

Earth Manifesto



Huckleberry Finn, the Forty-Niner Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

This is the first essay of the second book of my save-the-world Earth Manifesto. It is my hearty conviction that these writings just might be a real game changer, and deliver the goods. Please follow closely.

My literary and philosophic hero Mark Twain first published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884. Folks who are familiar with this great novel might recall how the story ends. Huck was an adventurous and observant fourteen-year-old boy, and Jim was a Negro slave running away on a quest for freedom, and Huck had found out that his father was dead, so he had been set free from his abusive Pap, the town drunk. He gave consideration to his personal situation, and reckoned he had to "light out for the territory ahead of the rest" ... "because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."

Wouldn't you just love to read a sequel of Huck actually setting out for the territories on a new quest for freedom? Imagine what wild adventures Huck and his great friend "the nigger Jim" (important disclaimer later in this essay) could have had, back in those Gold Rush days of yore in the Wild West. Here's some good news for lovers of delightful literature. Just 99 years after Mark Twain published this novel about Huck Finn and his boyhood friendships and adventures, another writer named Greg Matthews impersonated the author and created an almost equally good and possibly funnier and more entertaining sequel, with the straightforward title, *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain was a master impersonator himself, having adopted the persona of a teenage boy and written one of the greatest classics in all of American literature. He wrote in the first-person voice of Huck Finn, and used common vernacular dialects of the times. Greg Matthews likewise used vernacular speech and wrote from a first person point of view, and his copycat style and imaginative creativity is so true to Mark Twain's that it is truly remarkable. This book is a brilliant, colorful and entertainingly humorous conceptualization of Huck and Jim as they set out on new adventures out west. It is downright delightful to read.

From the opening paragraph, readers suspect they are likely to be "in for a good read". The tale begins: "There was another book I writ before this one which gives the story about how me and Jim went down the river on a raft, him looking for freedom on account of he's a nigger slave and me looking to get away from the Widow Douglas who's trying to sivilize me, and you could say we both wanted the same thing. I reckon most people don't read but one book in their life, so if that warn't the one you read, I best tell what happened at the end of the story ..."

In this new narrative, instead of rafting down the mighty Mississippi in search of freedom, Huck and Jim join the river of humanity heading for the 'gold country' of the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada. A colorful collection of pioneers, miners, adventurers, rogues and assorted misfits were making the perilous journey across vast prairies, high mountains and harsh deserts, traveling through sometimes-hostile Indian lands and Mormon territory. Many hoped to strike it rich out west. Mark Twain himself had made his own dangerous journey to the west, absquatulating for the territories in 1861 and generally *Roughing It* right after the Civil War had so rudely interrupted his short but exciting career as a steamboat pilot plying the sometimes treacherous Mississippi.

Authorities were in hot pursuit of Huck and Jim in this new tall tale. Huckleberry had been accused of having murdered Judge Thacker, and of having lifted Becky Thatcher's skirts, to boot. It is an incidental cause of literary

misfortune that Becky Thatcher makes so few appearances in this new adventurous cavalcade of Huck and Jim's experiences. When she does show up, Huck observed, she was "kind of hard to reckonize without Tom Sawyer draped all over her, but I picked out the curls and the frilly dress and the smug look easy enough."

Ha! *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is well worth reading for Chapters 6 and 7 alone. In these two chapters, Huck and Jim have fallen in heading west with the McSween Traveling Church of Christ the Lamb, and readers are introduced to Phineas McSween and Ma and their 'seven virtues' daughters, Faith, Charity, Constance, Hope, Mercy, Grace and the retarded "pinhead" Chastity, who are all traveling around the open spaces and small towns of the Old West in a congregation of five colorfully painted wagons. Accompanying them is stern Reverend Mordecai, a fire-and-brimstone preacher. One of the wagons features a wall with "a picture of Jesus squeezing a lamb next to him and staring out at you with big lonesome eyes." Visualize that!

It turns out that the members of this close-knit family are traveling minstrels of the Lord who put on a highly unusual kind of religious revival services. When they arrive at a farm near Slocombe, Missouri, Huck is sent to put up posters in town to advertise their popular annual faith meeting the next night. Reverend Mordecai will be officiating, says the poster, and hymns will be sung by the McSween Heavenly Angels Choir. The next day they set up a big meeting tent in a field with a steam calliope featuring a forest of tall pipes with valves up and down them, and when the organ's keys are played, chubby angels on the valves open and shut, emitting beautiful music.

A couple hundred town folk show up to participate in this locally renowned event. Phineas begins the religious meeting by playing the steam calliope with its merry-go-round sounds. In the meantime, the lovely choir of girls are dressed in long white gowns with big red crosses stitched across the fronts, and they sing a string of hymns in sweet and harmonial voices. Then the fiery preacher Mordecai starts in with some intimidating speechifying.

"Who among you is without sin?!" roars Mordecai. He sermonizes along in such manner for a fair bit, urging the faithful to repent of their sins, and then he slaps all the sinners one-by-one to drive Satan out. But curiously, at about this time, all the men begin to slide out of the big tent, leaving their devout wives behind. They depart in ones and twos, and then tilt a bottle outside and wait in line to enter the wagons behind the tent, where six of the seven virtues -- all the daughters except Chastity -- are providing highly personal services to the men.

Huck surmises that "fornicatering" is going on in the wagons. "I went over to the trees and lit my pipe to give the matter consideration," Huck reflects, "and by and by I got to smiling on it, one of them crooked ones you smile when you see the joke's on you. It's a feeling I reckonized from other times before this, when big expecterations come crashing down, and all you can do is ask why you was sap-head enough to have had them expecterations anyway." You've gotta chuckle!

Phineas McSween later leveled with Huck about the true nature of the services provided by the McSween Traveling Church. Phineas managed to make it seem entirely plausible that his troop of vice-propagating virtues was actually doing a distinctly honorable part, in a way, of "holding together the sacred institution of marriage." Really! Huck observed, "I seen how it's possible to take things and twist them into whatever shape you want, and see them another way entirely that don't have no resemblance to the truth."

Hold that thought, for incisively honest and scathingly valid big picture understandings are one of the main purposes of these observations, and you can bet that deceitful Trump Republicans and their seriously consequential antics will be an illuminating sideshow. In any case, this tale about Huck, Jim and the McSween family is a verily surprise-filled, sensationally humorous one, and includes some enlightening reflections on religion. Check it out:

"Huck, I bin thinkin' on dis here travelin' church. Why you reckon dey does it?"

"Humans got a basic need for religion, Jim. It fills in all the holes that can't get filled in with just thinking and pondering. There's questions that's just too big for understanding, so folks put it all down to God and His workings. That way they can sleep at night and not have to worry about not finding the answers to the questions."

"What kinder questions, Huck?"

"I reckon the biggest is why we got to die. Philosophers has been asking it for hundreds of years and they ain't got the answer yet."

"Why you reckon we has to die?"

"It's obvious, Jim. If we never died the whole country would get cluttered with people just getting older and older, and you know how cussed and cranky old folks is. They'd be three and four deep everywhere, just complaining and snapping their gums and getting in the way of everyone, so they got to die to make room for them that's young. We get our parcel of years and when they're done we wing it up to heaven. That's the theory of it."

Ah, instantaneous lucidification, indeed! This discussion may have been prompted by a sly observation that Mark Twain once made: "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world."

Jim then inquires why some of the characters in the Bible like Methuselah lived "nine hunderd years. How come he got de extra portion?" Huck reckons, "It must have been his holiness. If you're really holy, God gives out another hundred years or two as a reward." When Huck mentions Cartaphilus, the longest-lived mortal ever, Jim whistles in contemplation of how holy he must have been. But, no! -- Huck explains that there was a completely different reason for the incredibly long life Cartaphilus led.

Huck launches into an imaginatively funny tale of the curse of Cartaphilus, who is better known as "the Wandering Jew". It turns out that Cartaphilus had been condemned by Jesus to wander and wander for all of eternity. What happened was this, Huck explains. Jesus once sought directions in the Holy Land to the Mount of Olives, and Cartaphilus repeatedly sent him on a figurative wild goose chase, giving him a succession of wrong directions to the north, east, south and west from an arid crossroads in the Near East. The story is a riot! In the end, Cartaphilus pulls out a calendar and exclaims, "April Fools"! This gesture makes Jesus really mad, so he cursed Cartaphilus to a fickle fate of wandering around forever. So, that was the real key to his burdensome longevity. Huck ruefully concludes, "... and I just bet he kicks himself every April Fool's day." Ha! LOL!

In concluding these introductory thoughts, I give sudden perspicacious attention to an important conundrum. I say to myself, sotto voce, "Are there any new territories anymore that any of us can light out to, if our civilizations become too conflicted, onerous, unlivable, uncompromising, unjust or otherwise unsivilized?" Perhaps the new territories we need are spacious areas of the mind -- and maybe we mainly need to escape from the confusions, absurdities and paradoxes of our increasingly stressed, inequitable, viral, indoctrinated, excessively partisan, turmoil inflicted, trumped up divided, social media addicted, overcrowded and environmentally-compromised world.

"The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

--- Marcel Proust

Ponder the Facts about the California Gold Rush, and Their Implications

Hark back, for a moment, to the Gold Rush era that Mark Twain wrote about in stories like *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. Gold had been discovered in January 1848 at Sutter's Mill on the South Fork of the American River in California's Central Valley. An epic Gold Rush ensued in which some 100,000 adventurers arrived in 1849, coming overland on perilous journeys in wagon trains or by ship either from the Panama isthmus or around Cape Horn at the tip of South America. These Forty Niners swelled the population of non-Natives living in California, and by 1855, perhaps 300,000 people had come. Miners are estimated to have extracted more than \$12 billion dollars worth of gold in the first five years of the Gold Rush, at today's equivalent prices. That is a lot of money for a rowdy bunch of risk-taking frontier 'pan handlers'!

The human story of tens of thousands of gold miners in the Sierra Nevada foothills, and in the boomtown of San Francisco, is endlessly fascinating. The city of San Francisco experienced the fastest urban growth of any city in American history during those years, and the stories are provocative about the bars, gambling halls and bordellos, and the opportunist shopkeeper Sam Brannan who became the first millionaire in the West by selling supplies to gold seekers. The jumping-off point for many overland adventurers in wagon trains was the then-small town of Independence, Missouri, and that place lends a nice symbolism to this tale, so I liberally leap to the fore to focus on another prominent aspect of those times.

The Gold Rush became one of the most destructive environmental onslaughts by human beings in world history, as everyone who lived downstream from hydraulic mining operations was well aware back in those days. This harmful

kind of mining had its heyday in California from 1853 to 1884, when miners in the mountains channeled pristine water from Sierra Nevada rivers into flumes many miles long. The water was then funneled into high-pressure torrents in hoses and blasted against gravel hillsides from iron nozzles called monitors. This process washed huge quantities of gravel and silt from remnants of ancient river beds down through large sluices where nuggets and flakes of gold could be captured.

This mining method had severe adverse unintended impacts on people who lived downstream. Large volumes of sediments were washed into creeks and rivers, and were carried down into California's Central Valley where they caused significant flooding damage to people's homes, farms, crops, businesses and towns. Streambeds became so choked with silt that big ships could no longer navigate upstream from San Francisco Bay to Sacramento. Populations of fish, oysters and other species of life in this river system and the Bay were decimated. The scars of these hydraulic mining activities are still starkly visible in eroded foothill locales like Malakoff Diggins, the site of California's largest hydraulic mine.

Intense legal battles eventually ensued, due to dramatic conflicts of interest between hydraulic miners and those who lived downstream from the heedlessly obtuse activity. The conflict was finally resolved in what was to become a watershed environmental ruling by Judge Lorenzo Sawyer in the United States District Court in San Francisco in 1884. Judge Sawyer promulgated a sweeping injunction that mandated an abrupt and permanent halt to all hydraulic mining activities in the state. This was one of the first great legal decisions in history to require a stop to environmental despoliation.

This early defense of environmental protection was essentially a first step toward fairer and bigger picture adjudications of inherent conflicts of interests that exist in so many arenas. Big mining operations and fossil fuel extraction businesses have outsized negative impacts, as do rash real estate developments in flood-prone areas or ecologically vulnerable locales, or other activities that exploit natural resources regardless of impacts the activities have on people, wildlife, habitats, entire ecosystems and the global climate. The Sawyer Decision leads us to a precipice of vitally important insights for humanity from the vantage point of the summer of 2021.

Who should sue today, one might wonder, to fairly adjudicate between the epic conflicts of interest that exist between ridiculously heedless current day activities and the tsunami of future needs of all our heirs yet to be born? Who should sue about damages to ecosystems worldwide, and the squandering of vital resources, and natural disasters being made worse by extreme weather events and ominous changes in the global climate?

These questions and the insights they illuminate provide a springboard into better understandings of the many overarching challenges caused by abuses of corporate power, and by efforts to maximize private profits by means of the insidious expediency of allowing giant corporations to socialize costs and foist environmental damages and other harms onto society as a whole. These insights provide provocative perspective, in addition, into some wider considerations, like the corrupting influences of Big Money in our country and the role of corporate lawyers in advancing such unfair influences, as well as broader understandings about society, greater good goals, racial injustices, the growth of overweening corporate power, judicial ideologies, extreme political partisanship, our corrupted system of civil justice and incarceration, and the freedoms, rights and responsibilities of individuals.

Not long after having first posed this question about who should sue over environmentally damaging activities, a revelatory concatenation of curious circumstances occurred that provided an excellent answer, as if inspired by a Goddess of Timely Coincidence. It turned out that a thought-provoking legal case began to be considered in the U.S. District Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon in early 2016. The case involves a complaint filed in 2015 against the federal government and the fossil fuel industry on behalf of 21 young plaintiffs, aged 8 to 19 at the time, by an Oregon nonprofit organization, Our Children's Trust. The plaintiffs in the case assert that they have been deprived of key rights by their own government, along with all people in younger generations as a whole. Their argument is that, by failing to take steps to mitigate climate disruption, the U.S. government has valued its own generation more than future generations, and ignored the fact that those in the future will bear a much heavier burden of hardships due to the damaging impacts of human activities on healthy ecosystems and a stable climate.

A 15-year-old indigenous activist who is a plaintiff in the case summed up the perspective of young people at a press conference after an early hearing. "We are valuing our futures over profits," he said. "We are valuing this

planet over corporate greed." This critical point of view sounds eminently reasonable, for the young plaintiffs have very good justifying arguments that the government is allowing vested interests to endanger their right to a livable planet, and there is extensive supporting scientific evidence of unfolding and accelerating harms.

