

Earth Manifesto



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

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

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

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

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

There is a valid cause for the American people to have wide-ranging concerns that crucial fairness-oriented aspects of our democratic republic are being sabotaged, and here's why. A demagogue became president of the United States in January 2017. A demagogue, according to Wikipedia, "is a political leader in a democracy who gains popularity by arousing the common people against elites, especially through oratory that whips up the passions of crowds, appealing to emotion by scapegoating out-groups, exaggerating dangers to stoke fears, lying for emotional effect, or other rhetoric that tends to drown out reasoned deliberation and encourage fanatical popularity." Ominously, many demagogues throughout history had been elected to office and then "changed their democracy into some form of dictatorship." This concern is not mere hyperbole.

Alert! Ponder this idea, and understand what it is about. "Demagogues exploit a fundamental weakness in democracy: because ultimate power is held by the people, it is possible for the people to give that power to someone who appeals to the lowest common denominator of a large segment of the population." Nothing prevents

the people from giving power to someone who whips up their passions, prejudices and ignorance, and takes advantage of their fears for the pathetic purpose of gaining support by appealing to exclusionary tribal in-group fundamentalism and deceiving them by stimulating resentments and pandering to base psychological motivations.

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

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

- (1) Scapegoating. Demagogues blame the in-group's troubles on an out-group by demonizing and scapegoating others, usually of a different ethnicity, religion or social class, and in recent years especially immigrants.
- (2) Fearmongering. Demagogues hijack people's emotions by evoking their fears to stir support and action, and prevent rational deliberation.
- (3) Lying with little regard for facts or evidence, and wildly distorting the relative severity of dangers faced.**
- (4) Using emotional oratory and personal charisma, in effect rabble rousing at political rallies or speeches using a cult-like force of personality and emotional oratory to deceive, distract, entertain and enthrall, and to inflame the passions of fanatic supporters. and question the legitimacy of those who oppose them, and provoke suspicions and even hatred of people who oppose them.
- (5) Accusing rivals of weakness and disloyalty, and even advocating brutal violence to demonstrate strength, arguing that empathetic understanding and compassion are signs of weakness that enemies will exploit.
- (6) Promising nebulous, deceitful or impossible things to spark an emotionally motivating effect without being concerned for how such populist promises could be accomplished, and without any real intention to honor empty promises or greater good goals once in office, and secretly scheming to cheat the people.
- (7) Using physical intimidation and violence, often hurling insults and ridicule at others to intimidate them and shut down reasoned deliberation of competing ideas and plans, and make it seem reasonable to ignore the voices, needs and valid concerns of others.
- (8) Using personal insults, ridicule, vulgarity and demeaning nicknames, and acting with outrageous behaviors.
- (9) Engaging in folksy posturing and pretending to be like ordinary people whose support they seek.**
- (10) Grossly oversimplifying issues and using deceptive slogans in election campaigns and in governing.
- (11) Attacking the news media (and people on social media today), often intemperately and disingenuously, bullying and intimidating critics, whistleblowers and anyone that is critical of their rhetoric, strategies, policies, agenda, abuses of power or character -- and encouraging supporters to do the same.**
- (12) Evading the rule of law and efforts to hold them accountable, and trying to cripple the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, and to torpedo the crucially important separation of church and state.**

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

Eric Posner, a distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Chicago, wrote a book that provides a valuable analysis of the tactics that demagogic leaders use to subvert the institutions that stand between democracy and dictatorship. The book, published in June 2020, is *The Demagogue's Playbook*. It explained the nature and dangers of demagoguery and gives readers incisive insights into the pernicious techniques used by manipulative power-abusing demagogues to subvert democracy and change it into an authoritarian form of governing.

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

Mark Twain once reputedly made a relevant interesting observation: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme." The repetitious rhyme of Trump's divisive, inflammatory and danger-engendering tactics should cause every American to snap to alert attention. Actions and deeds, not words and rhetoric, are what determine the true nature of a person's character. Since many of Trump's ruses violated the public trust and came home to roost in the form of policies that further divided us, instead of uniting us, and increased the concentration of wealth and

power, the people must come together to decide what course of action to take. And they should give special attention to unconstitutional abuses of power and blatant malfeasance by Trump and his loyalists.

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

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

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

The American people are suffering the damaging impacts of Trump's demagogic reign, and his subsequent seditious conspiracy to cling to power, and to claw his way back into the presidency. The majority of Americans are concerned that he has gotten away with consequentially harmful abuses of power and the perpetuation of a crooked economic and political Crony Capitalist Con. And millions are worried about his dictatorial Project 2025

