

Earth Manifesto



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

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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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 considered 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 below on Page 32 of this book) 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's truly remarkable. This book is a brilliant, colorful and entertainingly humorous conceptualization of Huck and Jim on new adventures out west. It is downright delightful to read.

From the opening words, readers suspect that 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 real 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 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 a bunch of 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 whole 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 fire-and-brimstone 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 expectations come crashing down, and all you can do is ask why you was sap-head enough to have had them expectations anyway." You've gotta chuckle!

Phineas McSween later leveled with Huck about the true nature of the services provided by their 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 Donald Trump and his 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 that 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 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, inegalitarian, indoctrinated, partisan, conflict filled, trumped up divided, 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 the Central Valley of California. An epic Gold Rush ensued in which almost 100,000 adventurers arrived in 1849, coming overland on perilous journeys in a wagon train or by ship either from the isthmus of Panama 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 and 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 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 the 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 that were many miles long. The water was funneled into high-pressure torrents in hoses and then 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 pronounced conflicts of interests 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 to abruptly and permanently halt all hydraulic mining activities in the state. This was one of the first great legal decisions in history to mandate a stop to environmental despoliation.

This early defense of environmental protection was 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 without regard for the impacts that the activities have on people, wildlife, natural habitats and entire ecosystems. The Sawyer Decision leads us to a precipice of vitally important insights for humanity from the vantage point of the second decade of the 21st century.

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 ideas, 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, extreme political partisanship, our corrupted system of civil justice, judicial ideologies, 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 being considered in the U.S. District Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon in early 2016. The case involves a complaint filed 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 named 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 change, the U.S. government has valued its own generation more than future generations, in spite of the fact that those in the future will bear a heavier burden of hardships due to the damaging impacts of human activities on a stable climate and normal weather patterns and sea levels.

One 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 endangering their right to a livable planet, and there is extensive supporting scientific evidence of unfolding harms.

The serious complaint alleges that young people's Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights are being violated with regard to due process and equal protection. "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 *Gris*, 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 seems like 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 give enough concern to 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.

On April 8, 2016, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin of the federal District Court in Eugene, Oregon decided in favor of the 21 young plaintiffs and Dr. James Hansen on behalf of future generations in this landmark case concerning anthropogenic climate change. The Court's ruling is a big victory for the young people in what Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein have called the "most important lawsuit on the planet right now." One of the legal arguments made in the lawsuit is that the interests and future well-being of young people should be given much greater consideration, instead of permitting, 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.

Donald Trump's Department of Justice has tried to get this lawsuit by young people against the government for failing to address climate change dismissed, but on March 7, 2018, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San

Francisco denied the motion for dismissal, giving recognition to the merits of the case. The lawsuit will probably go to trial later this year, and this case is only one of its kind, with similar lawsuits having been filed by youth plaintiffs in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, North Carolina, Massachusetts and Maine. Another ploy that is 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 suits. This aggressive tactic has been employed by judges like Neil Gorsuch throughout their careers to throw judicial roadblocks in the way of environmental litigation and public land disputes.

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 greenhouse gas emissions are going to be exceedingly costly, 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 sheets. In 2017 alone, the costs exceeded \$300 billion for hurricane damages in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, along with various episodes of epic flooding and horrific wildfires, and terrifying debris flows in Montecito. 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, hellish wildfires, creeping desertification, coral reef bleaching and widespread coastal flooding. But the Trump administration is instead pushing a strategy of opening up coastal waters and previously protected National Monuments to increased extraction of oil, gas and coal. These actions resemble the initiatives of hydraulic miners in the 19th century, for their heedless activities will have exceedingly harmful downstream impacts. Republican politicians today, however, are much worse, for the impacts of their stubborn refusals to take steps to mitigate climate disruptions will have harsh impacts all around the planet, and will persist for centuries. In addition, today's anti-environmental politicians are trying to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, torpedo the 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, and eliminate many environmental rules that it regards as overly burdensome to the fossil fuel industry.

We would be wiser to heed the trenchant observation made by **President Lyndon Johnson** 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."*

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

Huge amounts of *Dark Money*, contributed largely in secret, are laying heavy hands on the scales of justice. Ruthless capitalists trumpet stentorian absolute certainties about how deserving wealthy people and giant corporations are to be given ever more advantages and privileges. Anti-government operatives tout righteous convictions concerning the unrestrained exploitation of resources and corporate personhood prerogatives that in effect allow costs to be externalized onto society.

Fred Koch, the industrialist father of today's system-corrupting billionaires Charles and David Koch, was a rich demagogue 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 World War II. 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 wily marketing and public relations firms, and operatives in right-wing think tanks, and they push skewed self-serving goals as top national policy priorities." It is easy to see how this is done. Wealthy conservatives assert that progressivism poses a treacherous existential threat, and they garner

support from extremely avaricious billionaires to buy unprincipled politicians and finance phony front groups, far right think tanks, yes men, bullies, union busters 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 control from 33% twenty-five years ago to over 40% today, en route to 50% thanks to the debt-financed Republican Tax Cut swindle passed without a single vote from Democrats in December 2017. Danger ahead!

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis was surely right when he sensationally warned that we can't have fair democratic representation if the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few becomes too outsized.

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 a more environmentally sane approach to existence. To better manage our democracy, the steps required are rather simple, though Senate Leader Mitch McConnell says they are politically impossible. To create a safer nation that has a more providentially positive 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-interested naysayers by removing Rump Republicans from majority power, and getting rid of even more extreme right-wing politicians. Donald Trump deserves to be impeached for his lies, financial conflicts of interest, treacherous ties to Russian interference in our elections, and socially irresponsible and treacherous despotism. Unfortunately, Vice President Pence is worse in many intolerable ways, and to impeach the dangerous Trumpster would not solve the problem of power abuses and cronyism and hard-right rule that is bedeviling *We the People*.

An Aside on the U.S. Supreme Court

Staunch conservatives understand that if only they had had a more ideologically right wing 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. (The cost would naturally have been to cause much worse downstream impacts).

Fast forward 132 years, and soon after Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in mid-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 since 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 conservative 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 very wealthy patrons who have big expectations in return for political contributions. (No expectorating on the premises, please!)

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 unhinged scheming demagogue Trump seized power, and began appointing extremist judges, so the need for greater judicial integrity has become increasingly 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, the 'Party of No' Republicans adamantly refused to give President Obama's eminently well-qualified nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, a hearing at all, thereby engaging in a seriously 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 ago, 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 extreme agenda. This is another act of anti-democratic belligerence by the cunning politicians that control Congress, who are disingenuously and wrongly acting as if the American people have given them a mandate to jam the rudder of the ship of state to the reactionary far right.

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 Swindle in World History", as described in detail 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 \$19 trillion onto the national debt since 1981 to finance low tax rates for people on the highest levels of their incomes. To add insult to injury, this swindle allows corporate entities to artificially boost profits by foisting high costs of compromised public health and safety onto the people instead of sensibly 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 ideological right-wing judges like Neil Gorsuch, and others Trump promises to appoint, 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 much more significantly, the records of judges who are ideological conservatives prove that they want to give giant corporations more prerogatives and rights at the expense of working folks and all people in future generations.

How epic this irony! In a misplaced enthusiasm for taking away the rights of others, indoctrinated supporters of ideologically conservative judges are obsequiously and stupidly willing to sacrifice personal liberties and to have an unconscionable range of infringements of the law instituted against common sense protections of the greater good. Republican politicians are torpedoing the independence of the judiciary by appointing extreme conservatives to lifelong appointments on the Supreme Court. They expect these judges to be counted upon to decide issues consistently in favor of corporations, even though this means that their rulings are 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 right as those of Clarence Thomas. We are at a critical time in history, and we need a more moderate judiciary to counterbalance the authoritarian right-wing takeover in the USA that is being cemented into place in some of the most horrifying ways with regard to international relations, environmental protections, human rights and the health, well-being and security of working people and children and billions of people in communities around the nation and 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 conservative by stoking the emotions of those who are fervently opposed to women having a right to get an abortion, or gay people being guaranteed fair 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 big corporations and economic elites against real people on matters relating to workers' rights, protections of the environment, voter ID laws, campaign financing laws, and anti-democratic usurpations of power.

The most reasonable stance on hot button social issues would be to abide by Golden Rule principles and give respect to live-and-let-live attitudes that embrace social equity and mutual acceptance. But let's put aside hot button issues for a moment, and concentrate our attention on more important matters that involve the best ideas for creating a providential future, healthy and sustainable.

There was unfortunately very good reason to fear that Trump, if elected, would appoint judges who are likely to be a menace to the 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 gain big advantages or silence his critics, 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 continues: "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 that we have a national interest in protecting."

We should rightly fight abusive uses of SLAPPs with "SLAPP-back laws" designed to protect public participation in local and national decision making by penalizing blatant SLAPP actions. Since Trump has so clearly

demonstrated that he is extremely thin-skinned and hates to be criticized, and that he wants 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, his rudely narcissistic exploitation of the court system, his cheating of taxpayers and his bigotry-amplifying attitudes toward immigrants, in addition to his taking advantage of employees, contractors, minority Americans, women and entire communities.

I read the news today, oh boy, and once again it's a mind-blowing doozy. Even conservatives in the great state of Missouri occasionally 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. As one 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 on public education are unconstitutional, the GOP-stacked Judiciary Committee of the state senate has 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 ratchets up strife within the Kansas state government, where a previous law designed to cut off all judicial funding was declared unconstitutional by the state's highest court.

Strange days, indeed! These Republicans apparently take umbrage at 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 in March 2016: "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 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." Aha! Voters should have taken note, and rejected this manipulative bid for One Party power. By failing in this, the USA is now suffering the unfolding highly negative consequences.

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*

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 assiduously 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 the atmosphere. And in a mad frenzy of repetitiously promoted consumer advertising and short-term profiteering, colossal quantities of minerals are being rashly wantonly wasted after being extracted from millions of mines worldwide.

We cannot afford to continue to allow unprincipled Republicans to abuse the power they have illegitimately grabbed. The risks are too wide-ranging and far-reaching. As *The Nation* points out, 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 an awfully misguided plan!

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.

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 that 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, outsized materialistic consumption, 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 that could be measured by assessing 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, 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 7.6 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 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 the

atmosphere is causing ominous changes in rainfall patterns, along with floods, droughts intensifying weather-related disasters all around the globe and wide-ranging 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, disease, 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 Earth's 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.

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 I believe in Enlightenment Era principles, which our Founders respected and found to be provocative and useful, like those of John Locke, an English philosopher. Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers advocated respect for reason and critical thinking, and they urged all people to question traditional institutions and customs. They endorsed liberal ideas of personal liberties, fair democratic representation, and equality under the law for all 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 South Carolina debate 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 that 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 concludes *The Time-Loop Party* with this rueful observation: "But don't all politicians spout canned answers that bear little relationship to reality? -- No!"