The serious complaint alleged that young people's Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights are being violated with regard to due process and equal protection under the law. "By failing to act on climate change, it argues, the government discriminates against youth as a class. Without access to a healthy climate, they're deprived of their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property."

Clayton Aldern, a senior fellow at *Grist*, elaborates: "The complaint is also built on the public trust doctrine, a carryover from English common law that says a government has the duty to protect certain natural resources and systems on behalf of current and future generations. The public trust doctrine originated with Emperor Justinian in Rome, Alex Loznak, a 19-year-old plaintiff, explained to the press. 'It's reflected in the Magna Carta, the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and cited in U.S. court decisions dating back to the 1800s.'"

Winning this case would be a real watershed moment, but it was a long shot, considering the powerful entrenched interest groups arrayed against the plaintiffs. One must honestly admit, however, that the idea has overarching merit. It is obvious that one of the most seriously underrepresented constituencies in the USA is the 75 million Americans under the age of 18 who are too young to vote. Politicians do not demonstrate enough concern for the best interests of these young people because they are so busy pandering to rich people and big businesses and old folks, instead of taking strong stands to ensure a providential and sustainable world. It is provocatively illuminating to realize that the best interests of young Americans are shared with billions of others around the planet, and with countless numbers of children to be born in the future.

In April 2016, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin of the federal District Court in Eugene, Oregon decided in favor of the 21 young plaintiffs on behalf of future generations in this landmark case concerning anthropogenic climate disruption. The Court's ruling was a victory for the young people in what Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein called the "most important lawsuit on the planet right now." One legal argument made in the lawsuit was that the interests and future well-being of young people should be given greater consideration, instead of permitting and encouraging and wantonly subsidizing a continued exploitation, production and combustion of dirty fossil fuels. More than \$500 billion is given annually around the planet in subsidies to facilitate this rent-seeking profiteering swindle. These are wrongheaded "perverse incentives".

Donald Trump's Department of Justice tried to get this lawsuit dismissed, rejecting young people's claims against the government for failing to address climate change. But in March 2018, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco denied the motion for dismissal, giving recognition to the merits of the case, and the Supreme Court refused to block that denial in November 2018. Finally, after 5 years of litigation, the lawsuit was dismissed in January 2020, with the appeals court writing that the youngsters made a compelling case that action is needed and agreed that climate change is undeniable, but said the proper venue for addressing the nation's emissions policies and fossil fuel use is the U.S. Congress or the electorate. Congress, however is corrupted by Big Money from fossil fuel interests, and has been incapable of passing even remedial measures to address the unfolding calamity, due mainly to stubborn opposition by Republican politicians.

This case is only one of its kind, with similar lawsuits having been filed by youth plaintiffs in Alaska, Washington, Colorado, New Mexico, North Carolina, Massachusetts and Maine. Another ploy often used to prevent lawsuits like this from succeeding in courts has been to use procedural technicalities to assert that most persons do not have "standing" to participate in such lawsuits. Judges like Neil Gorsuch have used this tactic throughout their careers to throw judicial roadblocks in the way of environmental litigation and public land disputes. In this suit by Our Children's Trust, the appeals court admitted that the plaintiffs did have standing in the case, and that some of the plaintiffs met the requirements for actual injury, but the court reckoned that remedying the problem required "much more than cessation of the government's promotion of fossil fuels. Rather, ... no less than a fundamental transformation of this country's energy system, if not that of the industrialized world" is required, and it is beyond the authority of courts to adjudicate a remedy.

In antagonistic countermoves to the climate change lawsuit, Republicans are trying to increase the rate at which

fossil fuel resources on Earth are being used up. This is bizarre because scientists are finding overwhelming evidence that the resulting impacts of excessive greenhouse gas emissions are exceedingly costly, and will get worse, due to the disruption of normal patterns of temperatures, storms and amounts of precipitation and snowfall, and due to inexorably rising sea levels from melting glaciers and ice caps. In 2017 alone, the costs of hurricane damage, flooding, wildfires and debris flows exceeded \$300 billion in the U.S. We should honestly assess projected future costs of climate inaction, so as to have a truer understanding of these future costs.

The vast majority of scientific experts declare that we should leave 80% of known reserves of fossil fuels in the ground during the rest of this century to prevent a catastrophic onset of hotter global temperatures, apocalyptic hurricanes, destructive tornadoes, hellish wildfires, creeping desertification, coral reef bleaching and coastal flooding. But the Trump administration instead pursued a strategy of opening up coastal waters and previously protected public lands to increased extraction of coal, oil and natural gas. These actions resemble those of hydraulic miners in the 19th century, being heedless activities that will have very harmful downstream impacts. Republican politicians today, however, are much worse, for the impacts of their stubborn refusals to take steps to mitigate the climate crisis will have harsh impacts all around the planet, and will persist for centuries and millennia. Today's anti-environmental politicians are trying to torpedo the sensible Clean Power Plan, suspend rules limiting methane emissions on public lands, reduce fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, prevent carbon fee-and-dividend plans from being enacted, evade obligations under the Paris climate agreement and eliminate many environmental rules they regard as overly burdensome to the-profitability of corrupt fossil fuel industries.

We would be wiser to heed the trenchant observation **President Lyndon Johnson made when he signed the Wilderness Act of 1964**: *"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them something more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."*

Crucial Understandings

"In the nineteenth century, anti-capitalist critics like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context; they contended that social justice counted for more than industrial efficiency or private profit. In the late twentieth century, the environmental movement is trying to teach us that both economics and ethics must be contained within an ecological context."

--- Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, 2001

Human beings are collectively treating our home planet like a business in liquidation, rather than doing what is inevitably necessary to live sustainably in a habitable world by working to make it a thriving and sustainable concern. We are figuratively fouling our nests by myopically dumping toxic pollutants and poisonous chemicals into nature, damaging natural ecosystems, and spewing huge quantities of global warming gases into Earth's atmosphere. And in a frenzy of repetitious consumer advertising and short-term profiteering, large amounts of minerals are being wantonly and rashly wasted after being extracted from millions of polluting mines worldwide.

We cannot afford to allow unprincipled Republicans to continue abusing the power they illegitimately wield. The risks are too wide-ranging and far-reaching. As pointed out in *The Nation*, for instance, " ... Trump's energy policy - - one that denies climate change, doubles down on fossil fuels, strangles incentives for renewable energy, and guts the regulations that protect our air and water -- would flood our coasts, burn our forests, parch our cities, and leave the whole planet a smoldering wasteland." This is a terribly misguided course of action!

In one of Annie Leonard's excellent online videos in her series *The Story of Stuff*, she asserts in *The Story of Change* that the real power to create a fairer, healthier and sustainable economy lies not in individual choices that we make in buying things, but in coming together as citizens to build a better future. Right on! Read on for some valuable perspectives and recommendations.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

--- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

On the Horns of a Perplexing Moral Dilemma

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim were floating down the Mississippi River on a raft and they saw a steamboat wrecked in the river on their fifth night below St. Louis. They landed alongside it, but their raft unfortunately broke loose and they were forced to escape in the dark on the skiff of some scoundrels they had glimpsed aboard the wreck. Huck and Jim then managed to catch up with their raft in the skiff, and the next day they "judged that three nights more would fetch us to Cairo, at the bottom of Illinois where the Ohio River comes in, and that was what we was after. We would sell the raft and get on a steamboat and go way up the Ohio amongst the free states, and then be out of trouble."

Well, things didn't work out that way. On the second night of drifting down toward Cairo, a dense fog suddenly descended on the river. Huck decided to jump in the skiff to tie the raft to a tree on the bank of the river, knowing how dangerous it is to go downriver in a powerful current when you can't see where you're going. The raft boomed down so lively in the stiff current that it tore out the sapling by the roots, and Huck in the skiff was thus separated in the fog from Jim on the raft. The river's strong current then took them on opposite sides of a series of islands, and by the time the fog dissipated and they were reunited, they were hyper alert to try to find the confluence with the Ohio River.

As they were looking out sharp for the lights of Cairo during the night, Huck began to struggle mightily with his conscience about helping the slave Jim escape from his rightful owner Miss Watson, who had always treated Huck fairly. Miserable with his thoughts on this troubling dilemma, Huck finally resolved to paddle ashore at the first light and turn Jim in. He set off in the skiff, but the realization dawned on him, just in time, that he would feel really bad for betraying his good friend Jim, who was so close to gaining his freedom.

Reasoning to himself, Huck said: "Well, then, says I, what's the use learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time." When daylight came, Huck and Jim were horrified to discover that they had indeed passed Cairo, and were headed deeper into the harsher slave states of the South. They bemoaned their bad luck, but had little time to belabor their plight because more adventures were in the offing, and they had to keep their wits about them.

I love Mark Twain's image of Huck coming out of a dense fog into the clarity of a brilliant night sky. And sure enough, sometimes a poignant glimmer of clarity is the best we can see, and it is foolish to hold out for the bona fide certainty of a transcendent epiphany. Humanity is faced, all together, with some profound existential dilemmas here in the twenty-first century, and it seems obvious that it is growing increasingly urgent for us to wisely strive to make the world a better place for all, and to honorably collaborate together to accomplish this goal. Honest leaders, please demonstrate greater integrity, and help us save ourselves!

More Incisive Perspectives

Huckleberry Finn lived in significantly simpler times than the ones we live in today. Way back then, before the Civil War, one way to achieve freedom was to quit school and absquatulate to frontier territories in search of gold or fertile lands or other opportunities. Today, dropping out of high school and choosing not to go to college generally results in undesirable personal socioeconomic outcomes, due to the fact that education is correlated so strongly to successful outcomes in our society.

Think about the powerful drive of high-income earners to get politicians to assess low marginal rates of tax on the highest levels of their incomes. This goal is being financed, in part, by slashing public funding for schools. A resulting heavy burden of debt is being forced on young people, so it is a form of cynically shortsighted and extremely unfair exploitation of younger generations. From the perspective of young people in our society, this gambit resembles a modern form of feudal bondage. Record levels of student debt make this opprobrious yoke ever more dishonorable. Robert Reich proposed four good solutions several years ago in his video on YouTube, *The Student Debt Crisis*.

One of the most provocative Enlightenment Era ideas our Founders embraced in the Declaration of Independence was the idea that all people are endowed "with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and

the pursuit of Happiness." Consider the compelling observation made in *Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview*:

The small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has the extraordinary idea of measuring well-being by endorsing comprehensive "Gross National Happiness" indicators. Bhutan's Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Y Thinley once elaborated, with this observation: "The four pillars of Gross National Happiness are the promotion of equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development, the preservation and promotion of cultural values, the conservation of the natural environment, and the establishment of good governance."

"Imagine if the American people were able to commit themselves to more enlightened ideas like these! Instead of hyping up consumption, stimulating the depletion of natural resources, stoking economic growth no matter how counterproductive, and driving up the national debt, we could once again become the beacon of sanity and hope to the rest of the world. We could strive to attain a more broad-minded approach to domestic and foreign policies, and pass sensible laws that would better protect the environment, and finance insurance policies to cover the most risky aspects of climate inaction. Good governance would be a positive change from today's extremely partisan and corrupt political landscape with its serious shortfall in cooperative problem-solving, civility in national discourse, truth-telling, social responsibility, ecological sanity, reasonable discipline, greater fairness, fiscal soundness, and better accountability and oversight."

Think about the astonishing studies that indicate people feel happier when they earn an annual income of \$50,000 to \$75,000 than others who earn less money -- yet other people who earn more than \$75,000 per year do not profess to be any happier. Even more surprising, there is an inverse proportionality between various levels of wealth and true well-being. In the framework of a person's net worth, if any of the bottom 50% of persons in net worth managed to gain a fortune of \$1 million, it would make a profound difference in their lived experience of security and well-being in their lives. In contrast, anyone whose net worth skyrockets beyond \$5 million finds that additional wealth, in general, does not necessarily make their lives happier.

These are powerful reasons why our convictions should be strong that our top national priority should NOT be to make the rich richer at the expense of everyone else, and that we should make our system of taxation much more steeply graduated. The December 2017 Republican Tax Cut law brashly violates this understanding.

The promotion of "the general Welfare" of the people, as set forth as a purpose in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, can best be achieved by making our society fairer, rather than by continuing to egregiously peddle influence and pander so exclusively to wealthy people by allowing them to corrupt our national tax policies to get debt-financed low tax rates for themselves. This perspective makes it clear we should strive to maximize the happiness of the vast majority of the American people by ensuring that our national policies share opportunities and after-tax income more broadly. It is high time we stop allowing the super-rich to implement national policies that generate and concentrate wealth and privilege ever more narrowly in the hands of the few.

A Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.

The night that Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy spoke these words in Indianapolis: "Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort. In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it's perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are, and what direction we want to move in. ... What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country ..."

That's a good call. Let's seek to heal the stark divide between the richest 1% and everyone else, and create a nation that is fairer and more secure for all. The Roman philosopher Cicero counsels us with words echoing from the first century BCE, "Let the passions be amenable to reason."

Let's find good ways to reconcile the left and the right, and to unite! Otherwise, by continuing to drive extreme political partisanship, wealthy people will be able to continue keeping the people from uniting to create a fairer and healthier society. By keeping Americans divided against each other, they will be able to continue to perpetuate their socially detrimental set of national policies and anti-egalitarian conditions and unsustainable plans. And by

effectively promoting a growing economic insecurity of the vast majority of American workers who must live from paycheck to paycheck, and pushing policies that hold minimum wages fixed and squelch labor organizing, they will be able to continue gaining the preponderance of the national wealth for themselves.

And the bankrupted bottom 50% of Americans, who collectively have an average "negative net worth" according to French economist Gabriel Zacman, will regard their treatment as being a hurtful result of systemic injustices and a viscerally severe form of disdain for them and the common good.

A Powerful Political Proclamation

In November 2008, a majority of *We the People* voted for "Change We Can Believe In", and we were not just in favor of the catchy slogan, we wanted real positive change. Since that time, it is astonishing how pathologically successful "conservatives" have been at stubbornly obstructing fair-minded positive change in our wrongly rigged economic and political systems. For eight years under President Barack Obama, the Do-Nothing Congress of our representatives seemed to have completely forgotten that in a constitutional democracy, one of their top responsibilities should be to fairly balance all competing interests in our society, and to prevent the wealthiest few from abusing the influence of their outsized riches to gain an increasing concentration of wealth and power.