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

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

Think about this! Politicians should try to win elections by honestly offering people good plans for improving their prospects and overall security. Instead, here is how Republicans won. Trump brazenly used devious cajolery, dishonest bait-and-switch trickery, hard-times swindles, demagogic emotional hijacking, fear-mongering, and the exploitation of racial prejudices. He hid revealing information contained in his tax returns and engaged in other insidious intrigues. Add to this the fact that the election was thrown to a Republican advantage by the intervention by FBI Director James Comey in the last 11 days before the election, and that there was treacherous Russian cyber-hacking interference in American politics and suspicious collaboration by the Trump campaign with Russian operatives, and a drumbeat of hacked private emails leaked by WikiLeaks that gave Republicans unwarranted support. A proliferation of micro-targeted "fake news", conspiracy theories and character assassinations occurred on social media platforms like Facebook that helped Republican politicians. And Trump's billionaire friend David Pecker had his hands all over Trump's 2016 victory, engaging in "catch-and kill" efforts to cover up Trump's sexual infidelities, and glorifying Trump in the National Enquirer while persistently demonizing Hillary Clinton in screaming supermarket tabloid headlines and that told stories filled with gossip, character attacks and conspiracy theory propaganda. There is also the scurrilous fact that Republicans gained unfair advantages from rigging our election system through partisan gerrymandering, purges of voter rolls, and voter suppression laws that Republican legislatures passed in many states after a narrow 5-4 majority of ideological conservatives on the Supreme Court chose to eviscerate key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. **And Trump scurrilously set fire, like a scheming firefighter who has secretly become a flagrantly unscrupulous arsonist, to the dry tinder of tribal in-group fundamentalist white identity resentments and insecurities in his obnoxious bid to command attention and grab power.**

It seems clear that Trump won only technically, and by a tiny margin of less than a total of 78,000 votes in the three decisive states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, while losing the popular vote by three million votes.

He did NOT exactly win "fair and square", and he did not win ethically, morally, or socially responsibly. And his ego-driven triumph proved to bode ill for the prospects of all our heirs in future generations.

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

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

Trump Republican Follies

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

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

--- The statesman Edmund Burke

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

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

Big Picture assessments were conveyed in the *Global Risks Report 2019*, which was presented to influential members of the World Economic Forum in the beautiful Swiss mountain resort of Davos in January 2019. The top 3 risks the world faces in terms of likelihood are extreme weather events, the failure to mitigate climate change and adapt to it, and natural disasters. Also included in the top 10 risks were cyber-attacks, data fraud, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, severe water shortages, man-made environmental disasters, large-scale involuntary migration, and asset bubbles in major economies. The report also assessed the worst global risks from the standpoint of the seriousness of their impacts, and included dangers of weapons of mass destruction, critical information infrastructure breakdown and the spread of infectious diseases. Clearly, leaders worldwide should give top priority to dealing with these risks, rather than focusing on cutting taxes and other corrupt goals of politicians and rich people. Since the most consequential set of *Global Risks* revolves around the failure to adapt to changing climate conditions caused by global warming and fueled by the emissions of greenhouse gases, this must become a top focus. A report of research done by the banking giant Citigroup in 2015 put the costs of climate change, without mitigation, at a colossal \$44 trillion by 2060. This is a compelling reason why we should demand that conservative politicians in Congress stop pursuing misguided priorities and corrupted goals, and promoting misleading propaganda, and cease denying the climate crisis and opposing remedial action, as discussed below in *Overarching Ecological Perspectives*.

Republicans, despite presumably knowing of the overarching risks we face, put their top priorities on cutting taxes, repealing the Affordable Care Act, reducing budgets that help the poor, building walls, eviscerating protections of

the environment, eliminating common good regulations, and reversing many sensible health and safety rules. And they rashly oppose many of the smart things that the black man (and now Joe Biden) accomplished while in the White House. They are simultaneously amplifying the propaganda and distractions that they have been catapulting into the minds of the American people in order to rationalize this hopelessly misbegotten set of retrogressive plans and stress-exacerbating priorities.

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

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

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

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

Fomented National Insecurity

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

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

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

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

Further, Trump declared during the campaign that he would revise libel laws, with an apparent intent of intimidating journalists and other critics, and he made concerted efforts to suppress dissent and criticize protestors who oppose his actions. His tirades against NFL football players who protest racial injustices and police brutality were especially devious. During his campaign, he threatened women who get an abortion with some form of punishment, and he unrepentantly threatened to take away rights of any woman who gets pregnant to get a safe abortion, no matter what the circumstances. And he followed through by appointing three Supreme Court Justices that took that right away. He chose Mike Pence as his running mate, a man who is one of the most anti-choice and anti-gay politicians in America. He pushed to give gigantic debt-financed tax cuts to rich people, financed by borrowing trillions of dollars from taxpayers in every future year. This action caused inequalities to increase and irresponsibly drove up the national debt, and undermined the hopes for personal security, prosperity and well-being

of all people in the future. By championing greed-rewarding causes like this, bolstered by the Big Lie deception of the trickle-down theory, he weakened the true personal security of the vast majority of Americans -- especially the two-thirds or so of adults who have a net worth of less than \$100,000, and their families, who are already pretty darned financially insecure.

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

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

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

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

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

And Trump had the temerity to disingenuously and preposterously pretend that he poses no threat to anyone. Yeah, right. "Don't be afraid," he cajoled. Ronald Reagan, faced with a questionably trustworthy geopolitical opponent, counseled "Trust, but verify." It is bizarre that Trump asserted that nobody had anything to fear after he strived so assiduously to flood the fear-alert emotional control centers of our brains with an ugly and sustained torrent of hyped up fears, taunts, suspicions, conspiracy theories, antagonisms and solipsistic tweets. Fast forward to April 2024, and all sensible citizens should reject a return of his chaotic rule, grave uncertainties, and the spiking risks that accompanied Trumpian rule.

