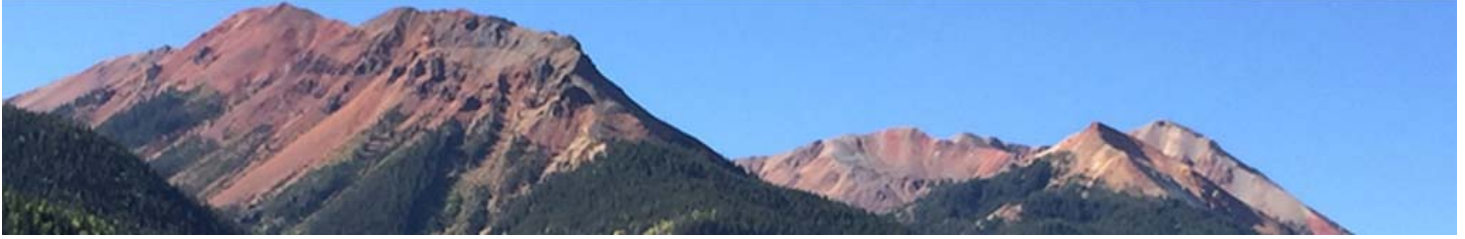




Earth Manifesto



"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 and patriotism in an essay titled *Glances at History* in which he called the phrase *My Country, Right or Wrong* "an insult to the nation." He wrote this piece in 1906, about four years before he died, though they were only published posthumously, in 1962.

The great philosophic author and celebrity had weighed 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."

Today, wealthy conservatives are bizarrely intent on pushing for ever more perks for themselves and their rich cronies, and for an ever-bigger monopoly on the total annual after-tax income and accumulated wealth in the USA. This is a bizarre and rash top priority due to the brilliantly simple understandings articulated by Nick Hanauer in *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, which was published in a 2014 Memo "To: My Fellow Zillionaires". Hanauer makes it clear that it's in the best interest of all Americans, rich and poor alike, to have a fairer society than we have today so that peaceful coexistence has a better chance of reigning in the land of the free.

The ruthless agenda of wealthy people is also rash and odd due to the focus of Republican politicians on shredding the social safety net and making huge cuts in public funding for national healthcare in order to finance more tax breaks for the rich. They accomplish this goal by using two uber-scams: First, by imposing harsher austerity on the 99% of Americans, who they are mercilessly cheating and lying to, and effectively stealing from -- at a terrible expense 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, and sad assaults against Golden Rule fairness principles that are championed by proponents of social justice and environmental justice and peaceable coexistence.

The second way that the super-rich get away with their ultra-scam against the common good is by driving up deficit spending 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%. We are foolish to allow rich people to add any more to the national debt now that the total obligation on these borrowings has increased from less than \$1 trillion in 1980 to a staggering and risk-laden \$20 trillion in August 2017.

Today, Donald Trump is demanding loyalty from others, yet he throws anyone under the bus who displeases him. But it is misguided to be loyal to politicians when they engage in abuses of power and self-serving conflicts of interest. 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 abusers are the true patriots in America today, and those who proudly wear "Make America Great Again" caps are often manifesting a foolish blind obedience to "conservative" politicians who are double-crossing them and betraying greater good goals and undermining the moral good of human social groups.

Mark Twain also focused in his provocative essay *Glances at History*, which readers will find below, on the propensity for the U.S. to become involved in wars. This issue rings with a particularly poignant and important clarion call today due to the findings of an NBC News National Security Poll in July 2017 that found a stunning 76% of Americans are worried that the United States will become engaged in a major war in the next four years. With all the turmoil and chaos in national politics this year, the likelihood is increasing of a *Wag the Dog*-like war to distract people from domestic shenanigans and the wide-ranging investigations into various Republicans having worked with Russian operatives to throw the election to Donald Trump.

Mark Twain was upset at U.S. imperialism in those days, and 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 in opposition to the harsh injustices perpetrated 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 and latter day robber barons of his time. 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 pulpit? Is it the school superintendent? 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!! That's a sly way of speaking real truth to power! These words reverberate off the interior walls of the echo chambers in which we are comfortably ensconced, suddenly competing to divert our attention from so many distractions, which notably include our online social feeds and Trump tweets and the scandalous and scandal-obsessed nightly news that features ranting-and-raving Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, for millions of people, and Rachel Maddox and Brian Williams and generally more honestly accurate progressive perspectives, for millions of others. As the author Michelle Alexander has 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 understandings, 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 dilemma-filled straits.

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 to more perfectly 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 shoddy planks that underpin this fraud. This is why glaringly needed reforms have not been enacted. This is how the interests of the wealthy few are advanced, while those of the majority are largely ignored.