I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, have a top-notch Better Management Master Plan to dramatically improve conditions by giving much more respect to greater good goals. As the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the estimable observer and humorist Mark Twain, I have sprinkled the details of this positively providential plan liberally throughout a dozen evolving books. The biggest collection of good ideas and recommendations can be found in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*, which is available right now from Lulu Press, the on-demand publisher, and in the compendium of ideas in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online.

The esteemed author and satirical humorist Mark Twain famously declared that we have the best government that money can buy, and sure enough, that satirical observation contains a vital kernel of truth. The principal problem with the current state of affairs is that Big Money has far too domineering an influence in our laws and national priorities and decision making. We need a larger framework to provide better and fairer guidance, and I feel strongly that this can be found in a much more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of issues in light of the overarching context of my proposed *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*. Check it out!

"All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

--- Victor Hugo

The need for good solutions to big problems continues to mount, especially because our leaders have been so stubbornly unwilling to work together for the common good, properly understood -- as evaluated from the perspective of "consequential ethics" and the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time. Some 2,500 years ago, the wise Athenian lawmaker Solon made historic efforts to reform the Greek economy and politics in what are remembered as Solon-wise compromises that saved Greece from violent revolution by the desperate poor against the jealously greedy rich. Solon is known as the Father of Democracy for the reforms he implemented to reduce conflicts between the angry Many and the privilege-protecting Few.

Tens of millions of Americans justifiably feel that our political system is rigged, and that they are personally shut out of the political process, often due to the distorting influence of Big Money. Every one of these people should strongly support democracy reforms such as the guarantee of voting rights for all citizens, the elimination of extreme gerrymandering, the public financing of elections, and new laws that overturn the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling that allows undue influence of money in our elections and law-making. Ever since this wrongly-decided Supreme Court ruling, any person or any company can spend as much money as they want to anonymously influence our elections. The consequences have disastrously left voters in the dark about who is trying to buy their vote, and what special interests their politician representatives are beholden to.

Huck Finn chafed under the bonds of civilization and the humdrum world, so it is easy to imagine that he would have grown into a passionate young man who would champion a fairer and more just world that would give greater opportunities to young people. And it turns out that the best hopes for such a world may be found in more honorable governance in a strengthened democracy. This would also help assure that our towns and cities and

societies in the future would be more peaceable and sustainable. Conversely, in the current day, it is folly to continue to allow political corruption and excessive power for wealthy folks and big corporations, because the inevitable outcome of such harm-engendering influences is an increasingly oppressive world with more extreme inequalities, dire injustices, revolutionary discord, repressive government and environmental insanity.

Extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts is responsible for giving Republican politicians an estimated 16 extra seats in the House of Representatives that should have been held by Democrats on behalf of the best interests of their constituents. This is according to an expert analysis done by the nonpartisan law and policy institute, the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law. This means that the ruse of gerrymandering alone has deprived progressive voices of a significant number of seats in Congress. Add to that the millions of voters who have been deprived of their ability to vote by Republican voter suppression tactics, and it becomes clear that fairer national policies and priorities are seriously undermined by dirty politics.

It might help to honestly understand the many ways our system is rigged to favor the wealthiest 1% over the best interests of the other 99%. One of the main political strategies for preventing collaborative solutions to big problems has been by dividing people through outlandish manipulations of people's emotions and resentments. To achieve this immoral goal, the Dividers have used hot button wedge issues, intolerant attitudes, stoked fears, goaded antagonisms, extreme political partisanship, supremacist religious dogmas, and appeals to base human motives like bigotry, racism, white supremacy, male chauvinism, misogyny, gender discrimination, xenophobia, uncompromising self-righteousness and hate. These strategies have been effective in achieving domineering political influence for conservatives, and in imposing harsher control over the populace, and running up the national debt, but they are egregiously contrary to propitious social cohesion and true national security and the general welfare. These things are the antithesis of the founding principles of our democratic republic. In a more healthy democracy, greater fairness is given more respect, and the people are protected from the predations of abusers of authority.

John Fowles noted in *The Aristos* that there may be an "obvious emotional heroic-defiant appeal" about a "violent plunge from the battlements of reason", like that revealed in fervent beliefs in claimed absolute certainties, or in stubborn adherence to indoctrinated dogmas. "But this is as if, finding myself in doubt and in darkness, I should decide, instead of cautiously feeling my way forward, to leap; not only to leap, but to leap desperately; and not only to leap desperately, but to leap into the darkest part of the surrounding darkness." OMG!!

Today, in the face of powerful and legitimate populist discontent on both the political left and the right, we are faced with a similar dilemma with regard to leadership and positive political change. The majority of Americans want salubrious change, but it is crazy for so many millions of them to believe that Trump Republicans and their trickle-down tax cut swindles, trade tariffs, manipulative propaganda, authoritarian power abuses, racial and gender discrimination, and defenses of domineering white male privilege are acceptable and meriting of support. Trump is an immature narcissist and dictator wannabe, and has consistently acted as if he is above the law. It's as if his supporters are willing to leap desperately in the darkest direction by giving the erratic Trumpster, with his self-dealing, illicit scheming, bullying, demagoguery, hair-trigger temperament, poorly informed intellect and flagrantly sociopathic persona, the power to manipulate and control and direct our lives and futures.

It is proving to be a YUGE mistake to have allowed this unstable, scandal propagating, chaos generating, shamefully dishonorable, women-demeaning and divisive demagogue to become the leader of the most powerful government in the world. He was a horrible choice for representing the best interests of the American people on the stage of international affairs, or to have honorably safeguarded the well-being of the people at home in our great republic. It is an extreme contrast to have had this bombastic demagogue instead of Hillary Clinton, who dealt very effectively with dozens of world leaders as Secretary of State for four years from 2009 to 2013.

John Steinbeck spoke the insightful and somewhat satirical truth when he observed, "Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts ... (especially) the fear of a loss of power." Donald Trump is understandably fearful, for the chances are increasing that he will be held to account for some of his many violations of the law.

The real depth of double standards relating to women in our patriarchal societies is stunning. To understand this better, read the surprising and sensationably persuasive article, "*The most thorough, profound and moving defense*

of Hillary Clinton I have ever seen." An observer named Michelle Vitali noted online, "Imagine a woman who showed up to a presidential debate unprepared, sniffing like a coke addict and interrupting her opponent 70 times. Let's further imagine that she had 5 kids by 3 men, was a repeated adulterer, had been involved in multiple bankruptcies, paid zero federal taxes, and rooted for the housing crisis in which many thousands of families lost their homes. Wait ... there's more: she has never held any elected office in her life."

With a modicum of poetic justice, this sly and entertaining Earth Manifesto will serve as a force for social good, and these writings will contribute to a renaissance of more responsible leadership, and cause power-abusing conservatives to suffer the sting of social rebuke in legislative defeats and ignominious landslide losses in future elections. And American voters should give many more progressive candidates, especially women, the opportunity to serve our nation and help make it fairer, safer and more compassionate.

Highly Compensated Lawyers Skew Justice, and Make Those Who Obey Rules into Chumps

Heavy hands are being laid on the scales of justice by means of huge amounts of *Dark Money*, contributed largely in secret. Ruthless capitalists trumpet stentorian absolute certainties about how rich people and giant corporate entities deserve to be given ever more advantages and privileges. Anti-government operatives tout righteous convictions concerning the unrestrained exploitation of resources and corporate personhood prerogatives, which in effect allow costs to be socialized as externalized burdens upon society.

Fred Koch, the father of system-corrupting billionaires Charles and David Koch, was a rich industrialist who supported the right-wing John Birch Society and helped both Joseph Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler's fascist Third Reich in Germany during the military buildup to the Second World War. Fred Koch realized, after one very long lawsuit, that justice can be bought, and that "rules are for chumps."

A modern day Tom Sawyer, his inventive cleverness having matured into an admirably perspicacious sagacity, would succinctly summarize this state of affairs. "See," he would say, "rich folks hire a bunch of high-priced lawyers and retain the services of cunning marketing and public relations firms and right-wing think tanks, and they push self-serving goals as top national policy priorities." It is easy to see how this is done. Wealthy conservatives assert that progressivism poses an existential threat, and they garner support from avaricious billionaires to finance unprincipled politicians and yes men, and phony front groups, and shrewd manipulators of the media who use a virtual array of minaret-quality loudspeakers to blare their "alternative facts", deceptive propaganda and sly indoctrination to the masses. And presto! -- they convert our democratic republic into a plutocratic "winner-take-all country", in which the top 1% have managed to increase their share of the national income from 12% in 1990 to about 25% today, and even worse to have increased the proportion of wealth they own from 33% twenty-five years ago to over 40% today, and headed toward 50%, thanks to the December 2017 Tax Cuts largess for the rich.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis was surely right when he sensationally warned, "we can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can't have both."

We would be wise and responsible to manage our national affairs much better to help guarantee greater fairness and the general welfare, and to ensure every American of fair personal liberties and broadly shared opportunities for happiness and more environmentally sane national priorities. To succeed in better managing our democracy, the steps required are rather simple, though Senate Leader Mitch McConnell would say they're politically impossible. To create a safer nation with an auspicious character, the politically impossible must now become the inevitable, and be actualized as soon as possible. The first step needed is to get rid of narrowly self-serving right-wing politicians and naysayers by removing Republicans from power.

Any true patriot would be concerned about interference in our elections by a hostile foreign power to influence the outcomes of our choices of leaders in our democracy. They would feel strongly that effective steps should be taken to prevent future episodes of pernicious election meddling. Here is what the Mueller report had to say: "Russian intelligence officers who are part of the Russian military launched a concerted attack on our political system. They used sophisticated cyber techniques to hack into computers and networks used by the Clinton campaign. They stole private information and then released that information through fake online identities and

through the organization WikiLeaks. The releases were designed and timed to interfere with our election and to damage a presidential candidate (Hillary Clinton, to help Donald Trump get elected.)"

"If our country's political health were better, the Russian attack would get the attention of every American. But Mueller gives us more credit than we deserve," wrote columnist Dana Milbank. "His report assumed that our leaders would take seriously the Russian threat when presented with overwhelming evidence. Instead, Trump laughs about the whole thing with Putin, Republican leaders quash bipartisan efforts to protect the 2020 election from on-going attacks, and GOP lawmakers, instead of pondering the president's culpability and Mueller's damning findings, demand investigations of investigators, who they ludicrously accuse of 'treason' and an attempted 'coup.' In appealing to their better angels, Mueller was naive. Yet even as he entered the Justice Department briefing room, stooped and alone, he continued to act as though things were on the level. Russia is preparing to attack us-- again. Trump is poised to benefit, again. Unlike in 2016, we now know Russia's bad intentions, thanks to Mueller."

A 5-minute video by 'Republicans for the Rule of Law' reveals a damning perspective of Donald Trump and the hypocritical Republicans in Congress who unpatriotically deceive the people for their own partisan political advantage. The video features three prominent former Republican officials who are among the more than 1,000 former prosecutors who have signed a statement asserting that Robert Mueller's findings would have merited felony obstruction of justice charges against Trump, if he wasn't the sitting president (and thus supposedly protected from indictment by interpretations of the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel).

The Mueller Report was basically a referral to the House of Representatives to begin impeachment hearings, as it is the duty of Congress to investigate "high crimes and misdemeanors". These treacherous activities include misconduct by officials such as perjury, abuse of authority, bribery, intimidation, misuse of assets, dereliction of duty, unbecoming conduct, refusal to obey lawful orders, tax evasion and other crimes against the people.

Donald Trump should have been removed from office for ten Articles of Impeachment that were considered by House Democrats, as set forth by ethics lawyer Norman Eisen in his book *A Case for the American People*. Eisen was appealing the Senate's impeachment not-guilty verdict "to the higher court of public opinion".

Those offenses include not only the Ukraine Plot extortion, but also Trump's colluding with Russia to interfere in the 2016 elections, violating election finance laws, obstructing the Mueller investigation, stonewalling against subpoenas to cover-up malfeasance, torpedoing congressional investigations, telling many lies, engaging in financial conflicts of interest and abuses of authority, involving himself in a hush money scheme carried out by his convicted lawyer/fixer Michael Cohen, dangling pardons to keep potential witnesses against him (like Roger Stone) quiet, usurping the power of Congress by spending money on his border wall without authorization, targeting his adversaries with powers of the presidency, and violating the emoluments clause of the Constitution.

Tom Coleman, former GOP congressman from Missouri, penned a powerful Op-Ed in late May 2019 that appeared in *The Kansas City Star*, in which he called not only for the pretender Trump to be impeached, but also his enabler, V.P. Mike Pence, because he said their installation in the two top positions in the executive branch involved many misdeeds and much wrongdoing, and so was illegitimate.

Before the Ukraine high crimes intrigue, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, along with many other Democrats, expressed serious reservations in these tribally hyper-partisan times about impeaching Trump, seeing that it would be politically risky, even though no American leader has been more egregious in violating laws, decency, honesty, ethical norms, shared values, real populist priorities and the Constitution. One reason Democrats hesitated on this issue is because Republicans had a narrow majority in the U.S. Senate, so it was highly unlikely that a required two-thirds of Senators would vote to remove Trump from office. Nancy Pelosi recognized this situation, and stated that, as Abraham Lincoln said in a debate with Frederick Douglas, "... public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed."

Public opinion eventually moved to the point that Trump's reelection was unlikely, even though almost all Republican politicians are deeply complicit in supporting their corrupt, cultish and authority-abusing leader. This is exceedingly odd. Yes, it was politically risky for House Democrats to vote to impeach, but it is the sworn constitutional duty of all of our representatives to "support and defend the Constitution of the United

States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," and to "well and faithfully discharge the duties" of their office, "So help me God." One of the main duties of our representatives in defending the Constitution is to protect it against acts of despotism and high crimes and misdemeanors. The first impeachment investigation built on the findings of the Mueller Report in exposing Trump's misdeeds and obstruction of justice and attempts to cover up all these things.

Donald Trump deserved to be impeached and removed from office, as then presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, the impressively poised and intelligent Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, said during a town hall on MSNBC in early June 2019, even before the Ukraine revelations. Then, after outrageously inciting violence against Congress on January 6, 2021, he deserved to have been found guilty in the second impeachment trial.

Inspecting Our Believing Brains

One might wonder, when in a mind-wandering mood, why established religions have such a powerful hold on the consciousness of the faithful. Most doctrines of various religious faiths are neither particularly plausible nor rational. And is it probable that these dogmas are not even relatively true. Every single experience we have in our lives, after all, involves us and the natural world. Every belief in some supernatural explanation of things is a leap of faith that involves superstition, not common sense. Michael Shermer asserts in *The Believing Brain* that beliefs tend to come first, then rationalizing explanations for beliefs follow. Ultimately, Shermer demonstrates "why science is the best tool ever devised to determine whether or not a belief matches reality."