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

--- Thomas Paine

In the simplistic symbolism of old-time cowboy Western movies, the good guys often wore white hats, and the bad guys wore black hats. This visually symbolized the contrast between good heroes and evil villains. Today, it is less clear who the real good guys are. The restless citizenry, dressed in relative tatters, looks up at the nearby ridges and sees an intimidating line of men mounted on white horses, their outsized American flags streaming, all wearing the most absurdly conspicuous white hats and sitting on snorting steeds with their prominently displayed rifles cocked and having an aura of threatening authority. One of them even holds aloft a huge banner that streams in a stiff breeze, reading "Faithful and True", just like the rider in the Bible's Book of Revelation who judges and wages war. Let's not allow them to fool us!

The Biggest Financial Scam in World History

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

--- Mark Twain

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

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

Since the days of Reagan's presidency, tax battles have been intense, and the American people have managed to nudge the top marginal tax rate back up from 28% to 37% in 2021, which is not much of a compromising move back toward 70%. Meanwhile, the net worth of the top 1% of American people has increased by somewhere in the range of \$40 trillion -- and they have achieved this boon at the same time that the national debt has increased from less than \$1 trillion to over \$34 trillion in early 2024. This is all but a crime, an inter-generational scam in its consequentially unjust and highly unethical impacts. This is arguably the biggest financial fraud in world history, and it is revealingly facilitated by ideological propagandists and media outlets like Fox News, Inc., as well as by "conservative" politicians and corporate executives.

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

See what's happening here. These basic facts about how our economic and political systems are rigged urge us to exit our echo chambers and seek to better understand -- and to demand much more fair-minded leadership and

smart reforms. See *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways the System is Unfairly Rigged* for some enlightening understandings of the true nature of how our system works against the interests of the majority of the people.

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

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

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

Wall Street insiders in effect infiltrated the executive branch of the U.S. government even more than they had done in the last few decades. The stock price of Goldman Sachs zoomed up more than 35% in the first four months after election day in 2016, so Wall Street was giving a strong signal that it fully expected the Trump administration to represent windfall profits for this bank's bottom line. Wall Street rejoiced, and the spike in the power of Big Banks and Big Business is reducing the influence of working class folks even more than it had been in the decades prior to this revolting development. This was consequentially bad news for the masses.

Trump has never been an ally to working people in his business dealings, so he was deceiving people to have claimed that he planned to stand up for working class folks. He initially chose Andrew Puzder to fill the Cabinet position of Secretary of Labor. Puzder is a wealthy businessman and big political donor to Trump who had been chief executive of a company that franchises fast-food outlets, and he was an outspoken critic of higher minimum wages and expanded eligibility for overtime pay and the worker protections enacted by the Obama administration. Trump's nomination of Puzder was a clear indication that he wanted to facilitate the maximizing of private profits for the few at the expense of the many by wrapping the ruse in the ideological cloak of deregulation and anti-union dogma. Puzder proved to be so involved in scandals that he was forced to bow out from the prospective Secretary of Labor position in soon after he was nominated.

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

Risks Related to "the Disastrous Rise of Misplaced Power"

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

Bernie Sanders wrote these compelling words just after the 2016 election: "President-elect Trump is right: the American people voted for change. But what kind of change will he be offering them? Will he have the courage to stand up to the most powerful people in the country who are responsible for the economic pain that so many

working families feel, or will he turn the anger of the majority against minorities, immigrants, the poor and the helpless?" The answer is clear. He sided with corporations against working people, and gave more money and privileges to the powerful. Revelations since the 2016 elections provided the American people with compelling reasons for insistently demanding that we reverse course against misguided policies. Deep conflicts of interest were exposed with Trump's far-flung business interests and lack of an asset "blind trust", and with his family's nepotistic involvement in governing. He has continued ever since to conceal his tax return information, preventing people from understanding the unscrupulous extent to which his cunning business dealings are full of conflicts of interest and malfeasance, both at home and in nations abroad. He committed fraud with his Charitable Foundation, and violated the Constitution's Emoluments Clause. His smug, stubbornly absolutist and authority-abusing stances made it clear that public graft was spiking, and this was only the tip of the iceberg.

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

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

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

Trump fans the flames of an astonishing set of extreme inequities that have been generated since 1980 by making huge tax cuts to primarily benefits corporations and the wealthy. At the same time, he imposed a variety of austerity measures on the masses. Trump and Republicans in Congress are clearly trying to pull the wool over our eyes with one of the most egregious bait-and-switch betrayals of the American people ever. The point man on Social Security for Trump's transition team was a longtime advocate of privatization of the program, which violated Trump's promises that he would protect people's Social Security retirement incomes. And Republicans made concerted efforts to reduce health insurance coverage for many millions of Americans. First they tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and failing that, they resorted to sabotaging it in five main ways, as Robert Reich made clear in his video, *Who's Trying to Kill the Affordable Care Act?* They also tried to slash spending on Medicare and Medicaid, and sneakily attempted to replace these federal programs with vouchers or block grants to states. Trump initially put Tom Price in charge of the Department of Health and Human Services, a man who was a stalwart Georgia Republican congressman who wanted to privatize Medicare. Trump thus brazenly violated his campaign promises to defend these social safety net programs.