Charles Ferguson writes about 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. so that the government generally acts in matters related to Wall Street and both tax and environmental policy to benefit the wealthy few. They do this in part by manipulating public opinion through the influence of people in deeply ideological "conservative" think tanks and media outlets like Fox News that cunningly affect public opinion in retrogressive ways or in defense of the 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 -- Big Money has been allowed to have far greater free speech rights than 99% of the people. Donald Trump has served as a treacherous Trojan horse for rich people to seize overwhelming power and to facilitate abuses of influence by plutocrats to dominate our national decision making in the USA.

The wise Athenian lawmaker Solon earned the reputation of being "the father of democracy" for his effectiveness in forging adequately fair compromises between the rich and the poor in classical Athens, saving the republic. We would be smart to see this lesson of history, and to emulate it!

Americans everywhere on the political spectrum love personal freedoms, from leftist radicals and hippies of the Sixties to Libertarians and the "Don't Tread on Me" loyalists to anti-government Tea Party partisans. So it is ironic that manipulative politicians have managed to push policies that are contrary to individual liberties, and that tend to undermine live-and-let-live Golden Rule reciprocity principles, and that give 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 reforms and lobbying reform. To start, let's adopt fairer, more steeply graduated national tax policies and more inclusive live-and-let-live social attitudes, and rise up in solidarity to positively change this state of affairs!

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 - 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 Buzz Windrip's America in the brilliantly satirical novel about an authoritarian takeover of the U.S. government, Windrip declared that there was thereafter to 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 apathy and confusion 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, and that issues are too complex for there to be even an opportunity for change. Alex Steffen writes 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."

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.

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 why I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, so passionately propose providentially good solutions to problems throughout the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto.

"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. Optimism, by contrast, especially optimism which 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."

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 honestly make efforts to see how potentially positive

these extensive understandings really are. Keep in mind that all of the policy proposals made in this manifesto honor social justice and environmental justice, and therefore all of these recommended plans are fair and workable and are structured in highly progressive ways, rather than in regressive ways.

Unfortunately for the American people, the Republican Party represents entrenched special privilege, and its right-wing fringe has come in from the cold of their deserved obscurity and, in the person of Steve Bannon, grabbed a seat as the most influential White House advisor and chief strategist in today's bizarre Republican regime. Bannon had been the executive chair of the emotion-exploiting and conspiracy theory-propagating Breitbart News, a far-right news, opinion and commentary website that Bannon described in 2016 as "the platform of the alt-right", a group that rejects mainstream conservatism in favor of white nationalism and extreme right ideologies.

This development causes me to hear a refrain that keeps coming like a reverberating voice from heaven, 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 elections of 1936 and triumphs, using demagogic rhetoric and actions to seize power, and soon after he takes office he imposes dictatorial rule. Some say that this couldn't happen in the USA today. The refrain that echoes in the interstices of my mind is "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 Donald Trump having taken over the Republican Party. It is revealing that 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 the fact of the matter is that Trump managed to usurp power in the Republican Party, for that political institution is in basic ways the province of authoritarian impulses. According to Bob Altemeyer in *The Authoritarians*, conservatives share the psychological trait of 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 ripe for anti-democratic authoritarian rule due to political instability, a rising tide of refugees, ethnic strife, anti-immigrant fervor, spiking sentiments of nationalism and stoked sectarian religious fanaticism, and all of this in a context of the hegemony of a system of what Naomi Klein calls *Shock Doctrine* "disaster capitalism" that features growing extremes of inequality between super rich people and poor people and those in declining middle classes.

Donald Trump frequently attacks journalists, saying that reporters often make up "fake news" using unnamed sources, and he describes them as "the enemy of the American people". These ruses, and his many "alternative facts", are antithetical to our democratic values. 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*, as updated on July 20, 2017.

The succinct and ominous 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 investigative reporting is invaluable in a democracy, as can be seen with the unraveling of the apparent lies and glaring omissions that Donald Trump Jr. and Attorney General Jeff Sessions and others in the Trump inner circle have told about their involvements with Russians interfering in our 2016 elections.

"O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!"

--- Walter Scott

Good citizens in a democratic republic support their leaders when they do the right things -- those consistent with the common good -- and they voice opposition to their leaders when they do the wrong things. 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 a "tree of the knowledge of good and evil". According to the 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 for cheap prices and investors for higher returns. I have conveniently summarized these things online in *The Common Good, Properly Understood*.

In a bigger 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 the British philosopher 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."

I plunge on. Dividing the people is a sadly effective way of undermining their general welfare, and blaming the wrong people or causative factors a ploy used by savvy propagandists to gain power.

