poverty and worse hardship. These programs keep many millions of Americans out of more desperate circumstances, so they are a form of social insurance against more extreme insecurity of a large number of Americans. Social programs are thus a type of insurance against revolutionary unrest. These programs mitigate impulses toward the politics of anger in the streets, so they effectively allow the current system, jerry-rigged as it is -- so extremely in favor of rich people -- to be largely perpetuated, without being forced to enact big structural reforms. Improved social insurance policies would be relatively inexpensive!

Oddly enough, many wealthy conservatives have been growing ever more adamantly opposed to paying for this smart form of insurance. This stance is forcing huge costs to be foisted onto our children and all people in every future year. It should irk every American that conservative rich people have been exhibiting such an eagerness to shirk tax obligations that help pay for these insurance policies. Such opposition to unemployment benefits, nutritional assistance programs and the like is, in impact, crassly unempathetic, and sadly smacks of a sense of entitled hubris, severe shortsightedness, and even an attitude of arrogant and cruel hard-heartedness.

An "immense wedge" was being forced through American society during the Gilded Age by "the maldistribution of wealth, status, and opportunity," according to journalist Henry George over 100 years ago. Bill Moyers noted that inequality has exploded in recent decades into what historian Clinton Rossiter described as "the great train robbery of American intellectual history." Stop these brazen villains now! We must reform tax laws to make them more progressive, seeing how current tax laws are contrary to propriety, fairness and fiscal responsibility.

A Gauntlet Has Been Thrown

John Steinbeck wrote in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* that ideas germinate in our minds and in the populace as a whole, but that they do not gain power and traction until they find the fertile soil of discontent to grow in. The force of this idea could cause a peaceful revolution in the USA today, for the soil has been well fertilized, and we have become ripe for such change. This was seen especially with unrest and widespread street protests in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder by white police officers. The right-wing unfortunately is good at sowing discontent and fostering fear and anger, so a coup like that caused on January 6 is also a risk.

I judge that really unempathetic ruses against fairness in our societies, perpetuated by those people with the most money, are causing energies to develop and gather force. Conservatives harvested populist discontent more effectively than liberals and progressives, but their policy prescriptions serve to make inequities, inequalities and injustices irrationally worse, even for most folks in the Trump base. So the time is ripe for clearly seeing this truth and supporting wide-ranging reform movements to set things straight. Liberal policies are required, NOT worsening reactionary demagogic ones in a corroded semi-fascist Trumpian dystopia.

James Madison was first elected in 1808, becoming the fourth President of the United States. Twenty years earlier, he had been instrumental in drafting the U.S. Constitution, and he was a key author and champion of the great Bill of Rights. Madison was thus one of the central figures among our Founding Fathers, and he deserves the respect of our attention. He says (paraphrased): "Beware of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power. More violations of people's freedom have been effectuated by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations." The danger is becoming grave right now.

These words from one of our foremost Founding Fathers should give us pause for serious reflection. We should heed these words and unite to oppose the many abuses of power that are taking place today, because these abuses are a driving force behind ecological shortsightedness, and are contributing to dire health outcomes, deepening inequalities, rapidly mounting public debt, inadequate investments in infrastructure, declining social mobility, and a

worsening general welfare in the USA. We should stop bowing to "conservative" ideologies, and instead champion liberal ideas of fairness and common sense concern for the greater good. The shocking growth of extremes in inequality of income and wealth between the top 1% of Americans and the other 99% is causing a serious abridgement of people's economic freedoms. And the corrupting influence of wealthy people in our money-dominated political duopoly system is facilitating despotic usurpations of power. The evil nature and extensive harms inextricably involved in these political games call for reform. Church leaders should "turn left."

Wealthy philanthropist Bill Gates once threw down the gauntlet to the wealthy: "I believe that with great wealth comes great responsibility -- the responsibility to give back to society and make sure those resources are given back in the best possible way, to those in need." Donald Trump's pandemic plan, in stark contrast, wrote Susan Glasser, was "*Absolute Authority*", *No Responsibility*. Let's pay closer attention to what is essential.

To Do the Right Thing, or Not To Do the Right Thing, That is the Question

To be, or not to be, that is the question
 Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
 The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
 Or to take Arms against a Sea of trouble,
 And, by opposing, end them ...
 Ay, there's the rub!