A Powerful Political Proclamation

Ten years ago, 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 rigged economic and political systems. For eight years under President Obama, the Do-Nothing Congress of our supposed representatives seemed to have completely forgotten that in a constitutional democracy, one of their main responsibilities should be to fairly balance all competing interests in our society, and to prevent the richest few from abusing the influence of their outsized wealth to gain an increasing concentration of money 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 concentration of good ideas and recommendations can be found in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*, which is available right now from the on-demand publisher Lulu. These ideas are also included in the essays 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 that the principal problem with this 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 true positive change 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 statesman Solon made historic efforts to reform the Greek economy and politics in what is remembered as Solon-wise compromise 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

progressive 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 public financing of elections, the guarantee of voting rights for all citizens, the elimination of extreme gerrymandering, 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 politicians 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, which would also help assure that our towns, cities and societies in the future would be more peaceable and sustainable. Conversely, in modern times, 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 would be an oppressive world with more extreme inequalities, dire injustices, revolutionary discord and repressive government.

Extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts is responsible for giving Republican politicians 16 or 17 seats in the House of Representatives, according to an expert analysis done by the nonpartisan law and policy institute at the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law. This means that gerrymandering alone has deprived progressive voices almost 20 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 fair-minded national policies and priorities are seriously undermined by dirty politics.

It might help to honestly understand how inegalitarian outcomes have come about to favor the wealthiest 1% over the best interests of the other 99%. One of the main strategies for obstructing collaborative solutions to big problems has been by dividing people through outlandish manipulations of people's emotions. To achieve this immorally narrow goal, the Dividers have used hot button wedge issues, extreme political partisanship, inflexible ideologies, stoked fears, goaded antagonisms, supremacist religious dogmas and appeals to base human motives like bigotry, racism, white supremacy, male chauvinism, gender discrimination, misogyny, xenophobia, intolerance, uncompromising self-righteousness and hate. These strategies have been an effective way to achieve political supremacy, and to impose harsher control over the populace and run up the national debt, but they are anti-social and egregiously contrary to our true national security and general welfare, and to the founding principles of our democratic republic.

John Fowles notes 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."

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 propitious political change. The majority of the American people want salubrious change, but it is crazy for so many millions of them to believe that Donald Trump and his trade protectionism, trickle-down tax cut scams, isolationism, divisive discrimination, manipulative propaganda and defenses of domineering white male privilege are good ideas. Trump has authoritarian strong man tendencies and seems to aspire to become a ruthless dictator. It is as if his supporters are willing to leap desperately in the darkest direction by giving the erratic Trumpster, with his poorly informed intellect, hair-trigger temperament and sociopathic persona, the power to manipulate, control and direct our lives and futures.

It is proving to be a YUGE mistake to have allowed this unpredictable, scandalously scheming, chaos generating, shamefully unadmirable, women demeaning and divisive demagogue to become the most powerful leader in the world. He represents a terrible choice for representing the best interests of the American people on the stage of international affairs, or to honorably safeguard the well-being of the people in our great republic. What an extreme contrast it is to have this bombastic man instead of Hillary Clinton, who dealt effectively with dozens of world leaders as Secretary of State for four years from 2009 to 2013.

The real depth of double standards relating to women in our patriarchal societies is stunning. To understand this better, read the surprising and sensationally 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 or ignominious landslide losses in all future elections. And American voters should give many more progressive candidates, especially those who are female, the opportunity to serve our nation and help make it fairer, safer and more sustainable.

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 strongly correlated 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 proposes good solutions in his video *Solving Student Debt*.

One of the most provocative Enlightenment ideas that our Founders championed in the courageous 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."

Again I recall 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, and yet people who earn more than \$75,000 per year surprisingly do not profess to be any happier. This is one reason why my conviction is so 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 fairer by making it more steeply graduated. The December 2017 Tax Cut law corruptly violates this understanding.

The promotion of "the general Welfare" of the people, as mentioned in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, can best be achieved by making our society fairer, NOT by continuing to egregiously peddle influence and pander so exclusively to wealthy people by allowing them to corrupt our national tax policies to get unaffordably low tax rates for themselves. This perspective makes it clear that 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 serve to generate and concentrate wealth and privilege ever more narrowly in the hands of the few.

Clarity of Understanding

Conservatives willfully characterize Barack Obama's presidency in wildly inaccurate and demeaning ways, and blame him endlessly, and portray America's prospects in bleak terms. With Trump having gained the power of the presidency, the economic, social and environmental ideologies that conservatives want to impose on the country will likely have the perverse effect of making such desolate characterizations actually come true.

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." To imagine borrowing \$1.5 trillion to give bigger tax breaks to wealthy people seems like a ludicrous plan, 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 posterously, "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 Trump and Ted Cruz, Krugman pointed out that party elites blame moral and character failings of the 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 powerfully contributed to creating these adverse conditions. Listen to 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 Mr. 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 small 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 this UN report. He expressed the laudable opinion that happiness and well-being should be high on every nation's agenda. "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 continues his 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.

Just to be clear, I'm not suggesting that Donald Trump has any better idea about what the country needs; he's just peddling another fantasy, this one involving the supposed power of belligerence. But at least he's acknowledging the real problems ordinary Americans face, not lecturing them on their moral failings. And that's an important reason he's winning."

Abraham Lincoln made a 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 follow Trump's plans by championing his version of "voodoo economics", cutting taxes on rich people like himself, ratcheting up military spending, slashing funding for public education, healthcare, protections of the environment and a myriad of other civilized things, and all the while stoking divisive tensions and generally egging on racists, white supremacists, anti-immigrant antagonisms, religious fundamentalists and discrimination against 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 fairer and smarter 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 the American people a powerful 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 nation.

The True Wealth and Well-Being of Nations

The "invisible hand" often doesn't serve the best interests of the public, though the economist Adam Smith had contended it naturally should. 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 .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 real 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 allying themselves with politicians in the Tea Party in recent years and insisting 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 the 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 particularly unacceptable.

Meanwhile, public funding of schools and universities is being cut, and many 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 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 let 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 deteriorating, and our national debt is spiraling upwards, while rich people are getting a lot 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 our 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 all the way up to incomes of \$1 billion per year. 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 cutting the budget for the Environmental Protection Agency to undermine its effectiveness, or slashing funding for schools, Planned Parenthood, public broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and other institutions and organizations that contribute to making a society salubriously civilized.

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

Inside Out!

To understand this here paragraph, see Pixar's thought-provoking exploration of the emotional control center in the brains of its characters in the animated film *Inside Out*. Every time I see a new image of Trump making his latest outrageous, dishonest or nonsensical and narcissistic proclamation, I imagine virtually plunging into the brains of every person who sees or hears his bombastic and toxic demagoguery. There, the colorfully animated emotional controls have been taken over by Trump, and he is wearing a Wizard of Oz costume with a pointy hat, and he has banished Joy and her happy perspectives from the premises. All the other control center characters have been suspended on puppet strings and 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 the most simplistic and disingenuous version of the truth possible. Trump has bound Sadness in a short skirt with muting earphones in a spot where she can only witness the proceedings, and the wily manipulator is slut-shaming her and has forbid her from expressing her feelings.

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 -- the neurotransmitter messengers in our brains, 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 Trump in power is beyond full comprehension. There is no doubt in my mind that the overall well-being of humanity on planet Earth is already taking a severe hit due to Trump's racist invective, inflammatory verbal anti-Muslim attacks, anti-environmentalism, climate change denial and general eagerness to torpedo the common good in his shameless pursuit of money and domineering power.

Trump's crudeness, hate speech and tweeted distractions will have psychological ramifications for many years to come, because he is amping up toxic and racist values in the political bloodstream of our culture.

All the characters in the emotional control centers of our brains have important purposes, and everyone is healthiest and most sane when they do not repress any of them. Fear keeps a person safe from harm by imagining worst-case scenarios. Anger can protect people from injustices. Disgust can keep you safe from being poisoned. 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. Joy orchestrates these emotions in an effort to make a person happy and whole.

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 one another for dominance, or force others to succumb 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 the general welfare. All sane Americans should resoundingly reject his shenanigans.

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 1%.

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 and staunch fundamentalists on the Religious Right like Ted Cruz and the money-corrupted Trump supporter Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham.

Above all, we must find ways to derail the unethical and downright dangerous demagogue Donald Trump in his efforts to fight for business prerogatives that would reduce protections of American workers and torpedo environmental protections, and fail to take steps to mitigate the risks of climate disruptions. We cannot allow him to abuse the power of the presidency like a tinhorn dictator 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 needs to get on board to support plans like those set forth in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again* and a visionary *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*. 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", according to Bob Altemeyer in his compelling online book, *The Authoritarians*. Altemeyer is a psychologist who has outlined a list of twelve revealing tendencies in the behavior of extreme conservatives like people in the Tea Party, 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 notes that it is "mind-boggling" that conservatives revere those who serve their country in military capacities or give their lives defending freedom, yet simultaneously support moves to take people's freedoms away. He provocatively 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 often been behind domestic terrorist incidents, gun violence, mass shootings, repression, and the

defiance in the U.S. since 2001 of folks involved in public land disputes and the Sagebrush Rebellion. Despite what Trump and many other politicians claim in order to scare people into supporting them, the major threat to America isn't Islamic extremism. Statistics show that white supremacists and other non-Muslim extremists have been responsible for almost twice as many people being killed since the Sept. 11, 2001 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."

"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: a struggle to gain and maintain domineering power and control. "Conservative" religious people like 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: the teaching of 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 all women, young people, gay persons, African Americans, Latinos and immigrants. And these faithful partisans are hostile to the best understandings of modern science. These are atavistic attitudes that make their dogmatic convictions suspect, and incidentally 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 of Texas 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 hardline 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 and 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." Ha!

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 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? Tweet away! This Manipulator-in-Chief is likely to increase the ranks of poorly educated folks, because his arrogant priority is to give huge new tax breaks to rich people, deplorably further crippling our ability to invest in public schools and young people's futures.

Sold Down the River!

It is noteworthy that Sam 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 it appears that the American people have been sold down the river by rich people and Congress. In the three decades from 1978 to 2008, the average incomes for the bottom 99% of Americans declined or were flat, after inflation is taken into account, and things got even worse with the 2008 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 sensational perspective. When judged from the outcome of overall changes in our tax code in the past 36 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 \$19 trillion in borrowed money. This shift is regressive because it adversely affects poor people and those in the middle class while generously benefitting the rich. By giving excessively extravagant financial advantages to the super-rich, this shift is irresponsible and contrary to the greater good of the American people. And it 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."

--- The Corsican national hero, Pascal Paoli

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 every Republican politician promotes plans to slash taxes even further on the highest income earners, and on corporations as well. 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 few 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 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 and spokesperson 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 taxes. These nuns expressed the strong moral conviction that people should honor sensibilities like the ones Jesus expressed with respect to poor people, rather than unjustly demonizing the working poor and accusing them of being lazy, or blaming immigrants for taking millions of jobs that most American citizens don't want 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 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 his political 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 13 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.

For more than 12 years, the Earth Manifesto Home Page has featured a quote by Virgil that is one of the most provocative 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 health of the ecological commons.

