

Earth Manifesto



"My Country, Right or Wrong"?

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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Mark Twain made extraordinary observations about loyalty, unthinking patriotism and imperialistic nationalism in his provocative essay *Glances at History*, in which he called the phrase *My Country, Right or Wrong* "an insult to the nation." He wrote this thought-provoking piece, quoted below in full, in 1906, four years before he died.

The great philosophic author and celebrity had also weighed in on these issues of loyalty and patriotism almost 20 years earlier in his 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, when he wrote, "You see my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags -- this is loyalty to unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy, was invented by monarchy; let monarchy keep it."

Democracy in the USA today, in its turn, is what needs to be cared for, and loyalty should be given to inclusive fair-minded representation of all constituencies. This is particularly crucial at this juncture in history because our democracy is under assault by authoritarians, demagogues, swindlers, con men and rogues. Carl Schultz, a German immigrant who served as a military general in the Civil War, and as a Republican Senator from Missouri, and later as Secretary of the Interior, expressed the more honorably patriotic sentiment back in 1872 that, "My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right." That's a real good call.

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

The ruthless agenda of wealthy people is reckless due to the focus of Republican politicians on shredding the social safety net and making big cuts in public funding for healthcare in order to finance more tax breaks for the highest income earners. They are accomplishing this retrogressive goal by perpetrating scandalous scams: First, by imposing austerity measures and unnecessary hardships on the vast majority of Americans, who they are mercilessly cheating and lying to, and effectively stealing from -- at a terrible cost to the overall well-being of the populace. Along with this forced austerity comes a diminished democracy, a degraded environment, serious Tragedy of the Commons harms, spiking public debt, and pathological assaults against Golden Rule fairness principles, which in contrast are commendably championed by proponents of more broadly shared prosperity and social justice, environmental justice and peaceable coexistence.

A main way that the super-rich are getting away with their uber-swindle against the common good is by driving up the national debt every year. This is an insult to the nation because these folks have already gotten away with paying historically low tax rates since Ronald Reagan radically reduced the top tax rates in the 1980s from a long-standing 70% (or higher) to only 28%. They achieved this treachery by successfully pushing a "trickle-down" Big Lie, claiming that low tax rates on the highest levels of income would be the best national plan. Fast forward three decades, and this reckless strategy has been a principal factor in unconscionably driving up the debt from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to a staggeringly risk-laden \$21.9 trillion as the year 2018 ended.

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

Mark Twain also focused in his essay *Glances at History* on the propensity for the U.S. to become involved in wars. This issue rings with a particularly poignant and important clarion call in the world today due to the findings of a National Security Poll conducted by NBC News in July 2017 that found a stunning 76% of the American people are worried that the USA will become engaged in a major war within 4 years. Since then, with all the saber rattling threats between the Twitterer-in-Chief and North Korea's "supreme leader" Kim Jong-un and the religious theocrats in Iran, this concern has perhaps increased. And though the Singapore Summit in June 2018 partially defused this danger with North Korea, there has been so much turmoil and chaos in national politics in 2018 that the likelihood is increasing of a *Wag the Dog*-like war to distract people from domestic shenanigans and glaring injustices and the investigations into various Republicans having worked with Russian operatives to throw the election to Donald Trump.

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

Glances at History

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

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

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

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

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

Wow! -- These understandings are a sly way of speaking real truth to power! These words reverberate off the interior walls of the echo chambers in which we are ensconced, suddenly competing to divert our attention from so many epic distractions, which notably include the Master-Manipulator-in-Chief's tweets and our online social feeds and the scandalous and scandal-obsessed daily news that features ranting-and-raving Rush Limbaugh and Fox & Friends and the ideological extremist Sean Hannity, for millions of people, and Rachel Maddow, Lawrence O'Donnell, Brian Williams, Washington Post's excellent Daily 202 and generally more honest and accurate progressive perspectives, for millions of others. As author Michelle Alexander put it: "The right to speak truth to power is the foundation of democracy and must be vigilantly protected and defended. Now more than ever."