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

The Alliance for Retired Americans described Price's plan as "a declaration of war on seniors, retirees and anyone who is counting on having guaranteed health care benefits when they retire after a lifetime of hard work." Nancy Altman, co-director of Social Security Works, called it "classic bait and switch," adding: "Trump ran on a promise,

repeatedly made, not to cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. Price has spent years working to destroy all of these vital programs. This nomination is a betrayal of the American people." After months of trying to get rid of Obamacare, Tom Price was forced to resign due to the bad optics of his lavish use of charter flights at taxpayer's expense. Sensible folks proclaimed, "Good riddance!"

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

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

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

Not only have hate crimes surged across the USA since 2017 when Trump became president, but threats by Trump supporters have proliferated against African Americans, Latinos, Jews and gay people. Asked about such issues by Lesley Stahl on "60 Minutes" on the Sunday after the 2016 election, Trump turned to the camera and sternly said, "Stop it." But as Aasif Mandvi, author of *No Land's Man*, pointed out in an article in the New York Times, if Trump really sincerely wanted to disavow and condemn acts like this and organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, he would do it the way he does when he feels strongly about an issue -- by spewing forth on Twitter:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Steve Bannon was finally driven from his influential position in the White House, and returned to Breitbart, where he worked to get extreme right-wing candidates to challenge Republican moderates in order to drive the USA even

further toward the domineering hegemony of extreme conservatives over the American people.

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

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

"If he governs as he campaigned," presciently observed Michael Gerson, an op-ed columnist for The Washington Post just after the 2016 election, "Trump will smash the unity of our country into a thousand shards of bitterness." That seems to be coming to a pass, especially after his lies about not having lost the 2020 election.

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

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

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

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

Ideologically Twisted Perspectives on the Supreme Court

The 2016 elections were significantly influenced by one major issue: who would be able to appoint a Supreme Court Justice to replace Antonin Scalia, who had died in February 2016, and other Justices during the 2017 to 2021 presidential term in office. When Anthony Kennedy retired in 2018, it set up real political fireworks because an

extreme partisan Republican Brett Kavanaugh was nominated and narrowly won a terribly ugly confirmation battle, despite much information being suppressed by Republicans (and apparently by the FBI).

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

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

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

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

Republicans want judges who will side with ideologues who say that government has no place in determining whether large political expenditures prevent corruption or "the appearance of corruption," so that no limits will be imposed on Big Money spent in our elections to buy influence. According to OpenSecrets.org, a record \$1.4 billion of Dark Money and SuperPAC money was spent in the 2016 elections, much of it in secret. This moneyed influence has clearly distorted and corrupted our democracy. A record \$600 million flooded Senate and House races, with voters often not knowing who contributed the money. And 94% of national House races and an astounding 96% of Senate races were won by the candidate that spent the most money. Republicans hypocritically oppose reforms that would fairly address the problems posed by our country being corrupted by Big Money in politics. The 2020 elections involved even larger sums of dark money, but they benefitted Democrats more than Republicans, so reforms in this arena should receive bipartisan support.

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

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

The Lessons of History, as summarized by Pulitzer Prize-winning historians Will and Ariel Durant, reveal that when societies have reached a tinderbox condition by having too extreme a degree of inequality, it historically has been

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

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

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

Having used the words "police state" a few times, let me clarify, lest this sound like some wild conspiracy theory. Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. has lurched toward more widespread surveillance of citizens and fewer checks on law enforcement power. One protection that has been in place since 1878 is the Posse Comitatus Act, a law designed to limit the powers of the federal government so that it cannot use military personnel to enforce domestic policies within the U.S. This law is often relied on to prevent the Department of Defense from interfering in domestic law enforcement. In the annual National Defense Authorization Act signed into law at the end of December 2011, a controversial provision was included that authorized the indefinite military detention of persons that the government suspected of involvement in terrorism, without giving the arrested person the right of being charged or being given a fair trial. This treatment could be used on U.S. citizens arrested on American soil, and one source has claimed that this provision "is tantamount to the militarization of law enforcement and the repeal of the Posse Comitatus Act."

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

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

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

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

during the transition of power from the last Congress to the next one. This action would have served as a last bulwark against demagogic abuses of power that threatened our cherished freedoms.

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

Here is a powerful reason to maintain an independent judiciary, as the American Civil Liberties Union stated before the 2016 election. Trump represented "a one man Constitutional crisis". According to the ACLU analysis, all of Trump's rhetorical proposals taken together would violate the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution in the Bill of Rights, so Trump in many respects appeared to be part of a devious plot against the best interests of the vast majority of the American people, and he presented a clear and present danger to our personal freedoms and democracy. The potential for tyranny is palpable, and his budget proposals and tax cut priorities confirmed the fears of many people that he would govern in favor of the 1%, not the 99%. And since losing the 2020 election, Trump is desperately trying to claw his way back into power to evade being held responsible for all of the 91 felony charges against him -- and he promises to be a dictator on day one.