Boethius was an influential Roman consul and philosopher who fell from grace and power due to some arcane political intrigue in 524 CE. While in prison for a year awaiting execution, he wrote *Consolation of Philosophy*, which became the most widely copied work of secular literature in Europe for hundreds of years. In this book, lamenting and seeking healing from Lady Philosophy, Boethius observed:

"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 the Native American Indians -- a religion that 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, affirmative relationships 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 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.

Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics

Mark Twain had an intriguing relationship with the truth. On one hand, he had a marvelously inventive mind and loved to tell tall tales and use wild exaggerations in some of his wryly funny stories. On the other hand, he was incisively critical of deceptions that politicians use to manipulate people, like those that rationalize a highly inegalitarian new Gilded Age economic agenda or aggressively imperialistic military adventures.

Unfortunately, dishonesty pervades our politics today. Republican presidential candidates hurled charges at each other of "Liar! Liar!" in early 2016, and many people may recall that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid made an outlandish accusation in July 2012 that Mitt Romney "didn't pay any taxes for ten years". That allegation upped the pressure on Romney to be more straightforward with the American people, but he refused for many months to disclose any more than one year of his actual tax returns. When he finally did release a second year of his tax returns, the details sparked even more questions. All in all, his position was rather embarrassing, given that his father George Romney, a former Governor of the state of Michigan, had released 12 years of his tax returns when he ran for President in 1968. And today, with Trump stubbornly refusing to release any information at all from his tax returns, and the New York Times revelations that he may have paid no federal income taxes for years after claiming losses of more than \$900 million in 1995, questions about his honesty and ethics are being intensely amplified.

Mitt Romney refused to provide more information about his tax returns because he knew how bad it looked that he had had money squirreled away in tax havens in places like Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. Very few honest Americans have had bank accounts in Switzerland, like he once had. These things make it appear that he really did evade paying his fair share of taxes. The two tax returns he released show that he paid less than 14% tax on his huge total income, a rate lower than any working single person who made more than \$40,000 in taxable income. His 2011 tax returns would have reflected an even lower tax rate of only about 10% without a suspiciously deceptive treatment of his charitable deductions.

Romney's tax strategies, and Trump's, may have been perfectly legal, but they reflect the imperfectly unfair nature of our tax code to the vast majority of Americans. And, of course, the tax code is terribly unfair to all people in future generations who are being saddled with record levels of federal debt because our politician representatives in Congress have failed to balance the budget, year after year after year.

The bottom line, in any case, is that wealthy people have been gaining the preponderance of benefits of our capitalist system for themselves at the expense of working people, young people, students, poor people, the middle class, and everybody in future generations. And they have often done this by using tax avoidance strategies that are perfectly legal, according to current jerry-rigged rules. We can be sure that countless other instances of tax evasion are taking place that are semi-legal or downright illegal. The Panama Papers provided many instances that proved this fact.

Republican plans designed to give rich people lower tax rates and impose austerity on all others are mean-spirited, because the main way to achieve these generous tax provisions is by cutting programs that benefit poor people and those in the middle class. The fact that these plans would hurt the prospects of the majority of Americans and all our heirs in the future make them irresponsible and reprehensible. These unrepentant leaders deserve severe opposition and social ostracism for this. The lyrics from Kenny Neal's evocative song *Things Have Got to Change* echo through the interstices of my mind, as further reflections bubble to the fore.

Debt Introspection

In the film *A Few Good Men*, Jack Nicholson plays a tough Marine character who bellows out, "The truth? You can't handle the truth!" Yours truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, offers the truth right here: We are dangerously and irresponsibly addicted to debt financing.

Our representatives often try to deceive us about this fact. They pretend that governments can continue to provide tax cuts to all, along with high levels of military spending and a wide variety of social programs, perks, benefits, subsidies and entitlements. They act as though it is acceptable to finance these things with borrowed money because our current system causes a significant shortfall of revenues from taxes assessed. The compelling details of these promises can be understood by reading *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics*.

When a politician tells an inconvenient truth, like Warren Beatty did in the film *Bulworth*, it is regarded as a "gaffe". Opponents then immediately pounce on this truth with scornful attack ads and mockery. Liberals tell us half-truths by pretending that we can continue to afford the rapidly increasing costs of Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other social programs without serious reforms if we will just raise taxes modestly.

Conservatives tell us even more ridiculous half-truths by pretending that we can reduce taxes especially on rich people to lower levels, and that we can increase military spending, and during elections they even claim this can be done while simultaneously balancing the budget, and that these things can be done at a time of increasing needs for infrastructure maintenance and an adequate social safety net and protections of the environment. Trust us and give us your vote, they say.

Bill Clinton gave a masterful speech at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina in September 2012. His point was convincing, and it resonated with the American people. He declared: "The Republicans at their Convention had a simple and snappy narrative. They had a message that went something like this: We left Obama a total mess, and he hasn't cleaned it up fast enough, so put us back in power to fix it." It is quite true that President Obama was not able to fix the economy as fast as millions of jobless people would have liked, but this fact is due largely to ruthless efforts by Republicans to sabotage his economic initiatives.

Republicans basically promised at their 2012 and 2016 National Conventions to "double down on trickle down". They cling to this ideological course instead of making a commitment to the American people to sensible plans for a more fairly-shared prosperity. It is practically a law of physics, however, that the superstructure of our economy cannot be built on a shaky house-of-cards foundation.

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 decided. Since the great writer and philosopher has been dead for almost 108 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 demands. 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 stubborn 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 makes these attitudes even more objectionable.

Trump and almost every Republican politician propose slashing taxes on earned income, capital gains, dividends and inheritances. These scheming politicians personally have a big vested interest 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 will make from the regressive changes Republicans made in the tax code in December 2017!

Americans have made the consequential mistake of giving power to Republican politicians despite their unfair political platform, which is dishonest, fiscally irresponsible, prejudiced and contrary to the greater good of the vast majority of 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. A Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as articulated in the Earth Manifesto, should be enacted and ratified to provide guidance.

Republicans in many states have been passing laws that serve to deprive millions of people of their right to vote. These vote-restricting efforts are mainly designed to deprive students, blacks, Latinos, 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 tax apportionment and political representation.

If women could be denied the right to vote and the votes of black people could be discounted by two-fifths, Republicans might be able to dominate our national 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 in the 1960s, could then get rid of this bothersome aggravation, and Republicans and Dixiecrats could enact some 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. 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 Tea Party types, religious fundamentalists, enthusiasts of unrestricted gun rights, 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 effects 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!

The Trumpster Leaves Rump Republicans in a Lurch

A rump party is a political party formed from a remaining body of supporters and leaders after a breakaway group has departed. A rump party may retain the name of the original party, or adopt a new name. The word

"rump" refers to the rear end of an animal, and its use in this political context of a "remnant" was first recorded with the 17th century Rump Parliament in England. In the USA, after the state of Virginia seceded from the union in April 1861, anti-secessionist legislators convened a rump legislature and formed a pro-Union reformed government that claimed to represent all of Virginia. This reformed government authorized a new state to be created that later became West Virginia.

Rump Republicans today have been driven to the right by the suction force of the departure of millions of angry souls whose rancor has been riled up by venom-spewing right-wing talk radio personalities and culture war-provoking commentators on Fox News and extreme conservative politicians, and alt-right provocateurs. The main issues they have exploited are related to "free trade", illegal immigrants, LGBT people, the reproductive rights of women, fears of terrorists, and NRA lobbying against the possibility of any restrictions whatsoever on the ownership of handguns, rifles and assault weapons.

The image of a rump party is rather funny. In political terminology, since a "Rump organization" is a remnant of a larger political grouping that continues to exist after the group has split apart or formally dissolved, today's establishment Republicans are a Rump Party whose extremely intolerant white nationalist Trump faction has left it behind. "And many assholes infest this faction," declares the underground Mole, rather ungraciously.

Consider this issue closely. The incisive commentator Paul Krugman wrote a prescient Opinion article in the New York Times titled *The Republican Rump* in November 2008, one day before the national election in which John McCain went down in ignominious defeat to Barack Obama. Listen to Krugman's words:

"Most of the post-election discussion will presumably be about what the Democrats should and will do with their mandate. But let me ask a different question that will also be important for the nation's future: What will defeat do to the Republicans?"

You might think, perhaps hope, that Republicans will engage in some soul-searching, that they'll ask themselves whether and how they lost touch with the national mainstream. But my prediction is that this won't happen any time soon.

Instead, the Republican Rump, the party that's left after the election, will be the party that attends Sarah Palin's rallies where crowds chant "Vote McCain, not Hussein!" It will be the party of Saxby Chambliss, the senator from Georgia who, observing large-scale early voting by African-Americans, warns his supporters that "the other folks are voting." It will be the party that harbors menacing fantasies about Barack Obama's Marxist -- or was that Islamic? -- roots.

Why will the G.O.P. become more, not less, extreme? For one thing, projections suggest that this election will drive many of the remaining Republican moderates out of Congress, while leaving the hard right in place.

Paul Krugman was certainly correct about this, as seen from a perspective eight years down the road in 2018. He went on to point out and conclude:

Also, the Republican base already seems to be gearing up to regard defeat not as a verdict on conservative policies, but as the result of an evil conspiracy. A recent Democracy Corps poll found that Republicans, by a margin of more than two to one, believe that Mr. McCain is losing "because the mainstream media is biased" rather than "because Americans are tired of George W. Bush."

The long transformation of the G.O.P. into the party of the unreasonable right, a haven for racists and reactionaries, seems likely to accelerate as a result of the impending defeat. This will pose a dilemma for moderate conservatives. Many of them spent the George W. Bush years in denial, closing their eyes to the administration's dishonesty and contempt for the rule of law. Some of them have tried to maintain that denial through this year's election season, even as the McCain-Palin campaign's tactics have grown ever uglier. But one of these days they're going to have to realize that the G.O.P. has become the party of intolerance.

One reason these remarks are so sensational is that today, more than nine years later, the Republican Party is trying to unite around their top goal of dictating a hard right agenda, but have splintered into fractious

factions, and the intolerant Trump wing is having serious conflicts with establishment Rump Republicans. The fact is offensive to many traditional Republicans that Trump won by taking advantage of the politics of resentment, and by exploiting sentiments that are not only belligerently anti-regulation, anti-tax and anti-government, but also anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, anti-Muslim, anti-gay, and opposed to protections of the environment and precautionary climate action, as well as standing against reproductive rights for women. While the establishment wing, which was embodied by Jeb Bush, looked eminently reasonable in contrast, there is no question but that Republicans are caught in a "time loop" of advocating positions that are far outside the mainstream of how this nation must evolve and adapt as demographic and environmental changes inevitably force us to cope more farsightedly with current and impending future challenges.

The Republican Party actually did do some real soul searching after the smooth-talking political opportunist Mitt Romney became the second Republican to lose a national election to that really smart guy with the progressive sensibilities, Barack Obama. This story is even more sensational because of its denouement, in which attentive observers have witnessed a stunningly contradictory and amazingly obtuse rejection of the recommendations of the Republicans who did the soul searching. Sometimes it really does seem, curiously, that many Republicans resemble ideological Texas education dogmatists, who prefer NOT to learn important lessons.