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

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

Behind this apparent bitter divisiveness in our politics today lies a deeper bipartisan consensus in which Big Money donors have bought our democracy and staunchly oppose any real changes to the pathetic planks that are foundational to this fraud. This is why the social security safety net is being shredded, and it is why urgently needed reforms have not been made. This is how the interests of the wealthy few are advanced while those of the majority are rashly undermined. This is why the worst provisions of the *Amazing Disgrace* debt-financed Trump Tax Folly were enacted without a single vote of support by Democrats in Congress. As a sad result, the voices of tens of millions of Americans are being arrogantly ignored, and their personal security is being sacrificed. These times are definitely trying our souls.

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

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

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

Americans everywhere on the political spectrum love personal freedoms, from leftist radicals and hippies of the Sixties to Libertarians and "Don't Tread on Me" protestors and hyper-partisan anti-government Tea Party types and members of the right-wing Freedom Caucus faction. So it is ironic that manipulative politicians have managed to push policies that are contrary to individual liberties and the overall well-being of the people. It is truly bizarre how successful they have been at sabotaging live-and-let-live Golden Rule reciprocity principles, and at giving excessive wealth and power to the top 1% at the expense of everyone else.

Let's open our eyes, and demand action to reduce the influence of Big Money in our elections with sensible campaign finance restrictions and reforms related to gerrymandering, voting rights and lobbying. Enact the anti-corruption initiative, H.R.1, and let's also adopt fairer, more steeply graduated national tax policies and act to ensure more inclusive live-and-let-live social attitudes, and rise up in salubrious solidarity to positively change the current retrograde state of affairs!

In a world still reeling from the exceedingly high costs of the severe credit crisis and subsequent recession of late 2008, and an on-going ominous explosion of public debt, I again consulted Charles Ferguson's red-jacketed book with the preposterously provocative title, *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. Ferguson, after all, had directed the illuminating documentary film, *Inside Job*, which exposed some pretty ugly and damning culpabilities that contributed to the cathartic calamity of the financial crisis. On the very first page, Ferguson did not disappoint, providing food for thought with the understanding that the financial crisis that struck during those panicky days was caused by a variety of factors that notably included massive fraud, and yet not a single financial executive has gone to jail, "and that's wrong." ... "Nor has there been any serious attempt by the federal government to use civil suits, asset seizures, or restraining orders to extract fines or restitution from the people responsible for plunging the world economy into recession" -- despite the fact that this profiteering malfeasance cost many trillions of dollars.

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

Today, after Republican politicians used a scurrilous litany of basically illegitimate means to seize power, they are acting like "evil doers", reversing the consumer protections hammered out in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, in addition to sacrificing the environment to benefit polluters and profiteers in the short term. So the pendulum is swinging backwards, and this is bad news for humanity!

Revealingly, Wall Street banks are among the biggest beneficiaries of the Republican Tax Cuts boondoggle. "In fact, fresh off getting caught lying about millions of fake accounts and systematically ripping off its own customers, Wells Fargo got a \$3.35 billion windfall. The other Big Banks are expected to fare almost as well. It takes an army of lobbyists to get these kinds of results from Washington. And the sad truth is that you may be paying for that army."

There's something happenin' here
What it is ain't exactly clear
I think it's time we stop
Children, what's that sound?
Everybody look at what's going down.

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

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

Revealingly, entrenched interest groups exploit resentments, confusion, misunderstandings, apathy and despair to prevent common good reforms. They encourage modes of thinking that lead us to believe problems are insolvable, that nothing we do will matter, or that issues are too complex for there to be even an opportunity for change. Alex Steffen wrote in *The Politics of Optimism* that "it is a long-standing political art to sow the seeds of mistrust between those you would rule over." Nice going, guys!