Most myths were originally concocted to explain some specific aspect of the pervasive mysteries of life. All ancient myths were stories that had their archaic genesis in pre-scientific days when the bar for accuracy in providing explanations was much lower than today (in theory, at least!).

"I've said many times that we can expect delusional beliefs to rise in proportion to the economic hardships we experience. That's exactly what's happening."

--- James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century*

The famous novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand was an atheist. She believed that not a single one of the mythological deities that humankind has invented over the millennia, in their attempts to explain existence and the inexplicable, were literal beings that actually existed. This perspective would be in accord with the definition of religion provided by Ambrose Bierce in his *Devil's Dictionary*: "Religion, *n.* A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable."

John Steinbeck had noted in his *Log from the Sea of Cortez*: "We knew that what seemed to us true could be only relatively true anyway. There is no other kind of observation." It turns out that narrowly-focused beliefs and observations are similar to overly-wrought convictions: they are fraught with risks of being rather rudely inaccurate, and are oft wrongheaded, so they generally involve the sacrifice of truths about the objects of our beliefs -- and about ourselves, our motives and impacts, as well.

John Steinbeck and Doc Ed Ricketts had debated and articulated valuably holistic worldviews during their famous voyage on the Sea of Cortez in 1940. One conclusion they reached was that seeing things clearly and with keen insight is a prerequisite to "breaking through" to fuller and more holistic understandings. John Steinbeck saw humankind as "a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim", so he believed it was vitally important to see things whole, and to work purposefully to change the way things are, for the better.

The implication is that useful social action is required of us all. We need to demand a smart restructuring of our economic and political systems to assure more positive outcomes for all. It seems apparent that we should strive to minimize the adverse effects we have on others, in accordance with the ethos of the Golden Rule, and we should responsibly contribute to achieving goals that are broadly consistent with the greater good. Smart incentives should be instituted to effectively accomplish this.

Authorities in established religions assert that they should be the final arbiters in arenas of morality and ethics. What they really seek appears to be a monopoly on judgmentality, which they use as a beachhead to control and manipulate people, all too often for base motives like power, profit and dominating control. They usurp the highest

moral concepts of language by claiming words like exaltation, reverence, righteousness, enlightenment and sacred. By placing these concepts in an ecclesiastic, supernatural and otherworldly frame, they basically debase them and degrade mankind at the same time, especially when doctrines are used to discriminate and oppress.

Morality should be emancipated from religion and brought into the realm of empathy, reason, logic, Golden Rule fairness, personal responsibility, compassionate understanding and ecological sanity. Morality is what is consistent with the overarching human good. Spirituality should be anchored in open-minded ways of seeing, and loving kindness, and an inner path to deeper connectedness, NOT in narrow orthodoxy and siding with repressive rule. Further explorations of the topic of people's beliefs are to be found in Earth Manifesto essays like *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*, and in *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies*.

Lifetime Ecological Footprint Tally (LEFT)

Chief Seattle, a Native American leader in the Pacific Northwest, is reputed to have made the following wise observation in 1854, and it provides a succinct and essential reason for the necessity for us to choose to live our lives in more sustainable ways: "Whatever happens to the Earth, happens to the children of the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Mankind did not weave the web of life; we are but one strand within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

Everything on Earth is interconnected and interdependent, so each of us is involved in impacting everything else. These impacts live on after we die as a legacy, like the fading echoes of ill-considered activities. To a significant extent, we help determine the destinies of our children and theirs, and theirs, and theirs, through the individual and collective choices we make today. We thus materially choose the legacy we will leave to our heirs.

Even if someone lives to be 100 years old, life goes by relatively quickly in the context of the duration of our species' existence. Each person is born, lives an indeterminate but distinctly limited amount of time during his or her own individual lifespan, and then dies. The ecological legacy of each person varies, depending on a number of factors. This legacy ranges from relatively inconsequential for those who die in childhood to more significant for those who live a long life or contribute in major ways to the common good or intellectual advancement or spiritual illumination. Those who have seriously detrimental impacts because of their excessive greed or outsized material consumption, or despotic acts, or prodigious child-bearing, can be understood to be leaving much more consequentially adverse legacies of stresses on the providential natural world.

Every one of us has an aggregate impact during our lives, which could be measured by evaluating a Lifetime Ecological Footprint Tally, or LEFT. What's LEFT? This is a measurement that would represent a total of all energy and resources used throughout an individual's lifetime, plus a per-person share of the infrastructure costs of the nation in which they live. A factor would be included for the number of children a person produces, due to the multiplier-effect impact that having children has on resource depletion and damages to Earth's ecosystems. The use of non-renewable resources would be given heavier weight than the use of renewable resources in assessing these lifetime impacts. The LEFT would also take into account total amounts of garbage, wastes, plastics, toxins and carbon dioxide a person produces, directly and indirectly, over the span of their lives.

This idea would be an extrapolation of the Global Footprint Network's measurements of how many planet Earths would be required to sustain consumption indefinitely at current rates for all the people in each nation. The World Footprint currently reveals that more than one and a half planet Earths would be needed to sustainably provide the resources collectively used by the almost eight billion people alive on Earth today. The aggregate "lifestyle" of people in the United States has an impact so heavy that if everyone on the planet consumed at the same rate, FIVE planet Earths would be required to provide for their needs and indulgences. Needless to say, there is only one Earth! And the biocapacity to support humanity is diminishing in almost every nation on Earth as a result of our heedless aggregate activities. For more information, see the website at footprintnetwork.org.

Business as usual is simply not tenable in the long run because it is diminishing the carrying capacity of Earth to sustain us. Fisheries are collapsing, forest cover is diminishing and fresh water resources are being degraded and depleted. In addition to these adverse developments, the growing concentration of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere is causing ominous changes in rainfall patterns, along with record floods, droughts, wildfires,

intensifying weather-related disasters all around the globe, and threats caused by rising sea levels. These are just a few of the most noticeable effects of "ecological overshoot", a phenomenon of overuse that contributes to ecosystem damages, serious conflicts over resources and starvation, wars, diseases, mass refugee migrations, and many other tragedies. These trends tend to have a disproportionate impact on poor people, who cannot buy their way out of problems or afford to relocate or obtain resources from somewhere else.

Continuing to encourage increases in human numbers is a colossally foolish course of action, and it is made much worse by stoked consumption that diminishes the ability of planetary ecosystems to support us. Better ideas on how to remedy these problems are investigated in this narrative. See the Earth Manifesto essay *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot* for an expansive exploration of the best current understandings of these issues.

An Aside on the U.S. Supreme Court

Staunch conservatives understand that if only they had had a more ideologically "conservative" court in 1884 in San Francisco, rather than having had an insufficiently business-friendly Republican Judge Sawyer presiding, then hydraulic mining could have continued for an indeterminate number of years longer, yielding bigger profits for the hydraulic mining companies, despite the accumulating costs of downstream impacts being much higher.

Fast forward 132 years, and soon after Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, extreme conservatives acted as though they learned one lesson, that if their guys had dominated the courts back in the 19th century, they could have prevailed. When Justice Scalia died, his demise upset the narrow 5-4 advantage that ideological conservatives had had on the Supreme Court after Samuel Alito was appointed in 2006 to replace Sandra Day O'Connor, who had retired after 24 years of fair-minded service on the high court.

Immediately after Scalia's death, unprecedented obstruction erupted in opposition to having President Obama fulfill his Constitutional duty to replace Scalia on the Court. This rancor revealed some fascinating facts. The fanfare and fury that faced a replacement for Scalia was supposedly about abortion and other hot button issues, but there is no doubt but that the most important issue to rich people and right-wing politicians is about judicial stances that favor corporations over the vast majority of the American people. What Republicans want is an ideological high court, not an impartial one. They want someone in the mold of Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas or Scalia himself, for they can't stand the thought of having a more progressive Supreme Court. After all, they have wealthy patrons who have big expectations in return for political donations. Following appointments of Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett to the Court, liberals could be seen expectorating in disgust.

Sandra Day O'Connor had been a conservative judge in Arizona before Ronald Reagan appointed her to the Supreme Court in 1981. Soon after retiring from her distinguished tenure on the high court to care for her Alzheimer-stricken husband, O'Connor expressed how important it is for our courts to remain independent from politics, stating: "... some political attacks on the independence of the courts pose a direct threat to the constitutional freedoms of Americans." She pointed out that judicial independence is under serious attack at the state level as well as the national level, and astutely added, "it takes a lot of degeneration before a country falls into dictatorship, but we should avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings." Authoritarian dictatorship is becoming significantly more likely after the increasingly unhinged scheming demagogue Trump seized power, and began appointing extremist judges, so the need for greater judicial integrity has become more and more crucial.

Sandra Day O'Connor also appropriately criticized "nakedly partisan reasoning" and political retaliation when senators or congresspersons dislike the result of certain cases. And she sensibly urged that a smarter system for "merit selection for judges" be created. A clever Tom Sawyer, transported to modern times, would really appreciate the common sense in this suggestion and enthusiastically exclaim, "Let's try it!"

In February 2016, O'Connor declared that President Obama should name a replacement for Antonin Scalia, and the Senate should consider the nominee, thereby opposing intently partisan arguments by Republicans that the vacancy should not be filled until after the 2016 national elections. She said, "I think we need somebody there to do the job now, and let's get on with it". Considering that it was President Obama's duty to name a replacement, and the Senate's duty to give fair consideration to the nominee, we should have gotten on with it! George W. Bush had

called for a "dignified process" in the Senate after Sandra Day O'Connor retired in 2006, a process "characterized by fair treatment, a fair hearing and a fair vote." Then when the shoe was on the other foot, Republicans adamantly refused to give President Obama's eminently well-qualified nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, a hearing at all, thereby engaging in a consequential dereliction of duty, and an egregious abuse of power.

Judicial appointments were a crucial issue in the 2016 election because the next president would be in a position to select several Supreme Court Justices in the ensuing four years, and sure enough, Republicans imposed a "nuclear option" change in Senate rules in April 2017 that allowed them to appoint an extreme conservative to the Supreme Court without any support from Democrats. **Five years earlier, Mitch McConnell said he would not invoke the nuclear option for Supreme Court nominees**, calling the right of the Senate minority party to filibuster "one of the most cherished safeguards of liberty in our government -- the right of a political minority to have a voice." This objectionable act upset the 4-4 balance between conservatives and liberals on the Supreme Court, and allowed conservative politicians in Congress and the White House to rig the highest court in the land to promote their corrupt agenda. This is another act of anti-democratic belligerence by the cunning politicians that controlled the U.S. Senate, who were disingenuously and wrongly acting as if the American people had given them a mandate to jam the rudder of the ship of state to the reactionary far right to benefit big corporate entities.

A strong and independent judiciary is vitally important to promote fair justice in a democracy, so federal courts should be independent of dominance by ideological extremists, and especially of those who want to allow the improper influence of private partisan interests. Judicial independence is an important aspect of the smart separation of powers in our Constitution, for it provides a balance to excessive concentrations of power in the executive or legislative branches of government. An independent judiciary is a part of the brilliant system of checks and balances that was designed to prevent abuses of power that unduly harm the nation's citizens.

The most consequential impacts of having conservatives dominate the Supreme Court is that they generally side with moneyed interest groups and amoral corporations against the best interests of the people. This is true in particular with regard to facilitating the corrupting influence of Big Money and Dark Money in our elections. The reason this is so consequential is that domination of the Supreme Court by conservatives aids and abets "the Biggest Financial Crime in World History", as described in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*. In brief, this legal malfeasance involves on-going abuses of power that have allowed politicians to pile more than \$27 trillion onto the national debt since 1980 to finance low tax rates for people on the highest levels of their incomes. To add insult to injury, this public borrowing swindle is made worse by allowing corporate entities to artificially boost profits by foisting high costs of compromised public health and safety onto the people, instead of requiring real social and environmental costs to be included in the prices of goods and services.

The terrible irony in having social conservatives dominate the Supreme Court with partisan right-wing judges like Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, is that they stand for two grotesque perversions of justice. Most of them are committed to weakening the destiny-determining reproductive rights of women and the human rights of gay people. Simultaneously, and perhaps even more significantly, the records of ideologically conservative judges prove that they want to give giant corporations expanded prerogatives and rights at the expense of working folks and all people in the future.

How epic this irony! In a misplaced enthusiasm for taking away the rights of others, indoctrinated supporters of conservatives in the judiciary are stupidly willing to sacrifice our hard-won personal liberties, and to have an unconscionable range of infringements of the law instituted against common sense protections of the greater good. Republican politicians torpedoed the independence of the judiciary by appointing more than 200 conservatives to lifelong appointments to federal court between January 2017 and January 2021. During that time, Mitch McConnell stopped nefariously obstructing dozens of judicial appointments and gave the green light to the Federalist Society's Leonard Leo's curated list of reactionary, justice undermining and anti-democratic judges. They expect these eminences to be counted upon to decide issues consistently in favor of corporations, even though this means their rulings will be harmfully negative to people and the best interests of society.

The judicial ideologies of Neil Gorsuch have been assessed as being more conservative than those of Anthony Kennedy, John Roberts, Samuel Alito and Antonin Scalia, and almost as extreme as those of Clarence Thomas. We

are at a critical time in history, and we need a more moderate judiciary to counterbalance the authoritarian takeover in the USA that Donald Trump tried to cement into place in horrifying ways with regard to trade tariffs, immigrants, refugees, Homeland Security secret police, abrogations of human rights, foreign intrigue, international relations, environmental despoliation, and the health, well-being and security of working people and children and millions of people in communities around the nation -- and billions around the world.

It is exceedingly unfortunate that crucial economic and environmental issues are inextricably tied to hot button social issues in the judicial divide between liberals and conservatives. What this means is that conservatives are able to fire up support for judges who are ideologically extreme by hijacking the emotions of those who are fervently opposed to women having a right to get an abortion, or gay people being guaranteed fair civil liberties and human rights, or government exercising sensible restrictions on the availability of guns and assault weapons. And then this support is used to decide unrelated issues in favor of economic elites and big corporations against the populace on matters relating to things like affordable healthcare, workers' rights, voter ID laws, campaign financing laws, protections of the environment and unconstitutional usurpations and abuses of power.