--- Soliloquy in *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare

'Tis nobler, my conscience shouts to me in a respectfully muffled yet urgent tone, to proactively support common good goals, and to seize the moment by demanding fairer representation of common good interests, and by so opposing ideological wrongheadedness, to end its adverse and oppressive impacts.

Annie Leonard made a provocative assertion in *The Story of Change*, an excellent film in her outstanding *The Story of Stuff* series. She said the real power to create a fairer, healthier and more sustainable economy lies not in individual choices we make in buying things, but in coming together as citizens to build a better future. She also simply and brilliantly related how *The Story of Broke* is being used to shortchange students and the American people, and to radically transform our country into a less egalitarian place. Watch Leonard's animated films online for details -- and read on for some valuable perspectives and recommendations.

The American people should reject extremely partisan politicians who abuse power by dishonorably deceiving and betraying the people. We should be outraged at coldly calculating politicians who deceive people in important economic, health, environmental, social and military matters. In particular, we should reject every politician who tries to fool the American people with rosy rhetoric about freedom yet prescribes policies that give freedoms to rich people to evade taxes, and freedoms for corporations to pollute the commons, and freedoms for banks and big businesses to avoid rules designed to protect the greater public good, and freedoms of payday lenders to assess exorbitant interest rates, and freedoms of big corporate entities to roll back protections of working people and undermine public health laws, and freedoms of the gun lobby and the arms industry to exert excessive influence on our national decision-making. And we should reject freedoms of Republican governors and legislatures to restrict voting and gerrymander, AND to wage a perfidious war on women's rights.

Particularly objectionable are those politicians who adamantly oppose the freedom of women to make their own personal choices about having sex, preventing pregnancy, and making an achingly difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy when the circumstances commend such a course of action. And those who oppose the freedoms of students to get good affordable educations, and stand against minimum wage laws and higher pay for overtime work, and against women being paid equal amounts for equal work, and against universal healthcare. And those who oppose gay people having equal rights to heterosexuals. And those who staunchly oppose protections of public lands from overgrazing, privatization or corporate mining and fracking despoliation. We need better national plans to reassure people in future generations that the legacy we leave them will be one of reasonable hopes for safety, prosperity, economic solvency, and sustainable living.

Misinformation, negative attack ads, deceptive populist rhetoric, voter suppression efforts and absurdly

gerrymandered congressional districts have helped give conservatives much more power than they deserve. This is an anti-progressive development that makes our national politics much uglier and more dysfunctional, uncompromising, unfair, acrimonious and anti-environmental. Having Republicans in control of the White House and the U.S. Senate from January 2017 through January 2021 tragically undermined the rights and hopes of women, children, poor people, minorities, immigrants, gays and all in future generations. We must now strive to really reduce inequality and social injustices, and improve social mobility and prevent excessive harm to the environment. And we cannot let any leaders obstruct our obligations to the people in all other countries in the world that have agreed in Paris on the imperatives of acting to mitigate impacts of global climate change.

Further Observations on Anti-Egalitarianism

A great strength of democracy in the USA has always been its hope-inspiring capacity for adaptive self-corrections. Political power fueled by the growing concentration of wealth is undermining this central aspect of democracy, and casting doubts on our collective ability to achieve socially salubrious goals. Usurpations and abuses of power that diminish democracy -- shoed in through divide-to-conquer treachery -- are having a dire and corrosive effect on the economy and social cohesion, and on the longer-term future of our country.

The United States is being crippled by the stubborn unwillingness of the highest income earners to pay taxes at rates that are even 60% as much as the lowest rates in effect during the 45 years from 1936 through 1981. Many negative consequences result from our inability to collectively demand that narrowly-focused interest groups act more fairly to share prosperity. As we can see, obtuse and unempathetic avarice causes us, among other outcomes, to be unable to make adequate investments in improved healthcare, public education, a safer national infrastructure, sensible environmental protections, a strong social safety net, protected National Parks and open spaces, and a more stable climate.

Leaders of The Wilderness Society once stated: "We are seeing a dangerously unbalanced approach to our debt crisis. Conservation programs key to ensuring our long-term public and environmental health are being cut to the bone, while corporate polluters like oil companies receive billions in taxpayer dollars each year. Using borrowed money to finance government activities has finally reached a risky tipping point ...". The people who have benefitted from this long reign of fiscal insanity should be the main ones who contribute to our nation's stability and recovery, and to achieving a better balance in federal budgets. Fie on MAGA Republicans!