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

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

Hallelujah! Let us adopt a philosophic attitude -- I invite readers to exit their echo chambers and accompany me into a Big Picture arena informed by comprehensive understandings, and to make honest efforts to see how potentially positive these extensive understandings really are. Keep in mind that all the policy proposals made in

these writings honor social justice and environmental justice, and therefore all these recommended plans are fair-minded, and are structured in highly progressive ways rather than in regressive ways.

Quite unfortunately for the American people, the Republican Party represents entrenched special privilege, and worse, Republican politicians have allowed their extreme right-wing fringe to come in from the cold of their deserved exile, and to seize power with their Chaotic-Decider-in-Chief and strategists like the diabolically cunning Steve Bannon (from January until August 2017) and the bigoted Stephen Miller. In this bizarre Republican regime, Bannon had grabbed a seat as the most influential White House advisor for the first seven months of this Trumpian era of folly. Bannon went back to being the head of the emotion-exploiting, conspiracy theory-propagating Breitbart News, a far-right news, opinion and commentary website that he described in 2016 as "the platform of the alt-right". This group pathetically rejects mainstream conservatism in favor of white nationalism and extreme right ideologies.

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

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

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

Could the good old USA actually become a repressive authoritarian state? To quote and paraphrase and extrapolate on the words of the central character Doremus Jessup in *It Can't Happen Here*, "Why, there's no country in the world that can get more hysterical -- yes, or more obsequious -- than America. Listen to the divine oracles on the radio and in the media. Remember all the episodes of Tammany graft and Chicago gangs and crooked Wall Street bankers. Remember the million-dollar evangelists and the Ku Klux Klan and our Red scares and war hysteria and wartime censorship of honest newspapers. Bad as Russia! Remember when the hick legislators in certain states, in obedience to William Jennings Bryan, who learned his biology from his pious old grandma, set up shop as scientific experts and made the whole world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution? Remember how trainloads of people have gone to enjoy lynchings? Not happen here! Prohibition - - shooting down people just because they might be transporting liquor -- no, that couldn't happen in America! Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!"

Today, the world has become increasingly vulnerable to anti-democratic authoritarian rule, due to the ease with which anti-immigrant fervor can be exploited. This sad state of affairs is being accompanied by a rising tide of refugees, desperate asylum seekers, ethnic strife, political instability and spiking sentiments of tribal factionalism, nationalism and stoked sectarian religious fanaticism. And all of this is unfolding in a context of the hegemony of a system of what Naomi Klein calls *Shock Doctrine* "disaster capitalism". A sad feature of the undesirable rise to power of operatives promoting disaster capitalist outcomes is that there is a spike in

extremes of inequality between rich people, on the one hand, and poor people and those in the increasingly insecure middle classes, on the other.

The Deceiver-in-Chief frequently attacks journalists, saying that reporters often make up "fake news" using unnamed sources, and he has repeatedly described them as being "the enemy of the American people". These ruses, and his many "alternative facts", are antithetical to our democratic values. Donald Trump distorts the truth and tells more lies than any president in history, as evidenced by a long list of these untruths summarized for readers by the New York Times in *Trump's Lies, The Definitive List*. And by mid-December 2018, the Washington Post Fact Checker "lie trackers" had counted more than 7,500 false or misleading claims made by Trump in his first 700 days in office. The environmental advocacy organization NRDC commendably evaluates some of the most consequential of Trump's lies, revealing a reality that urges us to oppose his consequential villainy. "O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!", said Sir Walter Scott.

Good investigative reporting is invaluable in a democracy, as can be seen with the unraveling of glaring omissions and apparent lies that Donald Trump Jr. and Attorney General Jeff Sessions and others in the Trump circle have told about their involvements with Russians interfering in our 2016 elections. Treacherously, Trump's allies on Capitol Hill have been escalating their efforts in recent months to undermine Robert Mueller's investigation and to impugn the integrity of career law enforcement professionals in the FBI and the Justice Department.