The most reasonable stance on hot button social issues would be to abide by the Golden Rule and give respect to live-and-let-live principles of fairness and mutual acceptance. Men should allow women to enjoy more equal rights! And let's put aside hot button issues for a moment, and concentrate our attention on important matters that involve the best ideas for creating a propitious future that respects well-being and sustainability.

There was very good reason to fear that Donald Trump, once elected, would appoint judges who are likely to be a menace to constitutional rights of the American people. "Trump has an extensive and consistent record on two important constitutional issues: freedom of speech and property rights," wrote Cameron Smith in the Washington Times. "And that record is deeply troubling." Trump has a long history of filing bogus lawsuits to try to silence his critics or gain advantages, and he declared on the campaign trail that he wants "to open up those libel laws so when the New York Times writes a hit piece we can sue them and win money."

Cameron Smith continued: "For the uninitiated, that type of legal action is known as a strategic lawsuit against public participation (or SLAPP). A SLAPP uses the legal process as a weapon against free speech. It isn't designed to assert a claim likely to succeed on the merits. Instead, the plaintiff uses the cost, hassle and reputational damage associated with a lawsuit to force silence, avoid transparency or intimidate a defendant from expressing his views. When it comes to elected officials, especially the president of our nation, the public has a significant interest in hearing information, opinion and commentary about their actions and words. That may not be convenient for the political class, but it's certainly a type of speech we have a national interest in protecting."

We should rightly fight abusive uses of SLAPPs with "SLAPP-back laws" designed to protect participation by the public in local and national decision making by penalizing blatant SLAPP actions. Since Trump so clearly demonstrated that he is extremely thin-skinned and hates to be criticized, and that he wanted to use the law as well as the bully pulpit of Twitter and his bombastic rhetoric to suppress criticism, his stance is anathema to good governance and democratic fairness. He is one of the least admirable men to have ever won national political office, on account of his offensively litigious involvement in thousands of lawsuits, and his bigotry-amplifying and arrogant exploitation of courts, taxpayers, communities, and employees, contractors, immigrants and minorities.

I read the news today, oh boy, and once again it's a mind-blowing doozy. Even conservatives in Missouri sometimes look askance when they regard neighboring Kansas to the west, where the folks sometimes seem to be going crazy with bizarrely reactionary political shenanigans. Here's the scoop.

Our federal court system has become exceedingly politicized, so Republican-dominated state governments are taking steps that would shock our nation's Founders. In one sordid instance, according to an observer, "Kansas has officially gone insane." Dissatisfied that judges in Kansas have described cuts in spending on education as "destructive of our children's future", and that the Supreme Court of Kansas ruled that Republican spending cuts are unconstitutional, the GOP-stacked Judiciary Committee of the state senate debated legislation that would permit the impeachment of any Judge who acts contrary to the wishes of the legislature or the governor. "In other words, any Judge who strikes down or modifies any law the legislature passes, for any reason -- whether the law is blatantly unconstitutional, violative of existing laws, or otherwise, is thereby subject to impeachment

proceedings by the state Legislature." This action ratcheted up strife within Kansas state government, where a previous law designed to cut off judicial funding was declared unconstitutional by the state's highest court.

Strange days, indeed! These authority-abusing Republicans apparently despise the checks and balances that our nation's Founders insightfully wrote into the Constitution to prevent abuses of power. As Dartagnan wrote in the *Daily Kos* eight months before the 2016 elections: "What's happening to Kansas should be a stark example to the rest of us of what the Republican Party in control of the U.S. Congress would do under any Republican President: Trump, Cruz, Kasich, any of them, it makes absolutely no difference. Any one of them would act as a willing and eager rubber-stamp for a Republican legislature hell-bent on satisfying the desires of a tiny minority of obscenely wealthy donors, leaving the rest of us to suffer the consequences. The behavior of the Republican Senate majority in refusing to even consider the President's nominations to the Supreme Court (under Barack Obama) is just another ominous reminder of their total disregard for government 'by the people.' And they absolutely will not stop, even if it means trashing the rest of the country -- and us along with it." Voters should have taken note, and rejected Republican politician's manipulative bid for One Party power. By failing in this, the USA suffered highly negative consequences.

The Key Value of Social Responsibility

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

I love our country, and believe in Enlightenment Era principles that our Founders respected and found to be useful. These included the ideas of John Locke, an English philosopher, who along with other Enlightenment philosophers advocated respect for reason and critical thinking. They urged all people to question traditional institutions and customs, and endorsed liberal ideas of fair democratic representation, personal liberties and equality under the law for citizens. John Locke was one of the first socio-political philosophers to write about the protection of people's civil interests, including personal liberties and certain guaranteed rights.

Clear understandings of situations and issues are crucial to good governance and future well-being. This point was confirmed by the character MacKenzie in HBO's *The Newsroom*, when he said: "There is nothing more important in a democracy than a well-informed electorate. When there is no information or, much worse, wrong information, it can lead to calamitous decisions that clobber any attempts at vigorous debate."

As debate after debate took place in the absurdly long run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the whole concept of people being well-informed was given glaring attention. Republicans in a debate in South Carolina charged each other vituperatively with propagating lies, and the public was right to not trust what they were hearing. The notion that the substance of Republican doctrines is valid was convincingly challenged by economist Paul Krugman in a sensational New York Times opinion article, *The Time-Loop Party*, in February 2016. Listen in:

The truth is that the whole G.O.P. seems stuck in a time loop, saying and doing the same things over and over. And unlike Bill Murray's character in the movie "Groundhog Day," Republicans show no sign of learning anything from experience. Think about the doctrines every Republican politician now needs to endorse, on pain of excommunication.

First, there's the ritual denunciation of Obamacare as a terrible, very bad, no good, job-killing law. Did I mention that it kills jobs? Strange to say, this line hasn't changed at all despite the fact that we've gained 5.7 million private sector jobs since January 2014, which is when the Affordable Care Act went into full effect.

Then there's the assertion that taxing the rich has terrible effects on economic growth, and conversely that tax cuts at the top can be counted on to produce an economic miracle. This doctrine was tested more than two decades ago, when Bill Clinton raised tax rates on high incomes; Republicans predicted disaster, but what we got was the economy's best run since the 1960s. It was tested again when George W. Bush cut taxes on the wealthy; Republicans predicted a "Bush boom," but actually got a lackluster expansion followed by the worst slump since the Great Depression. And it got tested a third time after President Obama won re-election, and

tax rates at the top went up substantially (actually only from 35% to 39.6%); since then we've gained eight million private-sector jobs.

Oh, and there's also the spectacular failure of the Kansas experiment, where huge tax cuts have created a budget crisis without delivering any hint of the promised economic miracle. But Republican faith in tax cuts as a universal economic elixir has, if anything, grown stronger, with Mr. Rubio, in particular, going even further than the other candidates by promising to eliminate all taxes on capital gains.

Meanwhile, on foreign policy the stock position has become one of utter confidence in the effectiveness of military force. How did that work in Iraq? Never mind: The only reason anybody in the world fails to do exactly what America wants must be because our leadership is lily-livered if not treasonous. And diplomacy, no matter how successful, is denounced as appeasement. Not incidentally, the shared Republican stance on foreign policy is basically the same view Richard Hofstadter famously described in his essay, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*: Whenever America fails to impose its will on the rest of the world, it must be because it has been betrayed. The John Birch Society seems to have won the war for the party's soul."

Paul Krugman concluded *The Time-Loop Party* with this rueful observation: "But don't all politicians spout canned answers that bear little relationship to reality? -- No!"

What's the Big Idea, Buddy?

Humankind became the first species of animal to have foresight and to realize that each and every one of us will eventually die. This recognition was one of the impulses for people to begin performing rituals and burying their dead, and maybe even for creating art in human cultures 40,000 years ago during the upper Paleolithic period. The knowledge that all human beings will die has caused profound existential anxieties. This was no doubt one of the original impetuses that gave shamans the motive to invent religious stories. The fear of death, after all, has been accurately characterized as "the mother of all gods".

Extensive evidence points to the fact that early religions honored Mother Earth goddesses and females, and fertility and motherhood. As seen through the eyes of Dr. Leonard Shlain, an accomplished polymath who sought to explain the biological roots of patriarchal domination in human clans at the dawn of human history, social roles underwent a revolutionary transition about 4,000 years ago. Women-respecting, motherhood-honoring attitudes in these societies gave way to paternity-protecting and women-controlling male dominion. This was a negative development for females, and it took place at the same time that feminine goddesses were overthrown by jealous male gods that insisted on domineering supremacy. This far-reaching change curiously coincided with the advent of alphabets and the time when written words and literacy became widespread in early civilizations. This was an early instance of social media drastically affecting the populace!

Dr. Shlain explained the correlation of this change to physical shifts that took place in the brain synapses of our ancestors and the lateralization of the two hemispheres of the human brain. As our ancestors' brains became more specialized in connection with the analytical development of literacy, a coincident upshot was that women's rights and roles became curtailed by the effects of left-brained dominance, and male ascendancy triumphed over more fair-minded attitudes.

Sometime after the recognition dawned on humankind that all people will die, females realized that having sex with a male was sometimes directly correlated to having a child nine months later. Pregnancy and childbirth were dangerous, especially back then. Not only does pregnancy involve a variety of health risks and heightened vulnerabilities, but having children is also a big lifelong commitment, so females began to be much choosier about WHOM they would have sex with. The veto power over sexual relations gave women the substantial power of "original choice". Males bridled, and men have used social convention bridles to lord it over women ever since.

Males cottoned on to the realization that they had a role in paternity, and began to appreciate the subtly death-defying nature of having their genes be perpetuated through fatherhood. This made them increasingly interested in making sure they controlled the sex lives of women, so they formed long-lasting commitments like marriage in an attempt to mandate sexual exclusivity. Without such exclusivity, after all, there can be no assurance of who fathered a child. So virginity became important, and divorce was made illegal or was subjected to intimidating

threats of excommunication from churches. For further insights on this topic, read Dr. Leonard Shlain's brilliant *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*.

Today these understandings are often lost in the battle between the sexes, and in attempts by men to restrict women's freedom of choice and the right to a fair degree of self-determination in the course of their lives. Males, evading responsibility for getting a woman pregnant, strive to deprive females of any choice in whether or not to deliver offspring, and many try to deprive them of easily accessible contraception. This dastardly double standard is deeply wrong! Here is another arena in which fair-mindedness and collaborative problem solving would be more advantageous than ruthless competition or unempathetic repression! Let's never forget that democracy means fairness, and that we need good governance that effectively prevents abuses of authority.

Clarity of Understanding

Conservatives willfully characterized Barack Obama's presidency in wildly inaccurate and demeaning ways, and blamed him endlessly, and portrayed America's prospects in bleak terms. After Trump gained the power of the presidency, the economic, social and environmental ideologies that conservatives want to impose on the country had the perverse effect of making such desolate characterizations actually come true.

In Trump's inaugural address on January 20, 2017, he talked about "American carnage", claiming that it "stops right here and stops right now." With his manifest failures in coping with COVID-19, and the 2020 recession and continued systemic racial injustices, this "carnage" became horrific.

Paul Ryan once warned that we need to prevent the social safety net from becoming "a hammock that lulls able-bodied people to lives of dependency and complacency." The 2017 Republican Tax Cut plan that borrowed trillions of dollars to give bigger tax breaks to wealthy people and corporations is crazily irresponsible, especially because the scam also involves slashing spending on the social safety net, yet that is the ideological bent of most Republican politicians these days. Many of them have the brazen effrontery to call people who earn so little that they pay no income tax "moochers", and even more preposterously, "lucky duckies."

Paul Krugman set a vivid scene in an Opinion piece in March 2016 titled *Republican Elite's Reign of Disdain*. Analyzing why the angry base of the Republican Party had rejected all other establishment candidates at that time in favor of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, Krugman pointed out that party elites blame moral and character failings of voters themselves, rather than admitting their own role in contributing to unnecessarily dire circumstances being experienced by millions of blue-collar workers. Obstruction-oriented tactics of Republican politicians and their backwards ideological stances have sadly contributed to creating these adverse conditions. Hear Paul Krugman's words:

Stripped down to its essence, the G.O.P. elite view is that working-class America faces a crisis, not of opportunity, but of values. That is, for some mysterious reason many of our citizens have, as Paul Ryan puts it, lost "their will and their incentive to make the most of their lives." And this crisis of values, they suggest, has been aided and abetted by social programs that make life too easy on slackers.

The problems with this diagnosis should be obvious. Tens of millions of people don't suffer a collapse in values for no reason. Remember, several decades ago the sociologist William Julius Wilson argued that the social ills of America's black community didn't come out of thin air, but were the result of disappearing economic opportunity. If he was right, you would have expected declining opportunity to have the same effect on whites, and sure enough, that's exactly what we're seeing. Meanwhile, the argument that the social safety net causes social decay by coddling slackers runs up against the hard truth that every other advanced country has a more generous social safety net than we do".

An evaluation of whether people in other advanced countries are suffering the same morbid symptoms as middle-aged whites in the U.S. is contradicted by a United Nations study of 156 countries that found the Scandinavian country of Denmark to be the happiest nation on earth. Denmark has achieved this enviable distinction by creating a society that makes its citizens feel more secure, and there is little political corruption. This accolade was based on a variety of factors, including people's health, access to medical care, family relations, job security and social factors that include political freedom and degree of government corruption.

Denmark is a notably egalitarian nation where women hold more than 40 percent of the top jobs in the public sector, and it is known for its extensive and generous cradle-to-grave caring for the welfare of its people. Few people complain about the high taxes they pay to help finance this successful state, because in return they all benefit from a health care system where everybody has free access to a general practitioner and hospitals, and there are excellent schools and universities, and students are given monthly stipends for up to seven years.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia University was one of the authors of the UN's report. He expressed the laudable opinion that happiness and well-being should be high in every nation's priorities. "Human well-being should be nurtured through a holistic approach that combines economic, social and environmental objectives," he said in a statement before the World Happiness Report 2016 was officially presented in Rome in March 2016.

The Roman Catholic Church welcomed the study, declaring that happiness is "linked to the common good, which makes it central to Catholic social teaching," according to Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, a key adviser to Pope Francis. After Denmark, the next happiest nations were Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, followed by Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden. The United States was in 13th place, and there is no doubt we could and should do better by adopting much more egalitarian measures, and by choosing to root out corrupting forces that stand in the way of creating a healthier and happier society.

Paul Krugman continued his March 2016 article *Republican Elite's Reign of Disdain*:

"But the Republican elite can't handle the truth. It's too committed to an Ayn Rand story line about heroic job creators versus moochers to admit either that trickle-down economics can fail to deliver good jobs, or that sometimes government aid is a crucial lifeline. So it ends up lashing out at its own voters when they refuse to buy into that story line.