Here's that stunning but consequentially serious story. After their failure to win the presidency in 2012, a task force was created by Reince Priebus, then chairman of the Republican National Committee, to perform an "autopsy" of the election debacle to determine the best path forward for the party. They assessed how they should best adapt to the changing American electorate, and decided it would be necessary to appeal to young voters, and to be more inclusive of minorities, especially Hispanics. They even called for abandoning the party's anti-immigration stance, and declared: "We must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform."

In an article about presidential candidate Marco Rubio titled *The End of Marco-mentum*, Mark Leibovich wrote:

"Rubio represented a model face of the idealized Republican future -- at least as it was imagined by the Republican Party leaders and many conservatives in the news media. To them, immigration reform was a kind of magic bullet that would allow the G.O.P. to expand its base and address the prescriptions of their autopsy while keeping the rest of the platform essentially unchanged." (Tax breaks for the rich, etc.)

"Rubio himself was a magic bullet in the immigration debate. He made an eloquent and persuasive spokesman for the so-called Gang of Eight, a bipartisan group of senators that was attempting to reach a compromise solution. When it became evident that the proposal would be a nonstarter in Congress, Rubio backed away quickly, though not quickly enough that he would avoid having it used against him ever since then by the immigration hard-liners who had never gone away."

So Marco Rubio had initially joined this reasonable effort, but discovered that such a stance could be ruinous in the face of "the politics of resentment" that has driven the extreme polarization of the Republican Party.

When the task force released its findings, they issued a remarkably hardheaded diagnosis of the party's many liabilities, which include its preference for rich people over working people, its alienation of minorities, its reactionary social policies, its markedly ideological rigidity, and its institutionalized efforts to repress dissent and innovation.

The Republican report represented an extraordinary public acknowledgment of internal discord and vulnerability that intensified the battle for control of the Republican Party between the deeply committed reactionary wing and the more pragmatic, pro-business wing. With just a few exceptions, the report did not mince words. At the federal level, it stated, the party is "marginalizing itself," and, in the absence of major change, "it will be increasingly difficult for Republicans to win a presidential election in the near future." Young voters are "rolling their eyes at what the party represents." Voters' belief that "the G.O.P. does not care about them is doing great harm." Formerly loyal voters gathered in focus groups describe Republicans as "scary", "narrow-minded", "out of touch", and "stuffy old men." The report also warned Republicans that they need to mute, if not silence, anti-gay rhetoric if they are to have any chance of regaining support among voters under the age of 30.

Here are rudimentary lessons to be learned, but instead of being able to honorably and pragmatically embrace them, the Republican Party went reactionary, and conservative voters rejected integrity itself by joining the chorus voicing anti-immigration attitudes and jumping on the anti-Mexican, anti-Muslim bandwagon. They have thus, in effect, joined the movement to build walls, double down on regressive tax breaks, intensify efforts to take women's reproductive rights away, and prohibit gun regulations. And they voted for Trump and Ted Cruz in huge numbers. As Thomas Edsall wrote in *The Republican Autopsy Report* in March 2013:

"There is at least one crucial problem that the authors, all members of the establishment wing of the party, address only peripherally and with kid gloves: the extreme conservatism of the party's primary and caucus voters -- the people who actually pick nominees. For over three decades, these voters have episodically shown an inclination to go off the deep end and nominate general election losers in House and Senate races -- or, in the case of very conservative states and districts, general election winners who push the party in the House and Senate to become an instrument of obstruction."

After this rump group of establishment conservatives lost control of the Party, and Trump took over and retained the services of shrewd but disgraced former Fox News CEO Roger Ailes and the reactionary extremist Steve Bannon, one pundit expressed the opinion that it would lead to "a long slide into oblivion", and that the 2012 autopsy would need to be followed by a 2016 cremation after the national elections in November 2016. In an outcome extremely unfortunate for humanity, the hubris-filled bullying Demagogue-in-Chief managed to triumph, and now we all are suffering the disastrous consequences.

Nonetheless, the Reince Priebus report threw down a bold challenge to Republican orthodoxy, stating:

"We have to blow the whistle at corporate malfeasance and attack corporate welfare. We should speak out when a company liquidates itself and its executives receive bonuses but rank-and-file workers are left unemployed. We should speak out when CEOs receive tens of millions of dollars in retirement packages but middle-class workers have not had a meaningful raise in years."

Here is another sensible and fair-minded idea that was rashly rejected. Instead of smart win-win-win solutions to big problems, they threw their lots in with Trump's win-lose-lose strategies and violated honest values to illegitimately gain and abuse power. The autopsy authors also agreed that marginal candidates should be weeded out in primary elections if they appeal to the base but alienate swing voters. The report was even critical of independent expenditure groups, including the anti-tax Club for Growth, that try to play kingmaker in the candidate selection process, because outside groups contribute to creating a splintered Congress with little social cohesion, so that polarization and gridlock grow and the political parties lose their ability to rally their elected officeholders around a set of fair and coherent governing policies.

This is reminiscent of political satirist P.J. O'Rourke's quip about Republicans being "the party that says government doesn't work, and then they get elected and prove it." Using his sense of humor and kernels of truth, O'Rourke also humorously criticized Democrats as being "the party that says government will make you smarter, taller, richer, and remove the crabgrass on your lawn." He is noted for having expressed this opinion: "One of the annoying things about believing in free will and individual responsibility is the difficulty of finding somebody to blame your problems on. And when you do find somebody, it's remarkable how often his picture turns up on your driver's license." Ha!

Dr. Tiffany Twain's Facebook Post on September 24, 2016

I recently recited aloud the pledge of allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, (under God), indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Then I re-read the bronze plaque memorializing the sentiments in Emma Lazarus' *The New Colossus*, which was originally placed on the inner walls of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor:

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Then I mused over President Franklin Roosevelt's words in 1943, as he signed the repeal of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act: "We are a nation of many nationalities, many races, many religions -- bound together by a single unity, the unity of freedom and equality. Whoever seeks to set one nationality against another, seeks to degrade all nationalities. Whoever seeks to set one race against another seeks to enslave all races. Whoever seeks to set one religion against another, seeks to destroy all religion."

Recognizing the rise of right-wing anti-immigrant movements in the USA and Europe and elsewhere, I reflected on the fact that millions of refugees are seeking asylum from desperate circumstances in the world today, and that many millions more are all but certain to find themselves in similar straits as the years in this century pass and the human population increases by another one billion people in less than 15 years, and as heightened conflicts unfold over ideologies and limitations in availability of land, fertile soil, fossil fuels and fresh water, and as intensifying climate disasters and rising sea levels wreak increasing havoc on human civilizations.

Then I thought about the pre-Olympian Titan gods of Greek mythology, Prometheus and Epimetheus, the deities of forethought and afterthought, and of the first woman Pandora, who the Olympian ruler Zeus had created and "endowed with numerous seducing gifts that would plague humanity from then on."

These philosophic musings reinforced my passionate conviction that humanity must pay attention and consciously and conscientiously seek consensus in championing foresight-informed decisions and smarter national planning to create fairer, safer, more just and more peaceable and sustainable societies. Once again, it can be seen that to accomplish these goals, the guidance of a farsighted Bill of Right for Future Generations is needed.

Disclaimer: A Quick 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 our nation, especially in Southern states of the Bible Belt. These are revealed in attitudes like that expressed by 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."

We should strive to mitigate the far-reaching legal, social and economic injustices associated with these biases, and with the distinct discrimination, racial inequalities, and serious lack of opportunities that accompany them. Unemployment among black people in 2012 was over 14%, 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. Profound social problems are affiliated with statistics like these, so they should be more fairly addressed in our national priorities.

With regard to this effort 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 real 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 writings.

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", which Mark Twain had used to such profound 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 black people, 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 would actually 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 the place 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, this 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 and 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 maneuverings and the terrible Civil War to finally bring the issue of slavery to a conflict-filled end, and to bring freedom to black people (more-or-less; Reconstruction was a disaster!). 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 extremely intelligent black man as President for 8 years, and now it has a vindictive con man that seems zealously focused on upending 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, 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 great 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 so long. It is unfortunate that so much sexism and discrimination against women continues, and that biased attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men are too 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 positive influence in the world.

An Aside on Inspiration

Sometimes the sun rises and beams down upon us like a benediction. It's just too bad that most of us are not usually awake -- or in an appreciative state of being -- for this oft lovely spectacle! Note that no higher power or authority communicated the insights in these observations to me, either by booming voice from the skies or burning bushes in the mountains. Nor do I lay claim to having found any Golden Plates etched with scriptures containing divine truths -- though if I had, such plates certainly would not have mysteriously disappeared. Besides, to lay claim to having found inspiration written on Golden Plates suffers from a stupendous difficulty: the almost insurmountable challenges associated with the need to magically translate revelatory engravings on metallic pages from the Deity level to the level of human understanding.

Mark Twain wrote about the Book of Mormon in *Roughing It* in 1872. The founder of the Mormon religion, Joseph Smith, Jr., claimed to have translated engravings made by the Lord on golden plates, and Mark Twain satirized the resulting Book of Mormon as "imaginary history", calling it "an insipid mess of inspiration", and "a tedious plagiarism" of the Bible. The phrase, "And it came to pass" was used so repetitiously in Joseph Smith's attempt to evoke olden-days authenticity in his 1830 writings that Mark Twain wryly stated: "If he had left that out, his bible would have been only a pamphlet." Ha! -- You've got to laugh at that sly quip! I recommend the theatrical production *The Book of Mormon*, for it provides audiences with uproariously funny entertainment and perspective.

Mark Twain was by nature rather cynical about the Bible itself, having written in *Letters from the Earth* that it has some clever fables, some blood-drenched history, and upwards of a thousand lies. But this is neither here nor there. My inspiration in the Earth Manifesto has been to try to advance big picture worldviews that would help humanity live more wisely, fairly and sustainably. These insights into the nature of things have been affected by my upbringing, experiences, education and propensities, along with a dose of good fortune in having a fair amount of free time and propitious personal circumstances. These conditions have allowed me to devote myself regularly to exploring objective, subjective and introspective ideas concerning vitally important issues.

One conclusion I have reached is that wildlife and natural habitats should be given greater protection, and that we should make more concerted efforts to ensure that our activities do not cause severe damage and disruption to Earth's providential natural ecosystems. The far-reaching scale and impact of human activities in this new Anthropocene Era of modern times has become "so large that it has thrown every fundamental life-sustaining system on Earth off kilter," says Jeffrey Sachs in his book *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*. Much bigger investments are needed to avert the most serious risks facing the world, which include

anthropogenic climate disruption, resource depletion, the extinction of many species, rapid population growth and extreme poverty.