The succinct words of President Harry Truman warn us: "Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear." Good citizens in a democratic republic support their leaders when they do the right things -- those consistent with the common good -- and they oppose their leaders when they do the wrong things. Perhaps it is true that understandings of right and wrong have been contested and convoluted ever since God supposedly banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for having eaten the fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". According to astute psychologist Stephen Pinker, opinions have become "loyalty badges for one's tribe". In the confines of our echo chambers, we often don't see other viewpoints or big picture perspectives.

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

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

Master manipulators have savagely divided the American people into antagonistic camps residing in their own separate propaganda-informed echo chambers. Facts have become slickly fluid, and the leaders who have gained control of the government are demonstrating an arrogant disdain for rules of law and civil norms, and the president is telling brazen lies. Social media has served to exacerbate these dangerous divisions by promoting selective spin on news stories and negative conspiracy theories, and journalists are being threatened for doing a good job of investigative reporting. The independence of the Justice Department is being undermined, and the Supreme Court has been waylaid by ideologically extreme appointees. This will likely get worse with the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy and the subsequent highly controversial confirmation of the long-time Republican partisan Brett Kavanaugh. Conservatives have refused to compromise, and political sycophants are loyally marching to the tune of a crazed alpha male wannabe whose demagogic actions have given him great power and influence in spite of the fact that his priorities are radically self-serving and his character seems to

be in a state of egomaniacally narcissistic arrested development, and he cares much more for money and himself and his family than for the true greater good of the people, or for democratic fairness, or for the future well-being of the country and life on Earth.

The right thing to do would be to act in ways that are honestly most likely to put the top priorities of country and people over political party, and to choose the common good of the American people over loyalty to Trump and Pence and McConnell and the Republican Party. Republicans in Congress should stop disgracing our nation with faithful claptrap loyalty to Trump, right or wrong. Our representatives should rightly stop helping the administration cover-up the Trump campaign's involvement with Russia's meddling in our elections to help him win. And our representatives should change course and stop enabling the rash ruses described in *See Clearly*.

Republican politicians today demonstrate that they are driven by one overriding principle, and that is to gain and maintain power by pandering to rich people who want to perpetuate the system that gives them outsized benefits while skimping on more important national priorities. This is why they push to cut spending on social safety net programs and protections of the environment, and allow high costs to be foisted onto the masses and all folks in the future. To accomplish this, they unconscionably contribute to continuing to run up the national debt to finance tax cuts and poorly managed federal spending. These stalwart politicians in the D.C. swamp are stubbornly dedicated to this tax cutting Santa Claus strategy in political economics, despite its terribly tragic implications for the health, well-being and future security of the American people and all of humanity.

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

One of the most serious ways Trump is trying to cling to power and perpetuate a long-term extreme influence over American society is by stacking federal courts with ideologues who he hopes will be reliably loyal to his corporate friendly, wealthy-people favoring, discriminatory and anti-egalitarian agenda, and his resource exploiting indulgences and environment harming plans. He is appointing judges who are relatively young, with an average age under 50 years old. "That is surely no accident. Like George W. Bush before him, Trump appears to favor younger nominees who will remain on the bench for decades -- and serve as a farm team of future Supreme Court picks. With a friendly Senate and a defanged filibuster, this strategy ... ensures that Trump's nominees will shape American law for generations to come, no matter how his own presidency ends." The payoff for proponents of the far right agenda was increasingly obvious at the end of June 2018, when a string of 5-4 rulings was made by the high court, with politically chosen Neil Gorsuch representing the deciding vote.

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

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

Today, with Donald Trump demanding loyalty from others, yet throwing anyone under the bus that displeases him, we can see clearly that it is profoundly misguided to be loyal to politicians who engage in self-serving conflicts of interest and broad abuses of power. We should rightly be loyal to the principles upon which our great democratic republic was founded, as spelled out in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution: "... to form a

more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity".

