

Earth Manifesto



"My Country, Right or Wrong"?

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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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, too many Americans are putting Party over Country, and 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 contemptible contrast to 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 \$34 trillion, and rapidly increasing, as 2024 began.

It is colossally foolish to give more debt-financed tax breaks to rich people. This drives up interest costs on the debt and heightens 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 the rich to add any more to the national debt, burdening every taxpayer in every future year, merely to increase fortunes of the few, while exacerbating 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 Jan. 6, 2021 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 Sean Hannity, Alex Jones, Tucker Carlson and Fox & Friends hosts, for millions of people, and Andrea Mitchell, Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes and others for millions of other people. 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 these facets of the current state of affairs that are highly unfair.

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 situation is facilitated by a political duopoly of Republicans and Democrats that allows such swindles, and gives the preponderance of 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 also 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 seen as 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 positively 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 beneficial 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 in 1935 by Sinclair Lewis. 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!" This is ominous in 2024!

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, along with 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 crony 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!", wrote 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." And falsehoods about election fraud are proliferating.

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." "Woe is us!"

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 impeachments, 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 politically 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 despite the fact that his priorities are shamefully self-serving, and his character seems to be in a state of egomaniacal arrested development and his cognitive capabilities are deteriorating. 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 and the discredited 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 now his betrayal of our European allies to side with Vladimir Putin. The January 6 Commission clearly exposed what really happened with Trump's coup attempt, and the Big Lie campaign that ignited it. "Conservatives" should stop enabling all the outrageous and 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 conservative judges who he hopes will be loyal to him and his self-interest and corporate friendly agenda. This agenda primarily benefits rich people and facilitates corruption, and is deeply discriminatory, and encourages resource exploitation and damages to 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 became increasingly obvious at the end of June 2018, when the high court made a string of 5-4 rulings, with the deciding vote made by partisan 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 disagree, and redesign our country to resoundingly refute these divisive anti-democratic stances.

Trump values loyalty over all other qualities -- loyalty to him, that is. In contrast, he is always 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 oppose power-abuses by 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 voting rights. This was the basis of the Southern Strategy developed by Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon to increase political support among whites in the South by appealing to racism against African Americans. This strategy stubbornly persisted to help Republicans gain a narrow majority in all the branches of government in 2016 (until they lost the House, and Nancy Pelosi again became Speaker in January 2019). And they are doubling down on the strategy in 2024.

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 50 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 over one-third of people in jails and prisons are Black. Overly punitive drug laws are supported by authority-abusing "law-and-order conservatives" to control and oppress the masses. Such laws are 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 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. 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 a stinging observation in 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."

As Donald Trump runs again for president in 2024, remember his time in office: "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 Trump supporters 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 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 give Republicans the rebuke they deserve for supporting a felony-committing con man who wants to terminate the Constitution.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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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.