Political authority depends on legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, and Trump's loss of the popular vote by almost 3 million votes in 2016, coupled with other pathological aspects of his character, means that his legitimacy hung by a thread. In far too many ways, the use of demagogic tactics to gain power renders illegitimate the authority that Trump and his cabal of cronies imposed over the American people.

Overarching Ecological Perspectives

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

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

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

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

Crony capitalism seemed to get worse than ever before, with so many rich people in Trump's Cabinet. His choice of Exxon Mobil Corporation Chief Executive Officer Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State confirmed this concern, and

set up "a confirmation battle with U.S. lawmakers who have questioned the oilman's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin." Trump made the announcement hours after he unexpectedly delayed a planned statement on how he would separate himself as president from the far-reaching conflicts of interests associated with his business activities. There were deep conflicts of interest related to having the CEO of a giant oil company act as the top diplomat and architect of foreign policy. It is chilling to realize that Tillerson "favored doing business in countries that offer political stability, even if this stability was achieved through authoritarian rule," as Steve Coll, author of *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power*, once wrote. After a turbulent 14 months as Secretary of State, he was fired, and was replaced by Mike Pompeo, a hawkish hard-liner, and a co-conspirator in the plot to pressure Ukraine for political favors that resulted in Donald Trump being impeached in the House (the first time).

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

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

The most important premises of the Earth Manifesto involve ecological issues. Trump is dangerous in this arena because his positions on environmental issues reveal that he may go down as the most anti-environmental American leader in history. A leading climate change denier, Myron Ebell, ran the Environmental Protection Agency transition team for Trump. Ebell is a professional climate change denier with no scientific experience. Intense suspicion was cast on his "integrity", due to the fact that an organization he led took millions of dollars from Exxon and other giant fossil fuel conglomerates to promote doubts and deceptions about climate change.

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

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

One of the most dangerous of Trump's actions was to make the USA a rogue nation on the international stage. He vowed to cancel billions of dollars in U.S. commitments to the UN Green Climate Fund, which is helping people in countries adversely affected by global warming to deal with adversities caused by the accumulation of greenhouse

gases in the atmosphere. This stance was belligerently lacking in empathy, in light of the fact that the U.S. has contributed the most of any country on Earth in driving the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from under 300 ppm in pre-industrial times to a peak of 424 ppm in May 2023. While Trump thundered on about making America First, he was being harshly and arrogantly unjust to vulnerable people in other nations in doing so. This is particularly true with regard to climate injustices. It is clear that the United States should pay a proportionally larger amount of the costs required to cope with the impacts of extreme weather events around the world, so that poorer countries that disproportionately suffer climate-related hardships will be covered by those who contributed the most to causing these hardships.

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

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

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

Feeling helpless in the face of a powerful adversary can be discouraging, but when we see that there is a good course of action we can take to dramatically improve the world, it can inspire us to positivity and resolve. There would be poetic justice if the strengthening movement to challenge the legitimacy and rightness of excessive influence by Republicans actually became an overwhelming force in peaceably preventing them from getting elected and staying in office.

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

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

The Harms Associated with Public Graft and Diversionary Tactics

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

Trump's strategy of blaming the woes of American workers on immigrants and bad trade deals with other countries was cunning, but this is another plank in the scam that prevents people from understanding that the main culprits in the hardships endured by working people are giant corporations abusing their power and depriving workers of better compensation for their work and profit-enhancing increases in their productivity. Conniving rich people are conspiring with big business executives in this effort to control our country and dictate our national policies. And they contributed significantly to drive up inflation in 2022-2023.

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

The obvious intent of this socially foolish provision was to give bigger profits to Big Pharma, even though this was accomplished by foisting higher costs on taxpayers and driving up public obligations for the national debt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robert Reich made a surprising revelation in an article he wrote in December 2015 titled *The Revolt of the Anxious Class*: "Last year two highly-respected political scientists took a close look at 1,799 policy decisions Congress made over the course of over twenty years, and who influenced those decisions. Their conclusion: "The preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." We must change this to preserve our democracy. Let's "drain the swamp"!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barack Obama managed to preside over the economy during a period from February 2010 to the end of his respectable tenure in office in which there was a net increase in private sector jobs for an all-time record 84 months in a row, with something like 15 million jobs created. One contributing factor to this great record was a moderately more progressively structured tax system that was put into effect in 2014 when tax rates on all earnings over \$450,000 for a married couple were increased from 35% to 39.6%. Republicans regressively cut this rate to 37%, which is having the opposite effect, and may eventually lead to another economic downturn or disastrous debt crisis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thou shalt not be dishonest" may not be one of the Ten Commandments, but it is crucially valuable to evaluate important issues from the viewpoint of honestly understanding the consequence of a course of action. The worst aspect of Trump's leadership was that he undermined *The Common Good, Properly Understood*. His backward stands on environmental issues was especially anti-democratic because he favored allowing the environment to be despoiled merely so that private profits could be maximized by allowing large amounts of costs to be socialized onto other Americans, and onto billions of folks around the world, and inevitably onto countless of our descendants

forevermore. Need resources, anyone? Appreciate clean air and clean water? Care about coral reefs? Love untrammled wilderness areas? Enjoy peaceful coexistence? Or even just want to help preserve coastal property values from draconian declines?