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

To help win his campaign for the presidency, the Ruthless-Art-of-the-Deal-in-Chief enlisted the help of Steve Bannon because he was an expert at exploiting people's emotions through the resentment-filled "bile factory at Breitbart News". Steve Bannon had been able to mine the "deep Web" to dig up dirt on the Clinton Foundation for Peter Schweizer's 2015 gossip- and innuendo-filled book *Clinton Cash*. Trump and Bannon received lavish financial support from the nefarious billionaire Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah, and exploited information from the data-analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, an offshoot of a British company "that advised foreign governments and militaries on influencing elections and public opinion using the tools of psychological warfare." According to information on Wikipedia, the role and impact of the company's data analysis activities on both the Trump campaign and the pro-Brexit campaign in Britain "has been disputed and is the subject of ongoing criminal investigations in both countries."

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

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

Favorite targets of scapegoating throughout history have alternately been poor people, communists, immigrants, racial minorities, Jews, Gypsies, feminists, dissenters, journalists, investigative reporters, socialists, liberals, marijuana users, long haired hippies in the Sixties, heretical religious folks, Muslims and terrorists. Since 9/11, trillions of dollars have been devoted to destroying terrorists and assorted freedom fighters around the world, many of whom have been driven to their violent opposition by extreme injustices perpetrated by those who decide that one of our nation's top priorities should be to spend trillions of dollars waging this offensive.

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

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

Non-Hispanic whites are continuing a long-term demographic decline from about 90% of the population in 1950 to about 60% today, and it is estimated that white people will slip below 50% of the population in maybe 25

years. It sure would be a good time to set a precedent for treating minorities more fairly, given that whites will become a minority as these demographic changes continue long-term trends. Given that rates of childbearing are much higher for females in racial minorities, why don't Republicans strongly support contraception?!

Give close consideration to the underlying reasons that the U.S. has waged a harsh "War on Drugs" for the last 40 years. There is one overriding reason that this prosecution is pursued so ruthlessly and with almost missionary zeal. It is hinted at in a simple statistic -- only about 12 percent of the U.S. population is African-American, but 36 percent of people in jails and prisons are black. Harsh drug laws are enacted by authority-abusing law-and-order conservatives in order to control and repress the masses. Such laws are also designed to keep desperate underclasses from developing an enthusiasm for revolutionary change. This is why reasonable folks want to make our society truly fairer by helping overturn the unjust status quo.

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

A friend of mine from North Carolina relates the story of her time in the South in the 1960s, when anti-cohabitation laws between unmarried adults were used as a pretext to justify raids on the homes of long-haired young people to try to bust them on drug charges. This in turn was a pretext for oppressing hippies, student activists, liberal professors and people in racial minorities, especially including blacks and Latinos.

Almost half a million people are locked up in prisons and jails right now due to drug offenses, and many millions have been convicted over the years. Tellingly, individuals convicted of a felony are not eligible to vote while incarcerated or on parole, or on probation, or for two years after the completion of all supervised releases. Here is yet another coldly-calculated means of suppressing votes of those who oppose injustices.

On a positive note, Florida voters decided in the November 2018 midterm elections to restore voting rights to convicted felons who have served their time. This ballot initiative was a huge victory for the ACLU and other activists, potentially expanding voting rights to more than 1.5 million Floridians, and may possibly tip the scales toward Democrats in what may be "the country's most significant swing state."

Demagogues also exploit people's nationalistic feelings to gain support. Trump manipulatively took advantage of people's feelings of nationalism by proclaiming "America First" during his campaign. When America First means being bad neighbors and mercilessly exploiting others and undermining social cohesion and using extreme divisive tactics, and pompously declaring that we must build a huge wall on the border with Mexico and "Mexico will pay for it", and separating children from their parents who are seeking asylum, and insanely wreaking havoc on Nature, it is morally wrong. It is wrong to treat people in other countries shabbily, or to maintain an attitude of arrogant imperial hubris. It is also wrong to, in effect, wage a war on the poor to further enrich the rich. Empathy and compassion may be the key to positive change, and surely it is a terrible plan to act like an asshole toward "shithole countries". While it may be a convenient expediency to adopt asshole attitudes, such stances are grotesquely antithetical to American values, and it is cartoonishly foolish to dangerously antagonize others instead of treating them in ways that are more just, inclusive, fair, egalitarian and mutually secure and peaceable for all concerned. More generous international assistance would be a smarter plan than oppressively pushing other countries toward being failed states.