We have been collectively kicking the proverbial can down the road for so long that we don't even recognize the consequences of fiscally irresponsible actions. The U.S. has gone from being the world's largest creditor nation in the 1970s to the world's largest debtor nation after Reaganism took root. Banking system regulations were eviscerated, and risk-taking was stimulated with easy money policies. Debt-financed bubble economic policies were instituted, and capital was given freer rein in its efforts to triumph over labor by curtailing the collective bargaining rights of workers. And a small elite segment of society usurped the wealth generated by increased worker productivity. These mega-trends are working out badly for the vast majority of Americans today.

President Obama Shared a Perspective

Barack Obama once suggested that the best way to grow the economy is from the middle out, not from the top down. "It's time for a new economic patriotism rooted in the belief that growing our economy begins with a strong and thriving middle class," he said. The American people have been forced to try the top-down method ever since Ronald Reagan launched his folksy revolution, and the results have been pathetic. Well, admittedly they have been financially very advantageous for the top 1%. For almost everybody else? Disastrous!

Let's try a different way. Let's enact a new simplified income tax system -- one that is more steeply graduated. This means everyone will pay exactly the same amount of tax on every dollar they earn, as they do now, but that higher rates will apply on the highest levels of earnings. This is the right way forward. It is the proper way, in both fiscal and economic terms, as well as in social and moral ones.

Consider this closely. Median household income roughly doubled between 1945 and 1980, and this increase was about the same as increases in worker productivity. But rich people generally seem to feel supremely entitled to maximizing their earnings and savings, so a strong resurgent movement began to crush the power of workers. This

movement was stoked by Ronald Reagan's permanent firing of more than 11,000 air traffic controllers who had gone on strike for better working conditions and higher compensation. This merciless termination started a long downward slide for American workers. Since then, almost all productivity gains in the economy have gone to the wealthiest 10% of Americans, instead of being more fairly shared with workers who help generate them.

Inflation-adjusted pay to working people has basically remained stagnant since 1980, despite another doubling in productivity in the past 40 years. This essentially represents a redistribution of wealth to the top. It is an outcome that reveals the extreme inequities in our economic system. Seeing this, we realize that income and wealth should rightly be more fairly distributed. The best way to accomplish this would be by enacting more steeply graduated tax rates on income, and also on capital gains and rich kids' inheritances as well.

Manifesto Rudely Interrupted

Improved group cohesion is a key to human security and sanity. As our societies worldwide struggle to adapt to rapidly changing economic, public health, demographic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances, the need for inclusive and broad-minded solutions based on shared values becomes ever greater. Yet at this crucial juncture, humanity is being subjected to one of the rudest and most nefarious episodes of toxic divisiveness ever, in the chaotic aftermath of a vicious 2016 election in which the most dangerous demagogue in American history became the leader of the free world, and autocratic authority-abusing politicians are usurping power in far too many countries around the globe.

The American people need a good therapist to help them better cope, along with rational and effective leaders who can articulate a visionary message of sanity, and who can recognize the vital importance of choosing an inclusive path forward. We need honest leaders who are auspiciously effective in communicating the deep and overarching need for us all to collaborate together to create much healthier societies. And we need to find good ways to keep manipulative politicians and media from dividing us, preventing reforms and ripping the public off. Responsible folks support the idea that we should adopt a raft of win-win solutions to our problems, thereby making the world more just, egalitarian, empathetic and more ethical,, virtuous and peaceable.

The USA would have been much stronger and more secure if we had succeeded in defeating the brazen bid for power by a deceitful authoritarian whose egomaniacal self-interest vastly exceeds his concern for the common good. The American people are justifiably angry at their increasingly insecure condition because rich people have been grabbing more and more of the nation's wealth for themselves. Millions of folks have valid grievances for the way our system has been rigged to their disadvantage, and they are being riled up by rhetoric and propaganda pushed by conservatives and white supremacists, who are making desperate efforts to preserve a white male-dominated American order, which they see slipping away as the USA becomes more racially diverse.