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

Let's think like a business person for a moment, and one who sees a bigger picture than just making money no matter what the costs or harms. It is just wrong to allow rich people to continue to engage in this historic financial scam of abusing the power of their moneyed influence to get politicians to rig our tax system to give them low tax rates, financed by borrowings from the public, as they have been doing since Ronald Reagan. It is wrong because the bottom line result of this scam has been to add over \$33 trillion to the national debt since 1980, and to constrain spending on public education, opportunity, healthcare and other provisions of our social safety net that provide a modicum of security to the two-thirds of Americans who live paycheck to paycheck.

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

Subsidiary Themes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Because Trump lashes out verbally at every critic and has made insulting attacks on Mexicans, immigrants, Muslims, women, disabled people, prisoners of war, Gold Star military families and Democrats, there is little doubt whether he would abuse the power of the presidency given another opportunity. He would lash out with chilling authoritarianism, starting with immigrants, and he would intimidate Americans who exercise their First Amendment-guaranteed freedom of expression and rights to protest. He engages in retributive actions against

media outlets that criticize him, and against lawyers, judges, patriots and politicians who oppose him. Since his time in office, there has been a catastrophic collision of white supremacy with the demographic reality of growing racial and ethnic diversity in the USA and the world.

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

An instance of Trump's twittering efforts to mislead people and suppress protests and repress the freedom of speech was demonstrated when he got real angry at the cast of the highly acclaimed play *Hamilton*. The cast felt compelled to communicate a heartfelt message to Trump's vice president-elect at the time, Mike Pence, when he attended a performance of this musical about our Founding Fathers in November 2016. After this popular theatrical production concluded, Brandon Victor Dixon, the actor who played Vice President Aaron Burr, took a microphone and addressed the audience and Mr. Pence with these ringing words:

"You know, we have a guest in the audience this evening -- Vice President-elect Pence, I see you walking out, but I hope you hear just a few more moments. Sir, we hope that you will hear us out. We, sir, are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us -- our planet, our children, our parents -- or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. All of us."

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

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

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

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

Such threats of disproportional penalties to any patriotic protestor who burns the flag constitutes a power-abusing

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

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

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

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

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

It Can't Happen Here

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

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

Wise patriots recognize that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. *We the People* have been distracted from being vigilant by the deadly serious demagogic antics of master manipulators who manifestly mesmerize the people

and the media in order to triumph in the contest for power and control. Trump indulged in activities that appear for all the world like a hostile takeover of the U.S. government, and it proved to be hard to stop him from cementing his hold on power and consolidating it with a cabal of loyalists and an enabling phalanx of Big Money plutocrats. This was a revolting development because of its subversive impact on our democracy. And the coup continued with MAGA Republicans promoting the big lie about fraud in the 2020 elections, and then Trump loyalists waged an insurrectionary attack on Congress on January 6, 2021, and they concocted an illegal fake electors scheme, and targeted state and local elections officials, and made efforts to gain control of Congress in 2022 and are trying to win the White House in 2024 in order to rule imperiously over the people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Author Masha Gessen commented on what Hillary Clinton should have said after Trump's triumph over her, indicating that instead of being magnanimous in conceding the presidential race, she should have said: "Thank you, my friends. Thank you. Thank you. We have lost. We have lost, and this is the last day of my political career, so I will say what must be said. We are standing at the edge of the abyss. Our political system, our society, our country itself are in greater danger than at any time in the last century and a half. The president-elect has made his intentions clear, and it would be immoral to pretend otherwise. We must band together right now to defend the laws, the institutions, and the ideals on which our country is based."

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

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

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

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

Mark these words. The conniving Trumpster poses a dire threat to a free press. He has repeatedly called journalists and reporters "the enemy of the people". He came first for Hispanic immigrants, with aggressive deportation agents. He attempted to de-legitimize protestors by charging that they were professional agitators, basically denying that the fear he inspired with his insult-heavy rhetoric was justified. His actions against Muslims and people in other minority groups strengthened worldwide recruiting support for terrorist groups. He threatened women who get an abortion with some form of punishment, and appointed three Supreme Court Justices who overturned the eminently sensible *Roe vs. Wade* decision, in an act that is forcing thousands of women to have children they don't want, or to seek unsafe abortions. And consistent with his vindictive history of retaliation against anyone who opposes him, he came after other individuals and groups, including liberals, intellectuals, writers, artists, professors, and state and local election officials. He took harsh actions against Black Lives Matter activists and drug users, who are already disproportionately locked up in prisons.

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

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

Republicans grabbed dominating one-party rule in the USA from 2017 to 2019, with the scurrilous help of Russian hackers and the Director of the FBI, who helped throw the outcome of the election from a Democratic presidency and a Democratic Senate and a more liberal Supreme Court -- all imminent probabilities just 11 days before the election -- to a near monopoly on power that represented an extreme threat to many of the civil liberties enjoyed by American citizens. Many conservatives and Trump supporters became giddy with their triumph -- idiotically chortling "own the libs" -- but should wake up and demand that our representatives take strong steps to strengthen protections of our cherished freedoms and our democratic form of government. Do NOT vote for Republicans in the 2024 elections!