Each and every person should feel a larger responsibility for doing this, to the greatest possible extent that they can afford. **Note to wealthy people: you can afford a lot more!** Pillars of our communities, please agree to progressive reforms that will generate more funding to help solve the many problems that confront us. Investments in the well-being of people in the future require this renewed commitment, as do hopes for greater social justice and environmental sanity.

Most people do not have the time or energy to be more responsible in civic activities. Relatively few have the financial resources to generously donate to good causes. Yet it is exceedingly important for us to somehow come together to make bolder commitments to common good goals. This will require an honest restructuring of tax laws to make them more progressive, and to provide more funding. It is an inadequate plan to leave such vital goals to the vicissitudes of voluntary philanthropy. The people who can most easily afford to help make our societies fairer and healthier should be required to make bigger contributions. At the same time, incentives for making charitable contributions should be made more attractive for all.

One of the biggest 'quality of life' issues concerns protected parks, open spaces and public lands. People need a more intimate exposure and access to the natural world so that they feel more of an appreciation for it. Parks and open spaces play a vital role in our physical and emotional well-being, so they deserve better protections. This understanding is an idea that originated with Parks Victoria in Australia, and was emphasized by the U.S. National Park Service, which has promoted a *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* campaign. This commendable effort acknowledges the role parks play in contributing to healthier people and healthier societies.

I call on civic leaders and rich people to give more generous support to protecting National Parks, Wilderness Areas, National Forests, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Wildlife Refuges, Wild and Scenic Rivers, State Parks, and County and municipal open spaces. A civilized society should not sacrifice these important natural areas for narrow short-term private profiteering, just as it should not abandon art, science, public education, honest ethics, or endangered species or other greater good goals.

"Invoke a little moxie. Think big. Risk failure. Laugh at yourself. Make a difference."

--- Tiffany Shlain, UC Berkeley 2010 Commencement Convocation (paraphrased)

Hopi Indian Elders have long recognized *Koyaanisqatsi*, a word in the Hopi language meaning 'life out of balance'. We are unwisely upsetting the natural balance in the world, so Hopi Elders advise us to walk more gently upon the earth. They essentially recommend that we give greater respect to ecological precautionary principles. They tell us to honor Mother Earth and to respect "our sacred life-giving waters and all life for future generations of our children." Our elders have spoken. Let us pay attention, and heed these words!

Insights Engendered from the Gold Rush

Samuel Clemens was just 27 years old in February 1863 when he began calling himself by the *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 the power of the people was being overwhelmed by wealthy industrialists 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 just 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 election in the history of the world, and this outcome is 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 November 2016 national elections featured much more spending, especially by the Koch billionaires and their nefarious 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 a lot since the year 2000, probably tripling in the past 18 years. More than 12,000 lobbyists actively work in Washington D.C. to sway politicians to do their bidding, despite the constitutional 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 representing the best interests of the people.

Another gauge of whether we have the best government that money can buy can be found by looking at the total spending by the federal government. In 2016, spending was roughly \$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 today we are spending almost three times as much, at more than 21% of GDP.

We have obviously 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, and 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 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. Corporations are rashly exploiting resources and showing a serious disdain for the law. 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 future generations. This is another reason why there is such a real transcendent need for a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

"If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed; ¶if you do, you are misinformed."

--- Mark Twain

On the Horns of a Perplexing Moral Dilemma

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim were floating down the Mississippi River on their raft and 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 canoe, 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.

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 that one can see, and it is foolish to hold out for the bona fide certainty of a transcendent epiphany. Humanity is faced, collectively, with some profound existential dilemmas here in the twenty-first century, and it seems obvious that it is growing increasingly important for us to wisely strive to make the world a better place for all, and to work together to accomplish this goal. Honest leaders, help save us!

Important Perspectives of the Economist Milton Friedman

"Only a crisis -- actual or perceived -- produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."

--- Milton Friedman

Milton Friedman was right about this. In fact, the entire Earth Manifesto is dedicated to the idea that some day, perhaps after we have tried a lot of other options that prove to be inimical to the greater good, a growing consensus will develop that is centered on propositions like those contained throughout this manifesto. Like the fact, for instance, that better cooperative problem solving is needed in civilized societies to achieve goals that are consistent with the common good. Let's accomplish this, instead of allowing corruption in our politics, and monopoly practices, and overly ruthless free-for-all competition, and excessive influence for giant corporations involved in the military-industrial complex, gun manufacturing, fossil fuel extraction, opioid drug sales and the like. Economic and ecological ruin, after all, will be the 'tragedy of the commons' outcome of an insistence that competing interests should have unlimited freedom of action to exploit the global commons.

Specific plans for actually creating a more propitious world are articulated in the essays of the *Common Sense Revival*, including detailed recommendations in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again*, and in the *online Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*.

The ideas Milton Friedman wanted to incubate were a form of gospel-like economic fundamentalism that has been shown to be potentially disastrous, as when adverse impacts resulted from bubble economic policies, deregulated exploitation, inegalitarian national planning and fraudulent activities, all of which contributed to wreaking wide-reaching harm on billions of people worldwide during the financial crisis and "Great Recession" that began in 2008.

Economic fundamentalists such as Grover Norquist advocate that we shrink the size of government until "we can drown it in the bathtub". In doing so, these ideological antagonists effectively advocate that we replace government with ruthless managers who make millions of dollars a year to wring more productivity from workers while strictly limiting wages and employee benefits, and rigorously controlling headcount in the workforce, and externalizing many costs onto taxpayers and people in future generations.

Canadian author Naomi Klein writes convincingly in her incisive book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* that the free market policies advocated by Milton Friedman have been used in many nations around the world to exploit people and natural resources while damaging the environment, and to enrich the wealthy while imposing excessive austerity on the rest. Such pathetic economic policies have been forced on people in many nations in the past few decades by banks and institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. A provocative perspective on these institutions is conveyed by the admirable economist Joseph Stiglitz in *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

The powerful motivations that spark socially irresponsible exploitation, and that make activities like this so attractively profitable, make it inevitable that we will have more economic disasters in future years. This is not paranoid speculation or a wild hatching of conspiracy theory. It is simply historical perspective and a lucid reflection on human nature in conjunction with the predictable outcomes of cause and effect.

"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you."

--- A famous line by Joseph Heller in *Catch-22*

Naomi Klein cautions us that we need to recognize what is actually happening in the world, and why it is happening, because this could help us protect ourselves against tyrannical abuses of power by amoral profit-prepossessed corporations and right-wing governments and the moneyed proponents of unfettered laissez-faire capitalism. Naomi Klein's book could be valuable in sparking dialogue about the contributory factors in financial volatility, economic instability, revolutions, wars and military coups. A greater awareness of interrelationships like these could help us find the collective will to more sincerely commit our societies to fairer dealings. One observer called *The Shock Doctrine* "the most important book on economics in the 21st century."

A critic of Naomi Klein's book pointed out that she may be conflating "free market orthodoxy with predatory corporate behavior." With governance being corrupted by Big Money, this is a rather blurry distinction. Negative outcomes often result from corporate malfeasance and political shenanigans, so it is sensible to demand that leaders in nations worldwide take smarter and more fair-minded steps to protect people and the ecological commons. Overall well-being is intimately intertwined with public policies, and making wise investments in the greater good is one of the obligatory prices of civilization.

The playwright Tony Kushner made a similar observation to Milton Friedman's about crises and change, although from a different perspective, when he stated just after 9/11: "There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be utterly transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two."

It seems highly probable that things will unravel in the course of coming decades, with prospects of diminishing fossil fuel resources after Peak Oil production, and in conjunction with population growth toward 8 billion within 7 years and all, so it seems obvious that we should strive to use the current moment and the recognition of coming crises to transform our cultures in more salubrious directions. We should not let rich people grab so many perks for themselves, and we should not allow corporate apologists, vulture capitalists or religious authoritarians to seize the opportunity to assert a rigid hegemony over the masses.

The free enterprise system does not regulate itself well. A myriad of specific instances makes this contention abundantly clear. The dynamics of 'free markets' do not always result in optimal outcomes for society as a whole, no matter what laissez-faire ideologues theorize. Instead, the free enterprise system tends to result in optimal advantages for individuals and entities that have the most influence and power. Frequently, outcomes are merely beneficial to the narrowly self-interested goals of a small subset of people, and the ones who inherit wealth are often rewarded rather than those who merit it. It is thus incumbent upon us to design and implement smarter provisions and rules for all, and to institute more progressive tax plans and make more intelligent national investments.

When moneyed interest groups are given the unalloyed freedom to inundate the airwaves and dominate both political discourse and policy-making, one of the favorite gambits is to get the government to enact priorities that emphasize "supply-side" economics and regressive trickle-down tax policies. By spreading such spin, wealthy interests have succeeded in getting very low tax rates for giant corporations and rich people for almost four decades, and in imposing a degree of austerity on others.

All economic activities are intrinsically affected by the prevailing rules that are established, so we would be wise to create fairer rules and adopt better practices and priorities. Intelligent incentives should be put into place to achieve fair-minded goals. Pragmatic and optimal solutions for society as a whole should be developed. All people in future generations should be considered when these determinations and priorities are formulated.

Milton Friedman also pointed out that special interest groups always strive to gain dominating advantages in response to every law that is passed. Interested parties work to make sure that whatever law is passed, they themselves will gain the maximum amount of benefit from it. Not long after a new law is enacted, many interest groups become vested in the new way things are, and thus a repeal of the law becomes increasingly difficult. Then more legislation is required to cope with the problems produced by the original law.

One instance that confirms this perspective involves the federal Farm Bill. Benefits under this program were initially designed to aid farmers beset by dust-bowl calamities and the severe agricultural depression in the 1930s. These benefits have been transformed into perks that mainly benefit big corporate agribusinesses today. And sure enough, it is proving to be nearly impossible to reduce the distorted and overly generous subsidies that these vested interest groups receive, even in the face of high agribusiness profits and foolishly risky levels of federal debt.

"History may not repeat itself, but it sure does rhyme a lot."

--- Mark Twain

Imagine New Courses of Action!

Adam Smith was the famous Scottish economist who wrote the veritable manifesto of capitalism and free enterprise in the momentous year 1776. His book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, postulated that the wealth of a nation is measured by the productivity and living standards of *all of its people*, not just by its accumulated wealth in the hands of a few. His belief was basically that private interests and self-interested behaviors contribute to the good of the whole of society. He was clearly interested in the greater good of a nation and society in its sum total.

Adam Smith also believed, it is stated in Wikipedia, that "a sort of system of social pressure persuades the wealthy to do, of their own volition, what the society around them requires." That was then; this is now. Today,

many rich conservatives seem to have developed a money-stoked hubris that makes them feel entitled to an ever-growing proportion of the nation's wealth, so they seem to have become partially immune to conscience-provoking social pressures and guilt and shame. They consequently support politicians who reject voices calling for a more steeply graduated system of taxation, and instead they demand further tax breaks for rich people and corporate entities that serve to disproportionately funnel profits into their pockets, thus undermining society's best interests and even democratic fairness of elections and governance altogether.