Inequalities and inequities are intensifying in the world, and injustices are proliferating as the wealthiest 1% of people jealously strives to protect and expand their privileges in the face of growing needs for fairer treatment of the 99%. Ayn Rand championed an ideology that regarded businessmen and industrialists as heroic, saying they should have superior rights, and conservatives have adopted this idea to modern circumstances to rationalize low tax rates on the rich and an increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. But the simple fact of the matter is that everyone will be better off only when everyone is better off. Under Trump, the temperature in this pressure cooker got too hot, and the safety valve was screwed too tight, resulting in an unnecessarily risky state of affairs. We would be wise to turn down the heat on this pressure cooker of social unrest by implementing policies that are significantly fairer, so that there is expanded opportunity and inclusive prosperity and greater social justice. Costs of "social insurance policies" to accomplish this objective would be relatively inexpensive, and they would be Solon-wise and better for the 1% by being better for the 99%, thereby helping prevent disgruntled factions from coming out with proverbial pitchforks.

A Somewhat Objective Assessment

The Republican Party has devolved into a party of "rule or ruin", rejecting moderation and embracing partisan extremism. Republicans obstructed almost every initiative during the 8 years of Barack Obama's tenure in office that would have helped him succeed in righting the economy from recession and making the USA a fairer, more

prosperous nation. This extreme intransigence was consistent with their misguided top political priority: "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president," declared Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell after the 2010 elections. Then in 2021, McConnell was once again Minority Leader, and cynically declared, "100% of my focus is on stopping this new administration."

Republican hard-line stances are blatant forms of political sabotage. Though targeted to make President Obama fail, and now to prevent President Biden from succeeding, they have the 'collateral damage' side effect of hobbling and harming millions of people in the process. By adopting these top political priorities, Republicans give this goal precedence over improving the economy, helping create jobs, investing in people's health, defending democracy, responsibly dealing with the huge national debt, protecting the environment, or ethically making our country fairer. Republicans have traditionally wanted to do aggressive "nation-building" abroad, but today they seem dead set against fairer and more sensible nation building at home. "They demonstrated a real animus toward doing anything that would have helped the black guy in the White House succeed, I reckon!"

John Steinbeck's son Thomas once said, "My father valued patriotism above all other social obligations, but he had his own particular interpretation of just how true patriotism was meant to function." ... "From my fathers point of view, without a thought for self, a true patriot stands up against the stones of condemnation and speaks for those who are given no real voice in the halls of justice or the halls of government."

True patriots reject the strain of extremism that has hijacked the Republican Party, and oppose their harmful strategies. Hey, maybe we might even be able to alter the oppressive treatment of women, in all its economic and social, reproductive, psychological and cultural dimensions. That would be truly positive! If we really want liberty and justice for all in our great nation, we need to work together to actualize this fair-minded democratic vision. Let's strive to reach unity through adopting win/win consensus plans. And let's reject ploys to establish win/lose outcomes, which evidence reveals are the inevitable result of ever-more unfair crony capitalist laissez-faire "deregulated" policies and distorted national priorities -- and a corruption-enabled authoritarian agenda.

A second American revolution is needed to overthrow the insidiously despotic aspects of the new monarchs of tyranny in our nation. This second revolution must ensure that the architects of reactionary social, racial and environmental injustices are removed from halls of power. The first American Revolution threw off the tyranny of an imperial and undemocratic political system and an unfairly exploitive mercantile economic system that taxed people in the colonies without fair representation. The second revolution must throw off the tyranny of corrupt corporate politics and the cruel hegemony of wealthy persons and their obedient sycophantic supporters, whose selfish greed has saddled the people with undue austerity -- and is stealing from future generations to enrich the few today, even during a deadly global pandemic. This new revolution should be peaceful, progressive and more inclusive -- and it should come NOW! It should be guided by a visionary Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as specifically proposed in this manifesto. This is just *Common Sense!*

The young French nobleman and historian Alexis de Tocqueville visited America for 6 months in the early 1830s. In light of his experiences and observations, he wrote a poignant portrait about our country titled *Democracy in America*. He was frankly skeptical that we could make democratic governance work in the long run. But we have made it admirably far, and until the Con-Man-in-Chief was elected, it seemed probable that soon we will begin taking smarter corrective steps to fix the dysfunctionally inept and ultra-polarized political status quo, and begin to positively remedy the serious financial, social and ecological shortcomings of our current system.

I believe the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton was onto something when he coined the adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword." The salvo of ideas in the Earth Manifesto is my attempt to set forth intelligent ideas to try to overcome the narrow idea-shaping spin and propaganda of irresponsibly exploitive interests. Let it be!

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