Eternal vigilance is required to keep despotism at bay because today it is glaringly apparent that the American people are highly vulnerable to the predations of demagogic con man Trump. And this toxic narcissist seems to be too strongly motivated by money, self-dealing and the egomaniacal thirst for power. It is contrary to the best interests of the people to be ruled by this man, who is so lacking in honesty, empathy, compassion, civility, magnanimity, respect for women, honor, virtue, poise, statesmanship, maturity, moral rectitude or ethical sanity.

"These are the times that try men's souls," as Thomas Paine was wont to say. Is it even remotely possible that our plutocratic American democracy could become a dictatorship? Many Americans might deny this could happen, expressing complacent confidence that it can't happen here in the USA. Our civil and military institutions are strong. But we are in entirely uncharted waters with demagogues dominating Republican politics, and plotting to eviscerate responsible civil servants with a 900+ page Project 2025 agenda. Considering Trump's vengeful persona and unempathetic self-centeredness and the fealty he commands over the Republican political base, responsible citizens should demand a pledge from each and every one of our representatives to oppose subversion of our democratic institutions. Cowardly Republicans should stop marching lockstep with Trump, and being so afraid of his grotesquely sociopathic wrath.

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

Recall again that Mark Twain called the phrase, "Our Country, right or wrong ... an insult to the nation." Remember the great author's words about true patriotism being loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders. Five years ago, I wrote, "Let's all look Mr. Trump square in the eye and ask, in honor of the tens of millions of Americans who have died in the patriotic duty of protecting our liberties and the values represented by our Constitution, Bill of Rights and rules of law in our democratic republic, that he make an irrevocable commitment not to impose any semblance of dictatorial rule on us in these already terribly divided United States of America.

The majority of the American people feel that Trump's rise to power presents a clear and present danger to our liberties, and because of the authority-abusing nature of his rise to power and his demonstrated authoritarian tendencies, he represents the biggest threat ever in our country's history of our democratic governance being overthrown from within."

This brazen and dangerous demagogue has induced a bout of temporary insanity in our psyches, and this alarming development has served to give this tyrant-wannabe excessive power. Every honest American should recognize this resentment-engendered and fear-actualized moment of error, and should now join together to speak out about the overriding desirability of retracing our steps and seeking to regain the road that is most likely to lead toward reaffirmed assurances of liberty and justice for all, and peaceful coexistence, and personal safety that is found in overarching guarantees of the freedoms spelled out in the Bill of Rights.

Many of the British "brexiteers" who voted for the UK to leave the European Union are suffering a serious case of "bremorse" at their votes, but this pales in comparison to the remorse the American people are experiencing in light of the treachery of MAGA Republican's far-right influence, which is abusing authority against Americans who have heretofore been guaranteed basic civil liberties.

Trump has given Americans little real reason to trust him or his word, and it should be the moral responsibility of each and every one of our elected representatives to make a commitment that they will honorably try to prevent future abuses of authority that would deprive any class of American citizens of a significant degree of the liberties they enjoy today. This particularly includes Hispanic Americans, Muslim Americans, African Americans, Jewish Americans, Asian Americans, gay Americans and female Americans.

Steve Bannon was once described as the "Leni Riefenstahl of the Tea Party movement", because of his manipulative spin. It may be recalled that Riefenstahl is possibly the most famous propaganda filmmaker in history, having created films like *Triumph of the Will* that catapulted Hitler's propaganda and droned the German people's minds into dutifully obeying the fascist dictator. Bannon promoted wild conspiracy theories when he was the head of the fringe Breitbart News, so the American people should see the real danger that he and Trump have posed, and we should demand guarantees that our cherished freedoms will not be diminished.

In the 1935 film *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl created a droning cavalcade of psychological manipulation through images that extolled Nazi greatness and the virtues of duty, patriotism and blind obedience by the German people. After Trump's triumph of invective and manipulative fear-mongering and vile exploitation of people's prejudices, and the reactive fervor of white male nationalists, he gave a startlingly uncharacteristic victory speech in which he declared he would be a leader who cared for all the people. This give people a momentary illusory hope that he would rise above the shrewdly manipulative character of his bigotry-spewing and sexist campaign self, in all its socio-pathological vitriol and extreme divisiveness and deep dishonesty.

But no, it was not to be. Trump failed to discipline his behaviors and steer them toward fair-mindedness, ethical action or any of the respectable hallmarks of true social intelligence, decency, civility or empathic compassion. He continues to stoke culture wars and exploit people's resentments and feelings of alienation on account of modernity, urbanization, multiculturalism and progressivism. The fact of the matter is that Trump cares mainly for money, power, self-aggrandizement, vindictiveness, and satisfying his ego and ambition, and so he shows few scruples and little of the better angels of human nature like conscience or empathy.