Mark Twain may have given indirect recognition to Adam Smith's ideas about rich people and their inextricable relationship with others in society when he noted: "In all the ages, three-fourths of the support of the great charities has been conscience money." But in this era of Trump Republicans, fears of social ostracism for overly obtuse greedy selfishness are being more blatantly ignored.

Freedom and Responsibility

When *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* opens with words about Huck and Jim going down the river on a raft looking for freedom, it inspires us to exclaim, "Hallelujah for freedom!" I reckon that we live in a free country -- more or less. This freedom is assured to every citizen thanks to the positive dispensation of our Constitution and Bill of Rights and evolving rules of law. Everyone is free to believe ANY thing they choose. But with freedom comes responsibility. Ecological responsibility, civic responsibility and Golden Rule responsibility to others, and also an ethical inter-generational responsibility -- hence, again, the need for a strong commitment to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations!

One thing I tell you is you got to be free
Come together now, over me ...

--- The late Joe Cocker, crooning out a rendition of the Beatles' song *Come Together*

One example of the fact that liberties and assured rights are irrevocably accompanied by real responsibilities can be understood in light of the Second Amendment right to bear arms. Owning a gun is a Constitutional right, but gun owners should be required to be responsible for keeping their guns safe from any accidental discharges by their kids, and to refrain from murdering their spouses or neighbors or strangers in fits of anger, or in insane attempts to achieve notoriety like the Aurora, Colorado shooter or the mass murderer at an elementary school in Sandy Hook, Connecticut or the slaughter at a gay bar in Orlando, Florida or the worst mass shooting ever, in Las Vegas. Or the Florida high school teenager who killed 17 people with a still easy-to-obtain assault rifle. Having private citizens own rapid-fire assault weapons has little sensible justification, so it would be smart to re-authorize the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that was in effect for 10 years from 1994 to 2004, and to implement better gun safety plans.

Another freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights is the free exercise of religion. I personally find it quite interesting that Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity back in the year 313 CE, more than 1,700 years ago, was smart and fair enough to issue an "Edict of Milan" that not only legalized Christian worship but also proclaimed religious tolerance of all religions throughout the empire. Good call, I say!

Twelve years later, Constantine convened a council of old men bishops in Nicaea, a town on Lake Iznik in present-day Turkey. His goal was to resolve all the many theological disputes that roiled the early church. Was Jesus human or divine? Was he God incarnate, or just a man? After months of heated debate, the Council handed Constantine what became known as the Nicene Creed, which outlined for the first time the officially sanctioned and thereafter Absolute Truth orthodox stories of the Christian church. Jesus was deemed to be the literal Son of God, and anyone who was foolhardy enough to disagree with this dogma was banished from the empire, and their ideas were violently suppressed. So much for religious tolerance!

In my opinion, there is a much more probably true story than the myth that the Lord Almighty is a supreme male god like Zeus that came down from the heavens and impregnated a human female who remained a virgin and then gave birth to a Son of God. For instance, historian Joe Atwill articulates a surprising, controversial and very thought-provoking theory about Jesus in his book *Caesar's Messiah - The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus*.

But it does not really matter whether or not these stories are true. What is most significant is that, as Reza Aslan writes in *Zealot*, "The council's decision resulted in a thousand years or more of unspeakable bloodshed in the name of Christian orthodoxy." Not so good, Constantine! An inquisitive person would wonder how so much violence could have been rationalized in the name of God and Jesus. It seems obvious that this must be an issue of control, influence and power. I feel strongly that we should reject ideological arguments that tout orthodoxy and conservatism when they are likely to cause widespread conflict and harm.

The implicit value of tolerance in polytheistic religions is a crucial moral value that is socially more advantageous than the whole set of supremacist underpinnings of monotheistic religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism. I enthusiastically recommend that people read Jonathan Kirsch's insightful book about misuses of monotheistic belief systems in *God Against the Gods - The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*. That story is about the era of King Tut's father in ancient Egypt, and it is fascinating and well worth reading.

A virtual marriage of church and state has often throughout history proven to be a dastardly affair. This is the reason that a representative democracy requires a separation between government and religious institutions. Such a fair balance is important for the health of a society -- and so is a robust balance between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government.

Every religion, like every body politic, has adherents who are scattered across a wide continuum that extends from the radical far left to the reactionary far right. Sadly, far right voices dominate most established religions. It would be a far safer and more humane world if liberals and moderates in every faith exercised greater influence. The right wing brings shame to their creeds in the form of intolerant attitudes toward others, and reactionary conservatives in many faiths cling to extreme beliefs, doing much harm to females and other under-represented people in their cultures by abusing the influence they have in politics. The tax-exempt status of churches should be revoked for all spending on political goals such as endorsing or opposing candidates, or opposing rights for women and gay people.

Political interference by religious establishments is not only sad, but dangerous as well. Hard-nosed attitudes and influences in faith traditions can have deleterious effects on people and the fairness of government policies. It seems nearly disastrous that right-wing Christians have so much power in the USA today, and that they misuse this power. It is socially harmful to have extreme conservatives wield so much influence -- people like Rush Limbaugh, Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan, Ted Cruz, Sam Brownback, Marco Rubio, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Rick Perry, Scott Walker and the bombastic Trump. In odd ways, these partisans often emulate the repressive Ayatollahs who rule in Iran. They are even a bit like extremists in terrorist organizations like al Qaeda and the Islamic State, because they apparently believe that any means, no matter how scurrilous, is justified to achieve their goals for gaining and maintaining domineering power and control.

Extensive adversities have been caused by weddings of church and state throughout history, as can be seen in any study of the negative impacts of the "divine rights of kings" over the centuries, or of the Crusades, or the Catholic Inquisition, or Muslim wars of conquest. The retrogressive influence of reactionary elements of the Christian Right in American politics today is similarly misguided and socially harmful.

Early in *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck inadvertently slides head first into the mighty Mississippi, "which give the bullfrogs something to croak about for days, I bet." So may these reflections!

Further Reflections on Republican Follies

Thomas Friedman wrote a brilliant opinion article in March 2016 in which he expressed the view that politicians who connect with people on a gut level are able to gain their support even though they do not articulate a way forward that makes good sense. In this article, titled *Only Trump Can Trump Trump*, Friedman accurately identified the anti-establishment feelings of Americans who feel betrayed by politicians because they have been left behind while rich people prosper. He criticized Republican elites in particular, observing that they have "sold their own souls and their party, so many times to charlatans and plutocrats that you wonder when it's going to show up on closeout on eBay: "For sale: The G.O.P. soul. Almost empty. This soul was previously sold to

Sarah Palin, Tea Party anarchists, Rush Limbaugh, Grover Norquist, the gun lobby, the oil industry, the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson and Fox News. Will bargain. No offer too low."

This characterization rings with a valid semblance of accurate assessment. Friedman continued:

"Normally smart people like Mitt Romney discarded all their best instincts to suck up to this ragtag assortment of self-appointed GOP commissars, each representing a different slice of what came to be Republican orthodoxy -- climate change is a hoax; abortion is impermissible, even in the case of rape or incest; common-sense gun laws must be opposed, no matter how many people get murdered; taxes must always be cut and safety nets shrunk, no matter what the economic context; Obamacare must be repealed, even though it was based on a Republican idea; and Iraq was a success, even though it was a mess."

"If you're like me, you've been watching the presidential primaries with excitement, anticipation, and a growing sense of terror. It's going to get more exciting -- and more terrifying -- in the months ahead. This level of stress calls for some light-hearted fun, but also informative coverage from your favorite reader-supported, environmental media source."

E.J. Dionne has said that the rise of Trump and the Republican Party has been fertilized by false promises of conservative ideology for 50 years, noting: "Republicans have depended on votes of white working class voters for decades, and they haven't delivered any tangible benefits to those voters. Trump speaks to their anger."

Many people apparently really think Trump tells it like it is. With so many folks feeling frustrated and angry at being left behind, he gives voice to frustration at being voiceless in the corrupted corridors of the status quo. The winning formula that Trump used was to appeal to the Republican base, and particularly to disaffected voters who are drawn to his bristling insular white nationalism and who favor his idea of deporting millions of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. He has split the Republican Party along a new class-based axis, and the core of his success remains his dominance among blue-collar workers and white voters that do not have a college education. This is statistically the case across geographic, religious and ideological lines.

Huckleberry Finn had been brought up in the lowest levels of white society, practically homeless and without a mother in his life, and with a drunk ruffian for a father, so he had not been "indoctrinated with social values in the same way a middle-class boy like Tom Sawyer has been. Huck's distance from mainstream society makes him skeptical of the world around him and the ideas it passes on to him." Huck didn't like being "sivilized" by having to mind manners and conform to his aunt's strict expectations of decorum, and he preferred to play hooky and engage in adventures with his boyhood pals. This rebellious attitude has struck a romanticized chord in readers for more than 130 years, but even with his shortcomings, Huck is appealing and sympathetic. He is only a boy, after all, and therefore fallible. Imperfect as he is, Huck represents what anyone is capable of becoming: a thinking, feeling human being rather than a mere cog in the machine of society.

At the other extreme on the socioeconomic spectrum, Donald Trump's father brought him up with terrible values. Fred Trump was a Ku Klux Klan sympathizer and an insensitive lout who would do the most unethical things imaginable to make money. He was a real estate developer who was investigated for profiteering on public contracts, and the Trump organization was sued by the Justice Department in 1973 for discriminating against black people in renting apartments in his complexes. Trump the younger regarded the ruthless lawyer Roy Cohn as a mentor -- he was the communist-baiting colleague of the demagogue Joseph McCarthy. Donald Trump was also enamored with the speeches that Adolf Hitler made between 1919 and 1939. His first wife Ivana Trump has said that he kept the book of these speeches collected in *My New Order* by his bedside, so he had not been indoctrinated with normal social values in the same way most human beings have been.

One of the biggest risks for Republicans is that with Trump as their leader, the party will be defined as one of white backlash in the eyes of growing Millennial and minority populations. "That's the great danger -- that he defines what the Republican Party is in the 21st century, and because of the demographic trends, that is toxic," said long-time GOP strategist Whit Ayres. "We are on a precipice here, particularly with the Hispanic folks. The danger is we could have Hispanic voters locked into the same voting patterns as African

Americans. If that happens we will never elect another Republican president."

Republican strategist Rick Wilson has said the party is right to worry about Trump's rhetoric, because it is "highly negative, deeply pessimistic, and profoundly nasty." Trump's many misstatements reduce Republican credibility across the board, he added. All Americans should recognize that it is not just Republicans who are suffering the ill effects of the divisive and antagonistic attitudes that they have sown. Their propaganda and the extremely inegalitarian policies they have helped put in effect have adversely affected almost everyone. Their shrill negativity and widespread adverse impacts of bad public policies should be soundly renounced.

After Trump became the official Republican nominee during a strife-torn Republican National Convention in Cleveland, many in the Party regarded it as probable he would fail to win the presidency and cause calamitous damage to the prospects of their cherished ideologies. After revelations surfaced in October 2016 of Trump's lewd and piggish comments about women in 2005 to George W. Bush's cousin Billy Bush, this seemed all but certain, for it is criminal behavior to engage in the crude sexual improprieties described by Trump.