The American people have been savagely divided by master manipulators into antagonistic camps residing in their own propaganda-informed echo chambers. Facts have become slickly fluid and leaders have gained control of the government who demonstrate an arrogant disdain for rules of law and civil norms, and who tell brazen lies. Social media has served to exacerbate these dangerous divisions by promoting selective spin on news stories, and journalists are being threatened for doing a good job of investigative reporting. The independence of the Justice Department is being undermined, and the independence of the Supreme Court has been waylaid by ideologically extreme appointees. Conservative politicians 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 despite the fact that his character seems to be in a state of egomaniacally narcissistic arrested development, and his priorities are radically self-serving and he cares much more for money and himself and his family than for the true greater good of the people and democratic fairness and the future of the country and planet.

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 the Republican Party. Our representatives in the U.S. Senate and House should stop disgracing our nation with faithful claptrap loyalty to Mr. Trump, right or wrong. Our representatives should rightly stop helping the administration cover-up the Trump campaign's involvement with Russia's meddling to get him elected. And our representatives should change course and stop enabling the rash ruses described in my essay *A Scathing Critique of Misguided and Misguiding American Leadership*.

Republican politicians today consistently 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 by skimping on more important national priorities -- by slashing spending on social safety net programs and protections of the environment, and allowing high costs to be foisted onto the masses and onto all folks in the

future. To accomplish this, they contribute to continuing to run up the national debt to finance this foolhardy scheme. These stalwart politicians in the D.C. swamp are stubbornly dedicated to this Santa Claus strategy in political economics, despite its terribly tragic implications for the health and well-being of the American people and all of humanity.

Adolf Hitler, commenting on the desirability of absolutism to achieve his totalitarian goals, uttered 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 that our Demagogue-in-Chief 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, discriminatory, anti-egalitarian, wealthy-people championing and environment damage-rationalizing agenda. 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."

Extreme ideology should have no place on the Supreme Court or in federal district courts. After all, every justice or judge 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."

Donald Trump values loyalty over all other qualities. Loyalty to him, that is. In contrast, he seems 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 is expressing increasing 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 many other Republican politicians 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 in order to give huge tax breaks to the rich, and to jeopardize millions of people's healthcare and shred the social safety net and eliminate protections of consumers and women and children and racial minorities and a habitable environment.

To help win his campaign for the presidency, Trump enlisted the help of Steve Bannon, now his Chief Strategist. Bannon was an expert at exploiting people's emotions through the resentment-filled "bile factory at Breitbart News", and had been able to mine the "deep Web" to dig up dirt on the Clinton Foundation for Peter Schweizer's gossip and innuendo-filled 2015 book *Clinton Cash*. Trump and Bannon received lavish financial support from the nefarious billionaire Mercer family, and exploited information from a 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 at 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 new book *Devil's Bargain - Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency*. Green tells the story of Bannon 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, stereotyping people and scapegoating them are generally used as divisive wedges. These ruses are sadly contrary to unifying principles and the common good, and can be better understood as a part of the twelve main tactics used by demagogues to stir up fanatical support. See *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy* for a better comprehension of these manipulative schemes.

Favorite targets of scapegoating throughout history have alternately been poor people, immigrants, communists, people in racial minorities, Jews, feminists, dissenters, honest journalists, investigative reporters, socialists, liberals, marijuana users, people with long hair in the Sixties, heretical religious folks, Muslims and terrorists. In the past 16 years, trillions of dollars have been devoted to destroying terrorists and assorted freedom fighters around the world who 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 on this effort.

Of the many villainous ploys demagogues use to gain power, some of the most despicable are the exploitation of people's racial and ethnic biases. 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 proposal basically condemned black people, "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. And the strategy has persisted to help Republican politicians gain a narrow majority in all the branches of government today.

Non-Hispanic whites are continuing a long-term decline from about 90% of the population in 1950 to about 62% today, and it is estimated that they will slip below 50% in maybe 25 years. It sure seems like it would be a good time to set a precedent for treating minorities more fairly, given that whites will become a minority as demographic changes continue their long-term trends.

Give close consideration to the underlying reasons that the U.S. has waged such 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 12 to 13 percent of the U.S. population are African-Americans, but about 36 percent of the people in jails and prisons are black. Harsh drug laws are enacted by law-and-order authority-abusing conservatives in order to repress the masses and keep the desperate underclasses from developing an enthusiasm for revolutionary change to make our society truly fairer by overturning the unjust status quo.