Recent history is not reassuring in the matter of presidents abusing executive power. George W. Bush abused the power of the presidency in a litany of consequential and extremely costly ways, including lying to the people to gain support for preemptive wars and military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. And conservatives accused President Obama, somewhat absurdly, of having abused power with things like Executive Orders to implement a Clean Power Plan, and the initiative to lift the threat of deportation from an entire class of children of immigrants known as Dreamers.

In order to avoid having our democracy meet its demise in dictatorship, the American people need to be hyper-alert to make sure despotic abuses of power do not morph into dangerously deceitful strategies and policies that undermine the common good.

Al Gore made it abundantly clear in his book *The Assault on Reason* that reason trumps faith, and faith trumps fear, and fear trumps reason. So Trump's stunning victory over liberty-loving democracy should not really have been such a big surprise. He used fear to trump reason, and now the unreasonable is exerting too much influence over the Republican Party. Trump effectively exploits reason-hijacking resentments and fear, thereby deceiving

with barely believable presumption, while pretending he cares about the downtrodden and those who have been left behind by policies and trade deals that mainly benefit corporations and rich elites.

Trump managed to triumph by scurrilously appealing to white males and "authoritarian followers", employing many of the powerfully manipulative tactics used by demagogic tyrants throughout history for their effectiveness in attracting support. This was a modern "triumph of the will" that poses a big threat to cherished liberties and the safety of the American people. A Trump comeback would lead to chaos, and bring our great American experiment in democratic governance to an inglorious end, after so many long years of struggle and hard-fought progress.

Profound anger at the extent to which our system is rigged has led many voters to want something different -- even though it means turning in risky new directions. Voters rejected a "stale elite consensus", but we are now confronting a still greater threat. What remains of checks and balances in our government is fragile, and some of the most sinister forces in American political life are right now imposing their ruthless will. Voters supposedly responding to a desire to get rid of the D.C. swamp have returned many politicians to the capital that are downright antagonistic to democracy and the true best interests of ordinary working people.

Pragmatic leaders of the progressive movement need to clearly articulate the best ideas for what collective response should be made in the face of the "unprecedented moment of crisis" that is affecting us as a result of Trump's rise to completely controlling the Republican Party.

Curiously, it was Ronald Reagan that coined the slogan "Make America Great Again". He used it during his first run for the presidency to promote a narrow agenda that was a subterfuge designed to crush collective bargaining power of working people, and to hyper-stimulate spending on the military, while reducing public funding for higher education. He also waged a crusade to eliminate regulations on giant banks, in a move that led to a costly savings-and-loan financial debacle. He made concerted efforts to undermine environmental protections, and also put in place rashly regressive tax and spending policies that have been the main factor in having dangerously driven the national debt up from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to over \$34 trillion today.

At least when Reagan campaigned, he asserted a hopeful vision of "beacon on the hill" optimism and propriety. Trump, in contrast, sets forth a dark and dystopian view of America. He is doubling down on Reagan's debt-financed trickle-down tax policy, and this could result in a severe debt crisis that would be disastrous to poorly educated Trump supporters in particular, and to billions of people worldwide. Thus, ironically, Trump's dystopian view of "carnage" in the world could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Trump cunningly adopted the slogan to Make America Great Again for even more nefarious purposes: to promote white supremacy and divide people against each other. His hidden purposes were similar to Reagan's -- to enact highly regressive changes in taxation that will increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, despite the danger this presents to democratic fairness, and to fool people left behind by the forces of globalization and modernity. He is betraying the trust of the American people and acting in ways that are even more divisive, anti-inclusive, racist, sexist, inequality stoking and anti-environmental.

Trump owns or controls more than 500 businesses in some two-dozen countries around the world. Getting things done in many of these countries inevitably involves various forms of corrupt practices like bribery and public graft to accomplish anything. Corruption needs to be understood and exposed to remedy the real nature of improper activities, and secrecy is a roadblock to remedial actions. To allow the Trump family to continue to conceal their business involvements by hiding Trump's tax returns is to engage in collusion that allows likely questionable business activities and conflicts of interest and compromising activities to continue.

Transparency International, one of the top think tanks in the world, defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". Donald Trump's entire personal business history is a saga of money-obsessed endeavors for personal gain that are tainted with thousands of lawsuits over egregious conflicts of interest and a variety of unethical activities. Transparency International makes it clear that corruption eventually hurts everyone who depends on the integrity of people in positions of authority. The level of corrupt activities and their nature differs from country to country, and includes a wide range of activities, from small bribes paid to officials by millions of people to large-scale looting.

Imagine a better world where social relations are infused with Hygge, the cozy and hugfully heart-warming Danish "feel good philosophy" (pronounced hooga). And imagine, like John Lennon did, all the world living in peace, and not mired in dark divisions and antagonisms riled up in fits of Trumpian bile. Imagine people no longer being forced to suffer from "Trump Derangement Syndrome". Imagine instead all of us together now, healing through the marvelous tonic of people appreciating Nurturing Parent worldviews and throwing their support to much better representatives of the common good. Imagine more honest and honorable leaders who will devote more generous funding to the general welfare and social safety net protections of public security and public health, and to overall well-being and salubrious protections of the environmental commons.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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