But Trump managed to win, and now we seem to be stuck with a bitter interlude of chaos, scandal and repressive authoritarian leadership by men who want to rashly undermine fair-minded progress and the common good, and to corruptly give domineering power to rich people and giant corporations. With Republicans in control of the Executive and Legislative branches of government, they have reshaped the Supreme Court by ramming through the far right ideologue Neil Gorsuch, who tends to favor the rights of corporate entities over the rights of the people. The implications are scary, for they will have long-lasting negative effects on the future of our country. But nonetheless, the Republican Party should try to find a more honest means of governing than by preying on people's economic insecurities and exploiting ugly "us versus them" identity politics and implementing debt-financed anti-egalitarian tax policies and sabotaging Obamacare and engaging in hard times swindles. We need leaders who do not obstruct fair-minded progress, and who do not corruptly contribute to favoritism of rich people and big corporations over the 99%.

The Folly of Record Levels of Deficit Spending

A noteworthy tremor unsettled global stock markets on April 18, 2011 when the Standard & Poor's Ratings Services warned that the intractable unwillingness of politicians to find real solutions to government financing problems could cause a destabilizing downgrade of both the trustworthiness and safety of U.S. credit and the dollar, and of the nation itself. At the time, we were facing a "fiscal cliff" at the end of 2012 due to the failure of our representatives to find common ground on budgetary decisions.

Fast forward seven years, and Trump is president. He had preposterously proclaimed on the campaign trail that he could reduce the national debt by making a deal with bond holders to pay them back less than the full amount of money they've loaned to the U.S. Treasury to finance the huge national debt. This proposal was so colossally idiotic, simple-minded and shortsighted on so many levels that it barely deserves explanation. Suffice it to say that the federal government is able to borrow money at low interest rates only because Treasury securities are regarded as safe investments, so any deals Trump tries to make that would undermine investor confidence would cost American taxpayers huge amounts in higher interest costs and tumbling global stock markets.

Many people agree that the orgy of borrowing to finance government operations is likely to hit a wall at some point in the not distant future. It is a significant risk to allow this shortsighted expediency to continue without bold and fair-minded efforts to mitigate this danger. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2010, had a possibly valid contention when he stated, "Our national debt is our biggest national security threat." This perspective provides food for thought. If our inability to control deficit spending and maintain a fairly progressive tax structure is resulting in one of the biggest threats to our national security, then it is downright stupid to run huge budget deficits year after year. It is a pathetic irony that a significant portion of this spending has been for military operations supposedly designed to make us safer. Our representatives in the House and Senate have simply become too partisan and short-term-oriented to act to make the difference

we need for a better-managed country. The time is NOW to change course before economic and social calamity strikes more severely.

The costs of denial and inaction get higher every year, and the longer we wait to address issues like climate change, the more difficult they will be to solve. And the longer we delay making sensible reforms, the more difficult the reforms will become, and the bigger the required adjustments will be.

Consider, for instance, Social Security and Medicare, the two main components of the social safety net for older people in the USA. The number of people alive who are over the age of 62 is increasing as the Baby Boom generation -- those born between 1946 and 1964 -- reaches retirement age. Simultaneously, the average age of Americans continues to increase, meaning that there will be more people getting benefits relative to the number of workers paying into the system. These demographic trends resulted in Social Security benefits being paid out in 2011 that exceeded the amount collected in payroll taxes. This financial dilemma will get more serious until effective efforts are undertaken to fix this problem. Other government funds will be needed to make up shortfalls, and national budget deficits will increase significantly if no reforms are instituted.

Sensible solutions do exist. Good recommendations on how we could tackle stubborn funding issues and reduce related deficit spending are made in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues*.

The Greater Public Good is Sacrificed to "Insider" Advantages

A grossly disproportionate voice is being given to big corporations in our elections, and this has been a growing trend especially since 1987, when the Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting was eliminated. The 5 to 4 ruling by the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case in 2010 severely exacerbated this problem. This trend is distinctly harming our nation by allowing rich people, big corporations and the political right wing to overplay their hands and abuse power. The billionaires Charles and David Koch alone spent more than twice as much money as the 10 biggest unions in the 2012 elections, so make no mistake about how mismatched this misguided ruling has been. The 2016 elections? The problem caused by dark money tragically got much, much worse!

There are two competing subsets of this subversion of the greater public good. One of them, vociferously decried by conservatives, is the "greed of the public servant". Sure enough, allowing public employees to have collective bargaining rights has given them more power and influence, and some people in the upper echelons of unions have abused this power to establish a variety of absurd provisions or to get excessive perks for themselves. Unions have been complicit in getting some bureaucratic rules and inefficiencies accreted around government policies and services. The result is too many confusing and sometimes contradictory regulations and some highly publicized pension-spiking scams, and a complex plethora of school tenure-related problems, along with a smattering of other significant inequities.

But the private sector is where the impacts of this problem are by far the most egregious. The excessively ruthless exploitation of working people in the private sector was the original impetus for movements that created collective bargaining rights in the first place. In a free market, working people need a modicum of power to negotiate better deals in the face of the domineering power of big corporations. The influence of unions in the private sector peaked in 1954 with 35% of all U.S. wage and salary workers belonging to unions, but today they have been so severely undermined that only 7% of private sector workers belongs to a union.

Roger Hitchcock, a talk show host on Radio America, once asserted: "Greed is not good -- either in private life or public service." He concluded, "In business, greed is tempered by competition." That may be the theory of it, but it's also true that rich people and corporations often effectively lie, cheat, steal and indulge in predatory behaviors. Government interventions are consequently needed to protect "the unwary, the unwitting, and the innocent" from these harm-engendering abuses of power.

Small businesses are closer to the people than big ones, and they deserve protection from multinational businesses, which tend to quash smaller companies and mom-and-pop organizations. This fact provides cogent

justification for reforming our system to make things fairer to small businesses, rather than continuing to allow the system to be rigged ever more lopsidedly in favor of huge corporations.

Milton Friedman once declared, "One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results." Once again, this particular assessment by Friedman has merit. But the results of his laissez-faire, pro-privatization, anti-regulation, austerity-imposing and tax-cutting ideologies have ironically proved to be damaging both to the ecological commons and the prospects of the majority of people, today and in the future. This is particularly apparent in the past several decades, during which time Americans in the lower and middle classes have seen their prospects paralyzed, in large part due to corrupt rule and the tyranny of Big Money in our politics.

The results of the policies and programs associated with right-wing orthodoxy are clear: we have increasing extremes of inequalities in opportunity, healthcare, income and wealth, and the world is out of balance due to wasteful uses of resources and related environmental degradation. The blame belongs with both parties in our political duopoly system, but conservatives have "earned" by far the biggest share.

Conservatives figuratively see red when they read the inscription of a quote from Virgil etched into an edifice that was originally the San Diego Civic Center building: "The noblest motive is the public good." Franklin D. Roosevelt made a compelling observation when he dedicated this building in 1938: "American democracy will live as long as the people keep in their hearts the motto inscribed." Keep in our hearts a high regard for the public good!

Today, fair-minded democratic governance and the public good in America are under concerted assault by the people with the most wealth, power and influence. The motives of these people are often ignoble, which is most consequentially outrageous when they undermine the greater good. We would be wise to consider the dangers this presents, and to do so from the largest and most comprehensive perspective possible.

Bill Moyers succinctly stated that "The soul of democracy -- the essence of the word itself -- is government of, by, and for the people. At the core of politics, the soul of democracy has been dying, drowning in a rising tide of big money contributed by a narrow, unrepresentative elite that has betrayed the faith of citizens in self-government." This is why the need is so critical for campaign finance reform and Congressional ethics reform, and for legislation to limit spending by Super PACS and corporations that has been unleashed by the Supreme Court in the wake of their *Citizens United* ruling and the subsequent decision in *McCutcheon vs. FEC*.

When democracy made its debut on the American continent, it required the consent of the governed. Not long thereafter, those who were skilled at manufacturing consent set up operations. They were in the employ of those who were driven to exploit people and resources to maximize the amount of wealth they could get for themselves. Such gambits are generally quite contrary to the greater good!

In *The Price of Civilization: Reawakening American Virtue and Prosperity*, economist Jeffrey Sachs "offers not only a searing and incisive diagnosis of our country's economic ills, but also an urgent call for Americans to restore the virtues of fairness, honesty, and foresight as the foundations of national prosperity." Right on!

Inspecting Our Believing Brains

One might wonder, when in a mind-wandering mood, why established religions have so powerful a 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, and 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 understandings that are fuller and more holistic. 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 systemic restructuring of our political duopoly system 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 also responsibly contribute to achieving goals that are broadly consistent with the greater good.

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

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 really should be 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. Further explorations of the topic of people's beliefs are to be found in Earth Manifesto essays like *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*, and *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies*.

A Final Perspective on the Current Supreme Court

Lawyers can rationalize and justify just about anything. John Roberts, Samuel Alito, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas (mum's the word!) and the recently deceased Antonin Scalia asserted in the *Citizens United* ruling that they do not think there is any distinctively corrupting effect of allowing record-profit-making corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence the outcomes of our elections. Listen in on Justice Anthony Kennedy as he issued a blithe opinion in this case: "We now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." Laugh out loud!

Astute Jim Hightower assessed the appearances, and wrote in response in *The Lowdown*: "Wow, if ignorance is bliss, he must be ecstatic!"

This ruling overturned campaign finance laws that had sensibly restricted corporate spending in our elections. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, one of four Justices at the time who strongly disagreed with the decision, read his dissent aloud to give additional emphasis to his words. He noted that the decision "rejected the common sense of the American people, who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt."

The retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was no longer on the high court in 2010, but she gave honorable voice to a non-partisan perspective on the corrupting effect of Big Money in our politics, issuing "her own polite public dissent to the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision on corporate political spending, telling law students that the court has created an unwelcome new path for wealthy interests to exert undue influence on judicial elections."

A Common Sense People's Judge, listening to these contrasting arguments by supposedly objective Supreme Court Justices, would almost certainly overrule the *Citizens United* decision. Anyone who fairly evaluates the Super PAC spending in the national elections in 2012, and in the 2016 contests, would admit that the influence of individual citizens in our political system is negligible compared to the titanic influence of billionaires and well-heeled corporate interest groups. The pervasive and repetitious negativity of political ads and "fake news" on social media platforms is making many Americans practically hate political advertising and fund-raising appeals. The distorting influence of Big Money is becoming more intrusively obvious, and people are becoming increasingly cynical about politics and the rigging of our supposedly fair representative system of government. Voter turnout in elections is low in the U.S. relative to that in many other democracies, and this effectively gives narrowly focused vested interest groups more sway. We should demand that our elected representatives sensibly limit the amount of money that rich people and corporations can spend on their spin, ideologies, fear-mongering, negative attack ads and buying influence.