Abraham Lincoln made his famous House Divided Speech in which he declared: "If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it." Republicans, join me in thinking about where your political party really stands, and where it should be heading!

If we truly "want to make America great again", here would be an excellent place to start to honestly achieve that goal. The wrong way would be to give support to Trump Republican plans by going along with their version of "voodoo economics", cutting taxes on rich people, ratcheting up military spending, slashing funding for public education, healthcare, protections of the environment and a myriad of other civilized things, all the while stoking divisive tensions and generally empowering white supremacists, racists, religious fundamentalists, those opposed to immigrants and refugees, and persons who favor discrimination against women and gay people.

Tom Sawyer always reckoned that almost any occasion called for concocting some elaborate scheme, but if he were to be transported to modern times and be apprised of the far-reaching implications of the real challenges involved in truly making America great again, he might well appreciate something simpler, and enthusiastically recommend, "let's manage better by trying smarter and more equitable plans!"

Famously, eight years before Abraham Lincoln's House Divided Speech, Sam Houston proclaimed during a Senate debate on the Compromise of 1850: "A nation divided against itself cannot stand." This wisdom was derived from Matthew 12:25 in the Bible: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." This gives Americans a good reason to seek collaborative solutions to big challenges and to transcend the negativity and divisive partisanship that is allowing domineering factions to abuse power and prevent us from coming together to create a better and healthier country.

The True Wealth and Well-Being of Nations

The economist Adam Smith had contended that an "invisible hand" naturally promotes the best interests of the public, though that seems to be a dubious proposition. Almost all the rewards of our capitalist system have been going to the top 10% of Americans, and a ridiculously big proportion to the top 1%. The top one-tenth of 1% is doing even more astonishingly well. Meanwhile most of the liabilities are dumped on everyone else, including all people in future generations.

In contrast to what is truly consistent with our national needs, the domineering control by those who advocate economic fundamentalism and Strict Father ideologies is contrary to fair policy-making and smart national planning. Uncompromising conservatives have been insisting in recent years on the triumph of a narrow agenda, which always includes -- generally at the top of the list -- a dictate that taxes be cut for those with the highest incomes. The fact that tax rates on the highest levels of income are near the lowest level since the end of the Roaring Twenties in 1929, at the beginning of a terrible economic depression, makes this priority unacceptable.

At the same time, public funding of schools and universities is being cut, and tens of millions of young people are being saddled with huge burdens of debt for their educations. These debts are being foisted on students not only because our political representatives are becoming less willing to adequately fund public education, but also because the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 imposed large administrative and bureaucratic costs on both state and local governments, thereby reducing the amount of money available to teach children well. The net effect is that we are literally leaving millions of students behind in favor of red tape and bureaucratic testing, and of excessively high interest rates and oppressively unfair terms on student loans.

In general, debt-financed low tax rates for rich people are a bad plan. So are absurd provisions that allow giant multinational corporations like Exxon, Bank of America, Google and Apple make record profits yet dodge billions of dollars in income taxes. These schemes are forcing spending cuts for many programs that make life a little easier for people in the middle class, and those who are poor. The vigorous engineers of austerity are ratcheting up stresses on the masses, in effect, in both the USA and Europe. Our nation's physical infrastructure is sadly dangerously deteriorating, and our national debt is spiraling upwards, while rich people are getting richer. The current level of our deficit spending and national debt represent a real folly -- and a serious crime against our descendants. Let's alter these outcomes!

A more sensible and fairly conceived allocation of national spending is needed. Our emphasis should be refocused on ways to provide truer national security for the majority of the American people. The 98% of people who earn less than \$250,000 per year should DEMAND that taxes on all incomes over \$250,000 be assessed at rates that are progressively graduated at higher rates. And, as the illuminating film *We're Not Broke* reveals, big corporations should also be required to pay income taxes on their profits instead of being allowed to hide them overseas. It is time to find ways to achieve vital goals without always yielding to rich people's desire to pay a bare minimum in taxes. The best interests of the vast majority of Americans are NOT to be found in economic fundamentalism and political conservatism!

When we are struggling to decide how to rein in the dangerously burgeoning national debt, we should refrain from focusing so exclusively on politically misguiding "small potatoes" budget items like the Trump administration did -- cutting budgets for the Environmental Protection Agency to undermine its effectiveness, and slashing funding for Planned Parenthood, public broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and other institutions and organizations that contribute to making our society salubriously civilized.

Conservatives often work tirelessly to cut spending on programs that benefit poor people and those in the middle class, but they also combine this approach with allowing tax loopholes for corporate entities and real estate moguls and hedge fund managers and other well-connected people. And they staunchly defend high levels of military spending and inflated costs for prisons, and give tax-exemptions to churches, no matter how political their activities. These are crazy priorities!

Psychological Understanding

A unique animated film titled *Inside Out* tells the story of the animating inner emotional workings of the human mind through its characters Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness. Watch this thought-provoking film by Pixar to better understand essentially how the emotional control center in our brains functions. Then imagine, in the context of these psychological impulses in each of us, everything that is going on in the consciousness of the general public in reaction to the narration of events being filtered through the bizarre self-centered interpretations spewing forth from the twisted and deceitful point of view of the brain of Donald J. Trump.

All the characters in the emotional control centers of our brains have important purposes, and every person is

healthiest and most sane when they do not repress any of them. Sadness helps us connect with other people, so that we feel empathy at afflictions experienced by others, and it encourages us to try to alleviate their sadness with sincere expressions of compassion, thus contributing to healing. Anger can protect people from injustices. Fear keeps a person safe from harm by imagining worst-case scenarios. Disgust can keep one safe from being poisoned. And Joy orchestrates these emotions in an effort to make a person happy and whole.

Every time I see a new image of Trump making his latest outrageous, dishonest or nonsensical proclamation, I imagine virtually plunging into the brain of every person who sees or hears his bombastic and toxic demagoguery. There, the colorfully animated emotional controls have been taken over by the Trumpster, and he is wearing a Wizard of Oz costume with a pointy hat. He has smugly banished Joy and her happy perspectives from the premises, and all the other control center characters have been suspended on puppet strings. The inner Trump is fiendishly holding Fear and Anger over a bonfire, agitating them, and he is goading Disgust with a tiny pitchfork. A stream of vaporized "Truth Serum" is being pumped into the control center, but it has come from a real cheap batch that tends to make people lie while pretending to tell simplistic and disingenuous versions of the truth. Trump has bound Sadness to a chair in her short skirt, and muted her by placing earphones over her ears in a spot where she can only witness the proceedings, and the wily manipulator is trying hard to slut-shame her, and has forbid her from expressing her feelings or enjoying her natural rights.

In this agitated state, each person's brain is being subjected to anxiety, irritation and a new trumped up variety of Psychological Adjustment Disorder. Curiously, when any memory is seen as salient or relevant enough to us -- or when it has revealingly been repeated enough times -- neurotransmitter messengers in our brains like dopamine and glutamate help ensure that short-term memories are preserved in long-term memory.

The psychological toll being taken on the American people by Trump's rancorously divisive attacks on millions of people is incalculable, and the price we are paying in intensified strife and insecurity with excessive Trump Republican influence is beyond full comprehension. There is no doubt that the overall well-being of humanity on planet Earth is taking a severe hit due to Trump's racist invective, inflammatory verbal anti-Muslim attacks, offensives against asylum-seekers, anti-environmentalism, climate change denial and general eagerness to undermine the common good in his shameless pursuit of money and power. Trump's crudeness, antagonistic rhetoric and distractions will have psychological ramifications for many years to come, because he stirred up toxic and racist prejudices in the political bloodstream of our culture, amplifying their affect.

These ideas are reminiscent of the 1993 novel *The Celestine Prophecy* and its insights into "Control Dramas." People seek to control others, and arguments between people are often about who will hold "the power." This goes all the way back to our deepest existential fears and core anxieties about survival, and about finding meaning and purpose in life. Control Dramas arise when people try to manipulate others to dominate them, or force others to give in to their wishes. The *Celestine Vision* website clarifies: "As we try to control this core anxiety, what is still our greatest tendency? We attempt to repress the fear by pushing it out of our minds with desperate activities of choice, pursued with a kind of unconscious frenzy. We shop when there is no money in the bank. We follow celebrities instead of studying our own lives. We play video games or watch sports obsessively. We partake in all sorts of addictions and diversions and ideologies, all with a desperate need to fill that void of unknown meaning in our lives. We seek to manage this deep anxiety by seeking power and control over other people. This gives us a false sense of security because each controlling act only temporarily gives us the energy and surety we need." ... "In a real sense, the core of what is wrong with humanity is one that is a spiritual matter."

An awareness of control drama behaviors in others, and in ourselves, can make it easier for us to take steps "to transcend and interpret them on a much deeper level, both spiritually and psychologically." Donald Trump is the Control Drama Queen of our time, and his outrageous conflicts of interest and abuses of power have been unprecedented in their far-reaching threats to national security and the general welfare. All sane Americans should resoundingly renounce him and the shenanigans he perpetrated.

We must find a way to right our ship of state by emasculating the extremism of Republican politicians, and to force them to help fix our democratic republic by getting Big Money out of the driver's seat. We should soundly reject corporate hegemony over affairs around the world, and demand more honorable commitments to common good

goals. We can't afford to continue to allow corporations to run roughshod over people and the environment to maximize private profits and funnel them into the bank accounts of the wealthiest few.

We must find ways to offset the *Dark Money*-fueled conspiracy to discredit progressive politicians, which was first directed at Bill Clinton and then at Barack Obama, and indeed toward every Democratic politician who dares to oppose the political machine of the Koch billionaires and the harangues by dishonorable operatives like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and staunch fundamentalists on the Religious Right like Ted Cruz and the money-corrupted Trump supporter Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham. Franklin Graham perversely engages in political stunts like promoting a national day of prayer "that God would protect, strengthen, embolden and direct" Trump against his "enemies." Under his leadership, "the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has gone from preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to preaching hatred and Trumpism." Time and time again, he has exploited his father's legacy for political purposes. like when he questioned President Obama's Christian faith for years and more recently when he demanded that Mayor Pete Buttigieg repent for being gay.

Above all, we must throw Trump Republicans out of office to derail the unethical and downright dangerous demagoguery and their efforts to fight for business prerogatives that reduce protections of American workers and torpedo protections of the environment, and fail to take steps to mitigate the spiking costs and risks of climate disruptions. We cannot let them abuse power like dictator wannabes in a third-world banana republic.

To lead the USA into a better future, the fixes needed are not all that revolutionary. Consumers and investors must agree to some concessions to advance good citizen goals, as articulated in *The Common Good, Properly Understood*, and everyone should get on board to support plans like those set forth in a visionary *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*, and in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*. These action plans should be implemented in powerfully non-regressive ways, and as soon as possible.

Authoritarian Leaders and Authoritarian Followers

"Social conservatism and neo-conservatism have revived authoritarian conservatism, and not for the better of conservatism or American democracy. True conservatism is cautious and prudent. Authoritarianism is rash and radical. American democracy has benefited from true conservatism, but authoritarianism offers potentially serious trouble for any democracy."

--- John Dean, *Conservatives Without Conscience*

Social conservatives tend to be "authoritarian followers", says Bob Altemeyer in his compelling online book, *The Authoritarians*. Altemeyer is a psychologist who outlined a list of twelve revealing tendencies in the behavior of extreme conservatives, and he has examined many studies about authoritarian followers and the authoritarian leaders they obey. He concludes, "... the greatest threat to American democracy today arises from a militant authoritarianism that has become a cancer upon the nation."

Altemeyer noted that it is "mind-boggling" that conservatives revere those who serve their country in military capacities or sacrifice their lives defending freedom, yet support moves to take people's freedoms away. He asks, "How can they go on believing things that have been disproved over and over again, and disbelieve things that are well established?" He also wondered, "Why do their leaders so often turn out to be crooks and hypocrites?"

Right-wing extremists and fervent believers in the righteousness of white supremacy and racist groups, it turns out, have been behind many domestic terrorist attacks and mass shootings and much gun violence, repression and the defiance of folks in the U.S. involved in public land disputes and the Sagebrush Rebellion. Despite what conservatives claim in order to scare people into supporting them, the main threat to America is not Islamic extremism. Statistics show that white supremacists and non-Muslim extremists have been responsible for almost twice as many people being killed since the 9/11 attacks than have been killed in the U.S. by radical Muslims. Statistics like this "reveal a vast difference between public perception and the number of actual cases in which Muslim extremists have claimed American lives. So why aren't more people outraged about domestic terrorists? Because then we'd have to admit that white supremacy is still a problem." Black Lives Matter!

"Don't Mess with Texas!"

"The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant."

--- Maximilien Robespierre

The odd alliance between economic fundamentalists and religious conservatives in the U.S. today is not really about misconceptions, ignorance or backwardness. It is about a more ignoble motive: the struggle to gain and maintain domineering power and control. "Conservative" religious people like former Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and former Texas Governor Rick Perry and the sternly bombastic Ted Cruz and the now deceased Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia sometimes seem to emulate the hyper-conservative Wahhabi sect of rulers in Saudi Arabia, whose highest values are strict control of the populace and austere puritanical obedience.

These American brethren deceive the faithful by speaking of freedom but then revealing their true colors in the things they support: teaching Creationism in public schools, an economic agenda that is profligately favorable to billionaires, and a social agenda that staunchly opposes the real interests of poor people and those in the middle class and most women, young people, gay persons, African Americans, Latinos and immigrants. And these partisans are hostile to the best understandings of modern science. These are atavistic attitudes that make their dogmatic convictions suspect, and render absurd their contorted literal interpretations of their holy books.

Curious proofs of these contentions can be found in numerous places. Consider this revealing one: the official Platform of the Republican Party in Texas! This falls in the "you-can't-make-up-this-stuff department". Here is what the Republican Party wrote into its 2012 platform as part of a section on education: "Knowledge-Based Education: We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills, critical thinking skills and similar programs."

This condemnation of the teaching of critical thinking skills is downright dumb. Texas conservatives apparently want Americans to close their eyes to more expansive understandings. Even the hard-line anti-evolutionist Pat Robertson once declared that young people and the future of the Christian religion will be lost if religious authorities insist on literalist teachings that are contrary to evolving scientific understandings. When Texas Republicans try to rewrite history, as they have done for years in school textbooks by insisting on teaching religious dogma as fact, it is a desperate, wrong-headed effort. It is socially foolish to oppose early childhood education, accurate sex education, broad multicultural understanding, or the teaching of evolution in biology classes. In stark contrast, Texas Republicans officially support "school subjects with emphasis on the Judeo-Christian principles upon which America was founded." What happened to the separation of church and state? Manipulative intrigue by social conservatives sometimes coincides with an insidious form of theocratic Christian Dominionism, making it invidiously incarnate!