Seeing that Attorney General Jeff Sessions wants to ramp up the War on Drugs again with harsher penalties for the use of marijuana, the satirical *Onion* imagines 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 of the homes of long-haired young people to try to bust them on drug charges -- and 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 because of drug offenses, and millions have been convicted over the years. Tellingly, individuals convicted of a felony are ineligible to vote while incarcerated, on parole, on probation or for two years after the completion of all supervised releases. So this is a cynical means to suppress votes of those who oppose injustices.

Demagogues also exploit people's nationalistic feelings to gain fervent support. Donald Trump 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 extremely divisive tactics, 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.

Trump made a big deal out of Made-in-America week in July 2017, and it left many observers quizzical at the depth of hypocrisy in his using products manufactured abroad in all of his American hotels and golf resorts, and in his having requested more than 230 foreign workers for his Florida properties alone since he launched his presidential campaign. And it just doesn't square up for Ivanka Trump to have all the goods she sells made in Asian countries that have cheap labor and dangerous working conditions. Come on, Ms. Ivanka, tells us real economic truths! And take bold, fair-minded and ethical steps to institute much stronger controls over the 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 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, perhaps apocryphally, to Mark Twain was this: "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled". This concept rings true today, when so many Trump supporters are sticking with their hoped-for savior, despite all evidence that he is double-crossing them. 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."

Mark Twain suffered many personal tragedies in his family and many financial hardships, 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 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 so 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, who was the head of the Office of Government Ethics until his resignation in mid July 2017, pointed out that actions by Trump and other White House officials have created a "historic ethics crisis," and he called for major changes in federal law to combat the threat by expanding the power and reach of the oversight office. Shaub said that the Trump administration had flouted or directly challenged long-accepted norms in a way that threatened to undermine the United States' ethical standards, which have been 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 said in an interview. "I think we are pretty close to a laughingstock at this point."

"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!"

--- *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2* (University of California Press, 2013)

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 ..."

"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."

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Hannibal, MO

Postscript -- Opening a Modern Pandora's Box of Inequities

Ideas as old as the hills reverberate through the arcane interstices of my mind, buffeted by conceptions as young and vibrant as a gusty wind that heralds the coming of a tempestuous storm. Again the red-jacketed book with a preposterously provocative title comes to my attention: *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. The images evoked by this in-your-face title might make one think that this is probably a book chock full of suspiciously partisan invective and conspiracy theories and maybe even a heavy dose of "liberal pabulum." But no! It turns out to be a fascinatingly insightful perspective.

In a world still reeling from the high costs of a severe credit crisis and subsequent recession, and an on-going ominous explosion of public debt, I thought, "Okay, give me your best shot, Charles Ferguson." This writer, 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 that began in late 2008. 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 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" -- at a cost of many trillions of dollars.

On Page 2, 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."

Charles Ferguson was only getting started, and as he delves into the meat of the matter, the details are sensational. This state of affairs is facilitated by a "political duopoly" in our country 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 Founding Fathers 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.

Several years after these words were first written, Republican politicians used scurrilous means to seize power, and they are acting like "evil doers", sacrificing the environment in order to benefit profiteers in the short term and trying to reverse the consumer protections hammered out in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. So the pendulum is swinging backwards, and this is very bad news for humanity!

In a startling contrast to the sensible trust-busting era that President Theodore Roosevelt led in the early 1900s, proponents of laissez-faire ideologies gained traction when Ronald Reagan's tenure as president began. Charles Ferguson relates this story in *Predator Nation*:

"The era of deregulation pioneered by the Reagan and Clinton administrations removed virtually all restrictions on trading, mergers and industry consolidation; the few remaining restrictions were then quickly stripped away by the Bush administration, along with any threat of sanctions from either criminal prosecution or civil suits to recoup illicit gains." ...

"And, in fact, bad things started to happen almost immediately. Beginning in the 1980s, the United States began to experience financial crises and scandals in a scale not seen since the 1920s. But deregulation continued, culminating in major laws passed in 1999 and 2000. Once completely freed, the bankers very quickly ran their institutions off the cliff, taking much of the global economy with them. Not only did they create and sell a huge amount of junk, but they turned the financial system into a gigantic casino, one in which they played mainly with other people's money."

When Ronald Reagan became president, tax cuts and deregulation were the order of the day. "Even from the start, though, there was a big element of dishonesty in Reagan's strategy. He cut taxes, but not government spending, so America's economic recovery came in part from unsustainable deficits. Administration officials claimed that tax cuts would pay for themselves, which they knew was a lie. And what they called 'deregulation' was often simply political corruption. Lobbyists and industry executives were appointed to run government agencies, and several industries sharply increased their spending on political donations, lobbying, and revolving door hiring. Nowhere was this clearer than in finance. It was in financial services that the Reagan administration initiated America's descent into criminality, financial crisis, political corruption, inequality and decline."