Donald Trump made a big deal out of Made-in-America Week in July 2017, leaving many observers perplexed at the depth of his hypocrisy in using products manufactured abroad in all of his American hotels and golf resorts. They were stunned to hear he had requested more than 230 foreign workers for his Florida properties alone since the day he launched his presidential campaign. And it just doesn't square up for Ivanka Trump to have had all the goods she sold made in Asian countries that have cheap labor and often dangerous working conditions. Come on, Ivanka, tell us real economic truths! And take fair-minded and ethical steps to institute stronger controls over abusive labor practices and child labor in the factories that produce the goods you sell.

Clear understandings can inoculate us against "alternative facts" and deceptive spin and blatant lies in our "post-truth" world. Think about the sensational words of Eugene Robinson, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, who penned this stinging observation on July 17, 2017 in *The Country Deserves Much Better than Trump*:

It's exhausting, I know, but don't let outrage fatigue numb you to the moral bankruptcy and gross incompetence of the Trump administration. This ugly departure from American norms and values must be opposed with sustained passion -- and with the knowledge that things will probably get worse before they get better.

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

We have a president whose North Star is naked self-interest, not the good of the country. Trump cares about his family, his company and little else. He dishonors the high office he holds, then reportedly spends hours each day railing against cable-news coverage that he finds insufficiently respectful. His ego is a kind of psychic black hole that devours all who come into its orbit.

Another of many quotes attributed to Mark Twain, perhaps apocryphally, was this: "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled". This is a concept that rings true today, when so many Trump and Pence supporters are sticking with their hoped-for saviors, despite all evidence that they are being double-crossed. Maybe this quote was actually uttered by that wily phrase-smith Yogi Berra. He was, after all, known not only for his exploits on the baseball field, but was perhaps even more famous for his paradoxical and whimsical quotes about life in general. He once declared, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, baseball bat to the face." Ouch!

Mark Twain suffered many personal tragedies in his family and many financial setbacks, but he was still able to articulate this fine sentiment: "A healthy and wholesome cheerfulness is not necessarily impossible to any occupation." In light of this auspiciously holistic attitude, let's breathe deep, and let go, and honor the counsel in the Bible, "in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer."

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

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

"It's hard for the United States to pursue international anticorruption and ethics initiatives when we're not even keeping our own side of the street clean. It affects our credibility," Mr. Shaub stated. "I think we are pretty close to a laughingstock at this point." In his *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2* (University of California Press, 2013), Mark Twain wrote: "The glory which is built upon a lie soon becomes a most unpleasant incumbrance. ... How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!"

Jonathan Swift wrote in *The Examiner* in 1710: "... as the vilest Writer has his Readers, so the greatest Liar has his Believers; and it often happens, that if a Lie be believ'd only for an Hour, it has done its Work, and there is no farther occasion for it. Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv'd, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect ..."

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

Misunderstandings can have catastrophic consequences, so we need courageous patriots who are loyal to their country over their political party, and we cannot afford to have contemptible politicians fawning over and helping enable ruthlessly authoritarian leaders who do not respect norms and rules of law.

President Theodore Roosevelt advocated a Square Deal for the American people, saying, "We must treat each man on his worth and merits as a man. We must see that each is given a square deal, because he is entitled to no more and should receive no less." He honorably added, "Let the watchwords of all our people be the old familiar watchwords of honesty, decency, fair-dealing and commonsense." And he had pointed out in September 1903 that "The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us."

Let's demonstrate solidarity with the national motto of France, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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