The highly respected cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead offered a cogent counterpoint when she observed: "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think."

Stephen Colbert ridiculed the Texas Republican Platform in a program piece he called *On the Straight and Narrow-Minded*. He called their platform "an attempt to repeal the Enlightenment", and then humorously added, "I blame Galileo. For centuries we had a perfectly good explanation for the order of the Universe. The Bible says the Sun goes around the Earth, making us the center of the universe. And you know what? Everyone was happy. And then numnuts over here (Galileo) gets a telescope for Christmas, uses his precious critical thinking skills and suddenly the Earth goes around the Sun, blah blah blah, and now we have lesbians." LOL!

When conservative school administrators in Texas make sadly misbegotten ideological attempts to establish a strict curriculum and controls over independent thought, this emulation of extreme social conservatives like those in Saudi Arabia is ridiculous. The hostility of Texas conservatives to science makes it appear that they want their schools to be strict, like Islamic *madrasas*, the schools that indoctrinate children in places like Pakistan. In these Islamic schools, dogma and rote learning are emphasized, and critical thinking is suppressed. Obedience is the highest value in such systems and male-dominant cultures. Knowledgeable people realize that Texas is not necessarily being backward or ignorant, but that conservative politicians in the state are striving to assert rigorous control over young people to force them to conform, and to prevent them from thinking for themselves. Extreme evangelical fundamentalism is a relatively recent development in the USA, and attitudes like those held by rigid Dominionists are negative ones for our society as a whole. Shame on them!

Trump, for his part, once declared without conscious mockery, "I love the poorly educated". Flatter 'em and fool

'em, eh, Trump? This master manipulator wanted, in effect, to increase the ranks of poorly educated folks by arrogantly prioritizing huge new tax breaks for rich people and promoting private schools, and deplorably further crippling our ability to invest in public schools and young people's futures.

Sold Down the River!

It is noteworthy that Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, expressed a wide range of marvelous understandings that are still highly relevant to the biggest issues we face today. The value of his common sense far-sighted ideas is explored in detail throughout this manifesto. Think again for a moment about the captivating tale Mark Twain spun in his novel *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*. This story is set in a period before the Civil War when slaves in Missouri regarded being sent down the Mississippi River to more opprobrious farm slavery in the Deep South as equivalent to being condemned to hell. A beautiful white woman in the story happened to be a slave because her ancestry was 1/16th black. She had an infant son who was born the same day as her master's son. Realizing that her son could be sold down the river to a harsh fate at the whim of her master, she switched the two boys, and they grew up in reversed roles. The tale unfolds many years later with a murder, a trial, and the use of the then-new forensic science of fingerprint analysis. The denouement is surprising; the real murderer is condemned to life in prison, but because he has been discovered to be 1/32nd black, the Governor of Missouri sympathizes with the slave owner and pardons the prisoner --- so that he can be sold down the river!

Fast forward 150 years. Now rich people and Republicans in Congress are selling the American people down the river. In the years from 1980 to today, the average incomes for the bottom 99% of Americans have been more-or-less flat, after inflation is taken into account, and things got much worse with the pandemic recession. Hard times? Not for the rich! The richest Americans have been increasing their share of the economic pie, and they have achieved this by radically rigging our tax system to primarily benefit those who are already wealthy.

A tax expert has stated, "The U.S. tax code is the most political law in the world." Think about this provocative perspective. When judged from the outcome of overall changes in our tax code in the past 40 years, the primary goal of these changes has been to shift the burden of tax obligations from wealthy people and big corporations to all other taxpayers. It is practically obscene that such a shift has been financed by using more than \$27 trillion in borrowed money. This shift is regressive because it adversely affects middle class and poor people while generously rewarding the rich. By giving excessively extravagant financial advantages to the super-rich, this irresponsible shift is contrary to the greater good of the American people, and is egregiously unfair to young people and those to come in future generations.

"Who is to be rich and who is to be poor is not divinely ordained."

--- Pascal Paoli, a Corsican national hero

There is no question but that our tax system has played a determining role in making the rich vastly richer since 1980 while the poor have become poorer and compensation for middle class workers has stagnated, and the national debt has exploded. The saga of these trends is incisively exposed in David Cay Johnston's *Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich - and Cheat Everybody Else*.

These understandings make elections decisive for our future well-being. Almost all Republican politicians push plans to slash taxes even further on the highest income earners, and on corporations. They claim over and over again that such actions will trickle down to help everyone else, even though the evidence, trends and statistics prove this claim to be false and deviously disingenuous, and to have obscenely anti-egalitarian impacts. The national motto of France proclaims a higher ideal: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* -- Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood! These surely would be more honest ways to "make America great again" -- by aligning policies a little more with ideals that are increasingly fair-minded and broadly auspicious.

"One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives."

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

Mitt Romney's business record at Bain Capital proved that he is a shrewd capitalist, and he would likely have been a good chief executive of our nation if the primary goal was to eliminate hundreds of thousands of government jobs and eviscerate collective bargaining rights for workers, and outsource work to people in nations abroad that have

cheap labor and fewer environmental protections. Romney was a spokesman for the wealthy who is out of touch with the reality and sensibilities of working people. He acted as though high rates of joblessness are crucially important to him, which they should be to every politician, but Romney's instincts and propensities as a capitalist made him ruthless and blithely unempathetic. "I like being able to fire people who provide services to me ...", he said during the 2012 presidential primaries. Even in the context he delivered this remark, he sounded like a tone-deaf Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*, arrogantly declaring, "You're fired!"

Some Catholic bishops in the U.S. characterized the plans of Republicans like Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan during the 2012 election as "immoral" because they would have given hundreds of billions of dollars in additional tax breaks to rich people while slashing spending on education, infrastructure and social safety net programs. Sister Simone Campbell called the Romney/Ryan budget plan "totally antithetical to either scripture or sanity." Sister Simone is a Catholic nun and Executive Director for a social justice organization named NETWORK. She had famously invited Mitt Romney to spend a day with a group of nuns so that he could honestly understand the true plight of working poor people. Romney declined, for he apparently had better things to do, like attending a \$50,000-per-plate fundraiser dinner where he demeaned the 47% of Americans who earn so little money that they pay no income taxes. These nuns expressed the moral conviction that people should honor sensibilities like the ones Jesus expressed with respect to poor people, rather than demonizing the working poor and accusing them of being lazy, or blaming immigrants for taking millions of jobs most American citizens are unwilling to do.

Jim once asked Huck about the Exodus passages in the Bible where God repeatedly hardened the heart of the Pharaoh. Moses had told the Pharaoh that the LORD was the God of Israel, and that God wanted Pharaoh to "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert." Jim wondered why the Pharaoh had rejected these pleas. Why, instead, did Pharaoh give an order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. *They are lazy*; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men, so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." Watch for this code word 'lazy' in today's political discourse.

Huckleberry sensibly explained to Jim that the world is a complicated place, and that "some things just can't be properly comprehendulated." Mitt Romney once stated, "I'm not concerned about the very poor, we have a social safety net". Romney was right about that, we do have a social security safety net -- and the majority of people in the Republican Party want to systematically dismantle this smart form of social insurance! They want to do this in abject deference to the preferences and great monetary advantages of rich folks, and to the sly and greed-driven spin they finance so lavishly. Unite, citizens, to alter this pathetic calculus!

An Underlying Digression

In the essay *The Odd Brilliance of Dante's Epic Poem, The Divine Comedy*, an intriguing investigation is made into Dante's great allegorical tale about Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso. Guided by Virgil, a famed Roman poet of antiquity, Dante makes a journey through an interesting place called Limbo, full of distinguished eminences like Socrates and Plato who lived centuries too early to have had the chance to be saved by the latter-day arrival of Jesus Christ. After Limbo, the intrepid and philosophic duo then travelled down through the eight lower circles of Hell. Dante uses Virgil, who had lived over 12 centuries before him in the first century BCE, as his guide on this transformative journey because Virgil was considered to represent the embodiment of reason.

The Earth Manifesto Home Page features a quote by Virgil that is one of the most thought-provoking observations ever made: "We make our destinies by the gods we choose." The course of our lives can be quite profoundly influenced by the choices we make, and by the things we believe in, so it behooves us to make smart choices, and to honestly proportion our beliefs to actual evidence and probabilities.

Each and every person indisputably does, to some extent, make his or her own destiny by the gods they choose. Even more definitely, we all together influence our collective destinies by the beliefs we entertain and the attitudes and worldviews we adopt -- and the politicians we support to represent us. There is a strong correlation between the worldviews we hold and the impacts we have on natural ecosystems, and since everything is

interconnected and interdependent, our beliefs also affect the destinies of all other forms of life on Earth. Honest mindfulness is called for, so that we can ensure better prospects, now and in the future.

A culture that strongly believes in personal responsibility for the stewardship of our home planet is more likely to protect the natural world than one that advocates expansive personhood rights for large corporations. A nation that makes bold commitments to protecting natural ecosystems and ensuring the sustainable use of resources would be certain to give higher priority to environmental protections and sane ecological activities than a nation that believes in Mammon or a God that encourages people to procreate and multiply with no limit and subdue every form of life that creepeth, crawlth, breatheth and liveth upon the planet. A culture that honors people who work together to create a more prosperous future would be much more likely to do well in the long run than a different culture that eagerly defends the freedom of individuals to indulge in excessively selfish drives at the expense of the greater good and the providential health of the ecological commons.

Boethius, an influential Roman consul and philosopher who fell from grace and power due to some arcane political intrigue in 524 CE, wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* while in prison for a year awaiting execution. This book became the most widely copied work of secular literature in Europe for centuries. In it, he sought healing from Lady Philosophy, writing: "Understanding of the self only arises in relationship, in watching yourself in relationship to people, ideas and things; to trees, the earth, and the world around you and within you. Relationship is the mirror in which the self is revealed. Without self-knowledge there is no basis for right thought and action."

"Know thyself" reads the ancient inscription above the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. That's good advice! Think about Mark Twain's observations in the sequel he started, but never finished, to his great novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In this tantalizing sequel, he wrote about the religion of Native American Indians -- a religion he alleges posited the existence of two gods, a good one and a bad one. It seems apparent that when people devote stupendous energies to propitiating a bad god, it is a much worse plan than to honor and celebrate the virtues and ethical spiritual truths of a loving good god. Hallelujah for that Twainian insight!

Look at it this way. If we worship Mammon and regard money as the most important thing in life, and continue to allow a small group of rich people to grab the biggest share of the monetary gains generated by the efforts of workers and the exploitation of Earth's resources, this priority will make us a vastly different people than if we were instead to extol virtues of conservation and greater social and environmental justice and commit our nation to fairer dealings toward all people alive today, and toward all those to come in future generations.

Insights Engendered from the Gold Rush

Samuel Clemens was just 27 years old in 1863 when he began calling himself by his defining *nom de plume* Mark Twain. The Civil War was raging that year, and President Abraham Lincoln gave a famous address at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania in November 1863 in which he expressed a strong conviction in the vital importance of good government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Unfortunately, the Gilded Age of robber barons was then just getting underway, and wealthy industrialists were overwhelming the power of the people with their often unethical or downright illegal business and political activities.

"Behind every great fortune," Honore de Balzac reputedly declared, "lies a great crime." That is a crude and rude generalization that happens to have numerous instances that corroborate it. Jane Meyers quotes a billionaire in her sensational exposé *Dark Money* who sets forth the primary parameter of an über-crime that he perversely calls the "golden rule" -- *He who has the gold is deserving of the power to rule.*

One of Mark Twain's most famous satirical observations was: "We have the best government that money can buy." Let's chuckle ruefully along with the great author as we ponder his meaning in these words. Clearly he was NOT expressing admiration for the powerful corrupting influence of Big Money in our political system. So let's delve into the messy particulars of the money being spent to buy our government and representatives in modern times, and assess how well this deal is turning out.

There are several categories of this spending. First, there are the big bucks being spent by politicians to get elected, and by Super PACs on their behalf. Much more money was spent on the national elections in 2012 than on any elections in the history of the world, and this outcome was directly due to the wrongheaded 2010 ruling by the

Supreme Court that corporations and unions should be allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money buying "free speech". Then the 2016 and 2020 national elections featured much more spending, especially by the Koch billionaires and their coldly calculating ilk. Institutionalized bribery is obviously thriving.

Huge sums of money are also being spent on lobbying activities to influence legislation at the federal, state, county and local levels of government. The amount of money spent by special interest groups to influence laws has increased substantially since the year 2000, probably more than tripling in the past 20 years. Over 12,000 lobbyists actively work in Washington D.C. to sway politicians to do their bidding, despite the fact that our representatives really ought to be striving to improve the general welfare of the people rather than putting policies into effect that further enrich the few. One can just imagine the shenanigans going on in the halls of Congress, and the pressure exerted by this overwhelming tide of special interest money and advocacy on the 100 Senators and 435 House members who should be standing up for the best interests of the people.

Another gauge of whether we have the best government money can buy can be found by looking at the total amount spent by the federal government. In 2018, spending was just over \$4 trillion, which is more than double the \$1.8 trillion spent in the year 2000. Back in Mark Twain's day, federal spending was less than \$3 billion, which is equivalent to an inflation-adjusted \$75 billion today. Spending has thus basically increased from \$75 billion to more than \$4,000 billion. In terms of the percentage that federal spending represents of the GDP, in 1910 we spent 8% of GDP, and by 2019 almost three times as much was spent, at more than 21% of GDP.

We have ratcheted up the amount of money spent by the federal government in the past century, so with all this spending, do we really have good government? The cost of buying and running the government is at record highs, yet the degree of fairness in our democratic process is fading, and it is less than the qualities of fairness found in many other nations. Our representatives have become extremely partisan and unwilling to work together to achieve common good goals. Giant banks, oil companies and other multinational conglomerates are evading taxes and mercilessly exploiting their advantages at the expense of the best interests of their employees and the people in general. The national media is controlled to a large extent by big corporations that often present a distorted view of issues and the news. All in all, we have poor governance at a very high price.

The folksy celebrity Will Rogers provided an incisively funny counterpoint: "Be thankful we're not getting all the government we're paying for"!