Criminality, financial crisis, political corruption, inequality, and decline! I know these words sound like outrageous hyperbole. But when you read the actual details of the many financial scams perpetrated in the past three decades, this characterization suddenly doesn't seem like an exaggeration at all. Charles Ferguson continues: "It was in large measure the financial sector's political activities that gave us deregulation, abdication of white-collar law enforcement, tax cuts for the wealthy, huge budget deficits, and other toxic policies." These are the aspects of our econopolitical system that have allowed the U.S. financial sector to become a rogue industry".

The financial sector began a period of astounding consolidation when sensible regulations like the Glass-Steagall Act were repealed. The amorphous shark-like octopus of the oligopoly began a feeding frenzy. Every segment of the financial sector was affected, creating huge financial conglomerates. "And the main source of this broader consolidation was not the organic growth of the successful; rather it was mergers."

Economic power has become increasingly concentrated since 1980, due to the radical ramping up of deregulation efforts. This is true particularly in banking, energy, telecommunications, automobiles, media and agribusiness. This trend has been the result of abuses of influence as corporate money has neutered antitrust policy and corrupted our political system, and even swayed the supposedly objective expert opinions of all too many people in academic institutions. Such concentrated power undermines the power of *We the People* and contributes to the sadly increasing extremes in income and wealth inequality between the top 1% and the other 99%.

Rich people and top corporate management together exert an unwarranted influence on our country by using wealth and solidarity of selfish purpose to wield political power that shelters themselves, their families, their personal assets and their businesses from competition, prosecution, effective regulation, proper corporate governance, and taxes. This situation is not merely unfair, it is economically disastrous for the vast majority of Americans.

Beneath the intensely rancorous sound and fury of partisan strife, the nearly unassailable battlements of a political duopoly monopolize our national decision-making. The actors in this duopoly stand resolute in dictating rules that establish a Great Bargain for rich people and a Bad Deal for everyone else. The unified solidarity demonstrated by our representatives is astonishing when it comes to policies related to tax law that benefit wealthy people and initiatives that reduce regulations, prevent sensible reforms, and facilitate an on-going consolidation of corporate power through mergers and acquisitions. Perhaps this should be no surprise, because influence peddling is not only legal, but a fundamental facet of the way our political system operates in modern times, sanctioned by conservatives on the Supreme Court in such decisions as the *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* rulings.

Republicans' War on the Poor

Republicans have tried furiously to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with a Trumpcare plan that would slash federal spending on Medicaid programs for poor people to give hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans on their investment incomes. Corporate media outlets and Republican propaganda tell us that it would cost \$32 trillion over the next 10 years for a Medicare-for-all type single payer system of medical care. This is a huge cost! How could we possibly afford that?? Think about this angle: An analysis has been made that gauged the total projected spending on health insurance and medical care in the USA over the same 10-year time period under the current system. They concluded that we are on track to spend an estimated \$49 trillion. So universal health care with a single-payer system like Medicare-for-All could save an astonishing \$17 trillion over a 10-year period. The scale of this savings should surely motivate our leaders to honestly examine the cost of sticking with the current system or changing it in unfairly retrogressive ways. The status quo, and conservative proposals for replacing the Affordable Care Act, are absurdly beneficial to the medical insurance industry and the drug industry, but at an exceedingly high cost to the American people. And the consequences of their plans would be lethal to countless numbers of Americans. Republicans, let the CBO score such a proposal now!

If we saved \$17 trillion by moving to a much fairer universal healthcare plan, we could afford to spend money on much smarter priorities. Republican politicians, pandering to entrenched special interest groups, want to shift a bigger burden of the \$49 trillion in future costs to people with "preexisting conditions" and women and older people and disabled people, and they want to slash federal spending on poor people who rely on Medicaid -- and they want to do this so that rich folks can reap huge amounts of money in lower taxes. These "death panel" Republicans want to perpetuate the current system because it is so beneficial to the insurance industry and the high priced drug industry. An understanding of who receives most of the capital gains in the stock market reveals that an estimated two-thirds of the profits made by this scheme would end up in the hands of the top 1% of Americans -- and they will pay very low capital gains taxes on the windfall. This priority is all but criminal, because hundreds of thousands of people will die unnecessarily if Republicans get their costly way.

This perspective shows us that we should rightly look into big picture understandings of truly fairer and smarter ways of dealing with the life-and-death issues involved with health care, and refuse to let our representatives cook up nefarious schemes and promote disingenuous propaganda that will serve to perpetuate profit-making on people's medical care.

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