A new Gold Rush mentality seems to be pervading our twenty-first century economic and political systems. Giant corporations are rashly exploiting resources and showing a serious disdain for the law, in addition to evading taxes. They are often obtusely and selfishly disregarding the collateral consequences of their actions. Many industrial activities have harmful impacts on natural ecosystems and human health, and these negative effects take place literally and figuratively downstream in location, as well as downstream in time.

These are reasons that, when we are formulating national priorities and public policies, we should think beyond ourselves and our times, and give closer consideration to the impacts of our aggregate activities on the well-being and prospects of our descendants in the future. This is another reason why there is such a transcendent need for a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

Disclaimer: A Digression on Racism

Mark Twain's original novel about Huckleberry Finn became big news in 2011, 101 years after the author's death, when a whole hullabaloo took place over a revised edition of the book in which more than 200 references to "nigger Jim" were replaced with a sanitized "slave Jim". Political correctness has its place, and there surely have been too many offensive and ill-willed uses of the N-word in the past century. But it is foolish to misconstrue the social satire of this book, which "allows mature readers to see the social injustices of the time period for what they were", as one observer saw the situation. "Mark Twain knew that the very baggage of the word itself would leave readers feeling wounded and uncomfortable. And yet he used it. Over and over again to make a very clear point -- that racism feels uncomfortable *because it is wrong*."

Far-ranging racial prejudices still exist in the USA, especially in Southern states of the Bible Belt. These are revealed in attitudes like that expressed by Donald Trump, according to John O'Donnell, a former president of

Trump Plaza Hotel & Casino, who has written about Trump having accused a financial executive who was black of being lazy, "because laziness is a trait in blacks. It really is; I believe that. It's not anything they can control."

Such biases are grotesque, and we should strive to mitigate the far-reaching legal, social and economic injustices associated with them, and with the discrimination, racial inequalities, and lack of opportunities that accompany them. Unemployment among black people in 2012 was over 14% during the hard times in the aftermath of the recession of 2008, compared to about 8% among white people. And unemployment among black teenagers was startlingly almost 40%, while it was about half that among white teenagers. A similar dynamic played out with job losses during the pandemic. Profound social problems are affiliated with statistics like these, so they should be more fairly addressed in our national priorities.

With regard to efforts to sanitize Mark Twain's novel, it was admittedly undertaken with the commendable goal of helping ensure this great book would be more widely read. It is an unfortunate fact that the book has been banned from libraries and classroom reading lists in many places over the years because of its use of the N-word. Hmmm ... There is always a wide variety of different ways to look at any situation. "Whatever!"

I personally feel that altering the vernacular speech of the times and its cultural context alters the authenticity in Mark Twain's writings. I further feel that readers should be alert to issues that underlie stories in renowned literature, and should try to understand historical context and symbolism used by prominent writers, as well as deeper and more important themes and meanings in their words.

This issue reminds me of a video of Chris Rock doing a funny comedy routine in Johannesburg, South Africa. He did a riff about the context in which words are used, like the word "nigger" that Mark Twain had used to such controversy. Chris Rock exclaims, "Shit, last year the NAACP had a funeral for the word nigger!" Then he provided many exclamatory contexts in Black culture in which the word is used with cultural appropriateness between Blacks, but he repeatedly poses the question, "Can white people ever say the word nigger?" The refrain in his routine, in answer to this question, is repeatedly "NOT REALLY!!!" This part of the comedy routine ends with one amusing context in which it actually would be appropriate. But the bottom line is this: there is no question that when words are used insensitively, disdainfully, manipulatively or with malicious or racist intent, that is when they are the most reprehensible.

Lest anyone be uncertain about Mark Twain's personal feelings about black people, one need only read his recently published *Autobiography*. In this oddly weighty tome, he writes, "All the Negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades." He expresses a strong liking for the black race and an "appreciation of certain of its fine qualities". The crowning epitome of these qualities for Mark Twain was embodied by Uncle Dan'l, "a middle-aged slave whose head was the best one in the negro-quarter, whose sympathies were wide and warm, and whose heart was honest and simple and knew no guile."

Mark Twain used his memories of Uncle Dan'l as the persona model for the character Jim in a number of his novels because he remembered Uncle Dan'l fondly and respectfully from his boyhood experiences. Of Uncle Dan'l, he wrote: "He was a faithful and affectionate good friend, ally and advisor."

To better understand literature, it is helpful to cultivate a good idea of the times and places and the culture in which the writings are set. It is also valuable to understand the formative influences that affect those who set pen to paper, or equivalent. Such insights can give readers a fuller context for better comprehension. In this regard, a passage on Page 212 of Mark Twain's *Autobiography* is quite illuminating: "In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind -- and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing. In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave misused; on the farm, never."

In Southern states further south from Missouri, slavery was a harsher, more heart-rending economic and social institution, and white supremacy was more deeply embedded then, as it is now. It took a lot of political maneuvering and the terrible Civil War to finally bring the issue of slavery to a conflict-filled legal end, and to

bring freedom to Blacks (more-or-less; Reconstruction and then Jim Crow laws were disasters!). Much troubled water has figuratively flowed under the bridge since those days. A clearer comprehension of the evolution of injustices in American society since those days is explored in this resurrection of Mark Twain's perspectives.

The United States had an articulate and intelligent black man as President for 8 years, and then it had a vindictive con man who seemed zealously focused on reversing every one of Barack Obama's accomplishments. This sharp contrast should force us to grapple more honestly with the serious issues of racial discrimination that are still embedded in our economy, culture, politics and policing. Racial prejudices have deep roots, and so do male chauvinism and anti-gay fervor and anti-immigrant sentiments. Social injustices make these conflicts more virulent. It's time for us to seek more honest understandings of psychological and social underpinnings behind these biases, for that might providentially help mitigate these injustices and facilitate healing in our nation.

Deep-seated ethnocentric prejudices live on, but we must transcend them as we did in repealing Jim Crow laws and statutes against "miscegenation" (marriages between black and white men and women). Our nation overcame stubborn opposition to the right of women to vote, and attitudes changed toward strict strictures against cohabitation of unmarried couples that persisted for way too long. It is unfortunate that much discrimination against women and sexist attitudes continue, and that biased attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men are so often preached. These issues should be addressed by extending the fairness principles in our Constitution to include the right of life, liberty and reasonable opportunities for the pursuit of happiness for ALL!

Perhaps emblematic of the shift of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men today, despite the glacially slow pace of social changes in general, are two bumper stickers seen on vehicles some years ago:

*HATE is Not
A Family Value*

--- Bumper Sticker, 2009

*I'm Straight,
But Not Narrow*

--- Bumper Sticker, 2010

Mark Twain was no saint, and he did not transcend all of his biases, like those against Native Americans or his occasional stereotyping of Jews. But his personal evolution from being a poor small-town Missouri frontier boy to world-famous literary superstar and humorous lecturer, and wise observer, and extraordinarily conspicuous character has had an outsized and positive influence in the world.

Observations Concerning Social Fairness

If Mark Twain were alive today, he would write scathing satirical diatribes against modern day robber barons and billionaires who have bought our political representatives and caused our national priorities to be distorted and our national decision-making to be corruptly determined. Since the great writer and philosopher has been dead for 111 years, this obligation is being assumed by yours truly, his illegitimate great-granddaughter, Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy.

I will channel Mark Twain again here by quoting his observation, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." Against the laughably preposterous prescriptions of rich people on Easy Street, no one should be duped into standing for their retrogressive agenda. Wealthy people chose money-obsessed Mitt Romney as their standard bearer and slick spokesmen in 2012, along with the social conservative Paul Ryan, a supposed deficit hawk who had voted with George W. Bush numerous times to cut taxes and increase government spending by using the expediency of deficit financing. Facts like this, along with disinclinations of Tea Party Republicans to compromise for the common good, have led some observers to charge these politicians with pathological hypocrisy. The eagerness of most conservative politicians to undermine women's reproductive prerogatives and human rights for LGBT people makes these attitudes even more objectionable.

Trump and almost every Republican politician push to slash taxes on earned income, capital gains, dividends and inheritances. These scheming politicians personally often have big vested interests in lower tax rates, just as Mitt Romney did when he made similar proposals in 2012. Tax cuts targeted to benefit the rich represent a blatant conflict of interest for such politicians. If Romney's tax plan had been in effect in 2010, the tax rate on his earnings would have been reduced from 14% to less than 1% on his \$21 million income. That made his position on

this issue corrupt and outlandish! And Trump? Try to imagine the huge personal gains he is making from the regressive changes Republicans made in the tax code in December 2017! His tax returns must be examined!

Americans have made the consequential mistake of giving power to Republican politicians despite their unfair political positions, which are dishonest, fiscally irresponsible, biased against non-whites, and quite contrary to the greater good of most Americans. Let's demand that Republicans and Democrats compromise together to commit our nation to fairer policies that really do serve to strengthen the middle class and increase overall security. The American people should demand that new policies be put into place that increase opportunities and move a significant number of people out of poverty and facilitate social mobility while also addressing overarching environmental challenges. These are more reasons why a Bill of Rights for Future Generations is needed for guidance, as articulated in the Earth Manifesto, and should be enacted and ratified.

Republicans in many states have been passing laws that serve to deprive millions of people of their right to vote, particularly since they lost the presidency in the 2020 elections. These vote-restricting efforts are mainly designed to deprive Blacks, Latinos, students, low-income voters and people with disabilities of the ability to vote. The Republican Party appears to be looking back longingly at the days before 1920 when women were not allowed to vote, and even seem envious of the good old days when the U.S. Constitution was being written, because black slaves at the time were counted as being the equivalent to only three-fifths of a white person, for purposes of political representation and tax apportionment.

If women could be denied the right to vote and votes of black people could be discounted by two-fifths, Republicans might be able to dominate our politics permanently. They could more easily advance "right-wing social engineering" plans by imposing austerity measures on the masses and dismantling more provisions of the New Deal social safety net. They could also proceed with a further emasculation of collective bargaining rights of workers, and prevent reforms designed to limit Wall Street abuses of power. They could enforce more anti-choice laws against women's prerogatives in life, and they could undermine inconvenient protections of the environment. White folks in the Southern States, still angry about federal government requirements to end racial segregation that were enacted in the 1960s, could then get rid of such bothersome aggravations, and Republicans and Dixiecrats could enact new Jim Crow laws, and they could give rights of personhood to fertilized eggs while taking rights away from all females of reproductive age.

Conservatives see that liberals have managed to get many progressive changes instituted in our society, and they apparently believe that a return to the halcyon days of old can only be achieved by slashing the size of the government and giving those rich people who own half of all the money and assets in the U.S. a significantly larger proportion. They in effect subscribe to the slogan, "Power to the Few!" The swindles and shrewd propaganda of the moneyed class have managed to enlist to their distinctly unholy causes the unsavory passions of anti-establishment types, religious fundamentalists, enthusiasts of unrestricted gun ownership, white supremacists, racists and people who oppose any form of women's liberation and empowerment.

Dirty politics associated with uncompromising ideological "purity" are resulting in socially negative outcomes by undermining policies oriented toward the greater good. Broadminded initiatives are being sabotaged that would otherwise help fairly solve national problems. Bubble economic policies and the inadequate regulation of banks and Wall Street have led to widespread global economic and social turmoil. These adverse impacts on the lives of billions of people are the newest face of what Naomi Klein called "disaster capitalism" in her compelling book, *The Shock Doctrine*. These policies, being so narrowly focused, are strongly correlated with abuses of power by rich people, and with Strict Father drives for domineering power. Let's unite to demand real positive change!

That's All, Folks!

A veritable plethora of philosophers and spiritual leaders, scientists and visionaries, politicians and economists, poets and writers, and artists and filmmakers have informed my thinking in this manifesto. John Fowles. Will and Ariel Durant. The Dalai Lama. Pope Francis. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Galileo Galilei. Voltaire. Dante Alighieri. Thomas Paine. Mark Twain. Jack London. John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts. Bill Moyers. Martin Luther King, Jr. Paul Hawken. Charles Darwin. Albert Einstein. John McPhee. Bill Bryson. George Lakoff. Ayn Rand. Karl Marx. John Maynard Keynes. Milton Friedman. Joseph Stiglitz. John Kenneth Galbraith. Carl Jung. E.O.

Wilson. Ambrose Bierce. Robert Reich. Paul Krugman. Jeffrey Sachs. Dr. Leonard Shlain. Tiffany Shlain. John Lennon and Paul McCartney. It has been a long and winding road!

These people have vitally important perspectives to convey to us all, and I hope readers will find this rambling assemblage of ideas to be illuminating and valuable. Once we have achieved more holistic understandings, let us then break through to making positive changes in our world and economy, politics, behaviors and habits!

Ideas germinate in the arcane interstices of our minds, and they percolate and evolve. In a sense, they are the collective expression of a boldly progressive strain of evolving thought. Such ideas posit that a revolution in our worldviews is necessary to throw off the yoke of business-as-usual activities, and to offset arguments by apologists, promoters and enablers of the status quo, and by retrogressive social and political movements.

The revolution we need is a peaceable one within our minds, to prevent a more violent one in the streets. Comprehensive understandings of problems and issues are needed, and should encompass both causes and consequences. They should also help us identify and implement the best solutions. We need a revolutionary transformation in our human modus operandi, and we must soon begin to act more fairly and sanely, and in ways most likely to be sustainable.

This manifesto is an entertaining yet seriously fair-minded assessment of history, trends, understandings and ideas designed to help us together break through to more comprehensive worldviews. By setting forth good ideas, they will be lying around conveniently available to provide overarching direction for us to begin a far-reaching and propitious restructuring of our societies when they are needed. Hopefully, we will not wait too long, or be required to experience too much of a long unfolding emergency of catastrophic events in the twenty-first century before taking smarter courses of action, for there will be plenty of economic challenges, natural disasters, environmental calamities, resource wars and violent conflicts to come. The time is long overdue for us to truly remake the world in ways that are fairer, safer and more sustainable. That's the theory of it, anyway!

I'm beginning to feel another one of those Huck smiles coming on; "one of them crooked ones you smile when you see the joke's on you. It's a feeling I reckernized from other times before this, when big expecterations come crashing down and all you can do is ask why you was sap-head enough to have had them expecterations anyway."

Well, hope springs eternal, and it's a powerful force that may drive us to achieve great things. I sure hope so! Help!! Let us all seek a way to collectively move forward toward a goal of fulfilling Mahatma Gandhi's advice: "Be the change you want to see in the world"!

Thanks for reading this.

Truly,

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