The "conservative" Justices on the Supreme Court seem to agree with those who believe that enormously influential corporations should be allowed to make political contributions largely in secret. This is stunning in a democracy where a well-informed electorate and the consent of the people are so vitally important.

Sheldon Adelson, one of the ten richest persons in the U.S., is a billionaire who contributed upwards of \$100 million to Republican candidates and conservative causes in 2012. Even he is opposed to the *Citizens United* ruling. He told Forbes Magazine: "I'm against very wealthy people attempting to, or influencing, elections. But as long as it's doable, I'm going to do it." Adelson spent a huge amount of money in a failed attempt to defeat President Obama in 2012. His spending completely dwarfed the contributions of hundreds of thousands of regular Americans. Such influence is clearly a corruption of the fairness of representation in our democracy.

The ruling in the *Citizens United* case is right up there with the five worst decisions in the history of the Supreme Court. Right up there with the dumbfounding Dred Scott ruling in 1857, which allowed racism to be institutionalized against African Americans for decades. Right up there with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, made by a conservative Supreme Court, which legitimized segregation and ended the post-Civil War Reconstruction. And right up there with the fear-inspired, racist Fred Korematsu ruling in 1944 that justified the relocation, internment and ripping off of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans without individual cause or suspicion.

"Judges are like umpires", Chief Justice John Roberts declared at the time of his Senate confirmation hearing. "Umpires don't make the rules; they apply them." But the *Citizens United* case overturned decades of precedents, and looks very much like an instance of conservatives on the Supreme Court actively making up new rules to give cash-flush individuals and organizations more power. This ruling was detrimental to the interests of the vast majority of Americans, so our representatives in Congress should now act to limit such influence.

From the moment when conservatives gained a narrow majority on the Supreme Court with the appointment of Samuel Alito to replace Sandra Day O'Connor, until Antonin Scalia suddenly died in February 2016, they engaged

in creating "a precedent about precedents that may have greater precedential effect than the dubious decisions on which it rests," as Justice Alito declared in a discursive dissent from a decision that overturned an earlier ruling. Justice Thomas, who tellingly failed to ask a single question from the bench in more than 9 years, has publicly mocked *stare decisis*, a Latin term meaning "to stand by things earlier decided." This threatens the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision with being overturned, after conservative Justices regained a majority in 2017 and resumed obstructing progress toward a safer and more sensible society. Reasonable people call for a new generation of more fair-minded Justices to be given responsibility for fairer jurisprudence.

Note that if some of John Roberts' conservative colleagues really were professional sports umpires, they would have been disciplined or fired long ago for egregious breaches of rules of professional conduct that mandate scrupulous neutrality and avoidance of fraternization with players and club owners. Both Justices Alito and Thomas have attended lavish retreats organized by the right-wing corporate and political financier Charles Koch, a billionaire who funds many Republican campaigns. And Virginia, the wife of Clarence Thomas, is a lawyer who is an active leader in the Tea Party. The clever and wily rascal Tom Sawyer uses a broad brush to slather crimson letters on a whitewashed fence; they read, "Impeach Clarence!"

The billionaires Charles and David Koch have been instrumental in supporting several front groups and foundations that pump hundreds of millions of dollars into "conservative" causes like reducing environmental protections, undermining the collective bargaining rights of working people, and making our system of taxation more regressive to benefit themselves.

Another reason why ethical storm clouds float over the Supreme Court, according to one observer, is that several Justices appear to have forgotten basic lessons about conflicts of interest. All professional sports teams act in accordance with rules that prohibit conflicts of interest, as do and many other organizations. But several Supreme Court Justices have stepped out of their proper judicial roles and engaged in professional, social, political and fundraising activities with political partisans and ideological factions like those involving the Federalist Society and Koch Industries. These entities have been directly involved in Supreme Court litigation or are committed to particular judicial and legislative outcomes.

Here is another aspect of the status quo that requires honorable reform. Much has changed since the Constitution was written, and the life spans of Americans have roughly doubled, so the provision that Supreme Court Justices are to serve appointments for life has become contrary to progress and adaptive change. Ten-year terms would make the Court significantly more responsive to evolving needs and exigencies. Amend the Constitution!

A Digression on Family Planning

The number of human beings alive on Earth now exceeds 7.6 billion people. The social and environmental problems created by growing numbers of people are undeniable, so we should find better ways to work together in nations worldwide to reduce global population growth, especially in developing countries. One of the best strategies would be to give women more respect and power, and to let them have the means to control their own reproductive destinies, particularly when they do not want more children. Creating truer economic security for the world's poor would also directly help people choose to limit the size of their families.

United Nations projections in the World Population Prospects report (2017 Revision) indicate that there will likely be 8.6 billion people on Earth by the year 2030, and more than 11 billion by 2100. The population in the U.S. is projected to increase from 325 million today to more than 475 million by the year 2100. Just imagine the impacts of this crowd! Think about the traffic problems alone!!

An increase of this magnitude in the number of needy (and greedy) people will create extreme management challenges. It will also exacerbate social conflicts. Think about the fact that black people have more children per capita than white people, and that Latinos have more children than blacks. Let us be honest about the racism of many social conservatives and religious people in the USA, and admit that this surge in the number of

non-whites will cause much more intense racial conflicts in the future. The white majority will soon enough be a minority, so now is a very good time to establish precedents of fairer treatment of minorities!

Inequities in opportunity, legal justice and incarceration have been increasing radically in the past 35 years, and this will surely create more intense social conflicts as demographic trends shift. We should change course, and guarantee women more options than abstinence in being able to avoid having children they do not want!

Consider the daunting projection that the number of people on the African continent will increase from 1 billion today to almost 4 billion by the year 2100. Imagine the population of cities in Africa increasing by a factor that is more than TRIPLE! Fast growth rates in Africa and in other developing nations elsewhere will significantly increase probabilities that hardships will be extreme for people in places where there is already a dauntingly difficult struggle to provide enough food, fresh water and security for people to lead decent lives.

Some people interpret Genesis 1:28 in the Bible to instruct people to "Go forth and multiply." But times have changed since biblical days, and today there is a farseeing new injunction that should be adduced, one that sensibly advises, "Go forth and ADD"! There are already more than 380 cities on Earth today with more than 1 million people living in them. The urban problems these cities are experiencing will get much worse. Delegates to a sustainable development conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 were ironically greeted on their trips from the airport by the stench of raw sewage in a bay that reportedly absorbs more than 300 million gallons of raw waste every day. The Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992 had formulated a Declaration emphasizing environmental protections and the eradication of poverty and the need for cooperation to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of Earth's ecosystems. Now, the shortcomings of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development are turgid, indeed. It's time to invest more energies and money in achieving greater good goals.

Large increases in human numbers will make life more difficult for billions of people around the world. Financial instability, exacerbated inequality, resource depletion, fresh water shortages, social turmoil, destitution, violent conflicts, political revolutions, terrorist attacks, authoritarian repression, onslaughts against ecosystems, global warming, desertification, rising sea levels and other likely impacts of increasing human numbers make it urgent for us to find better ways to mitigate these problems, and to reduce rates of population growth.

Consensus expectations until recent years held that human numbers would stabilize at about 9 billion people by the year 2050. But these projections have been dashed due to efforts by religious fundamentalists and social conservatives to undermine family planning programs and deny women reproductive rights in nations around the world. Without concerted efforts to stabilize population, all the environmental and social problems that face humankind will become critically worse. The best plan would be to strongly support policies that help ensure a better quality of life for those alive, and also support measures that could help stabilize human numbers. Those who oppose family planning, contraception, women's rights, safe abortions, fairer opportunities for females, and the education and empowerment of women should yield to truer understandings of the common good.

The most important initiative required to slow global population growth is to find ways to reduce rapid rates of growth in developing countries. The best way to do this would be to make generous investments in education, gender equity, economic opportunity, maternal healthcare, contraception and family planning services in all nations. People everywhere should work together to accomplish this goal.

Staunch opposition to Planned Parenthood clinics erupted in the both houses of Congress in the past eight years due to the election of many extreme conservatives. Most of them vociferously oppose Planned Parenthood's programs on the grounds that they help women who want to have an abortion. They oppose Planned Parenthood despite the fact that almost all the spending in its clinics relates to services that are vitally important to women's health. Only 3% of the budget for Planned Parenthood is spent on providing abortion services. About 36% of its spending is devoted to contraception services, 32% for the testing and treatment of sexually-transmitted diseases, and 29% for cancer screening, prevention and other health services.

These services are vital for millions of low-income women and teenagers, so opposition to Planned Parenthood is a perverse form of class discrimination and paternalistic prejudice. These attitudes and extremist agendas should not be allowed to dictate our national policies.

Contraception can help prevent sexually transmitted diseases, so support for expanded contraceptive services is important for the overall health of the populace. Contraception also helps prevent pregnancies. The main reason any woman has an abortion is because she became pregnant when she didn't want to be. By preventing pregnancies, the use of contraceptives prevents tens of thousands of abortions in the United States every year. Opposition by social conservatives to contraception is a sexually prudish and socially backward attitude that is basically misogynistic and practically antediluvian, so it should not be given such determining influence in our policy-making.

Social conservatives have held national budget decisions hostage to their narrow anti-choice agenda in Congress, despite the fact that stubborn opposition to Planned Parenthood funding is outrageously unfair to women. Even worse are the excessive restrictions that Republican governors and legislators have imposed on women in dozens of states in the past decade. These restrictions were basically approved by the 1992 Supreme Court case, *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania vs. Casey*, in which the Court ruled that a woman is still allowed to have an abortion before fetal viability, as ratified in the *Roe vs. Wade* ruling in 1973, but the strict trimester framework of that decision was discarded and replaced with a more vague test of whether such restrictions placed an "undue burden" on a woman. This ruling opened the floodgates to states dominated by conservative Republicans to pass hundreds of laws placing heavy burdens on women and undermining their fundamental rights to get a safe abortion. These efforts have been significantly ratcheted up in recent years as the Republican Party has moved to more extreme right-wing stances.

It was therefore a heartening development in June 2016 when the Supreme Court reaffirmed and strengthened constitutional protections for abortion rights and struck down parts of a restrictive Texas law that would have reduced the number of abortion clinics in the state, leaving them only in the largest metropolitan areas. Texas lawmakers had cooked up some sham arguments about how they cared about safeguarding women's health, but the obvious extreme nature of their anti-abortion overreach was soundly rejected by the high court. Fairness and sanity have fortunately prevailed and given recognition to how the disingenuous Texas abortion law placed severe "undue burdens" on a woman's right to get an abortion. Justice Breyer wrote the majority opinion in this decision, which basically stated that two new requirements cooked up by conservative Texas politicians created obstacles too formidable for women who sought a pre-viability abortion. This decision was a victory for women in Texas and across America, for a safe abortion should be a legal right -- "not just on paper, but in reality."

Mitt Romney once said, "If you're looking for free stuff you don't have to pay for, vote for the other guy." I agree with him on voting for anyone other than guys who oppose women's reproductive choices! The category of free stuff Romney was referring to included contraceptives, because Romney was competing with reactionary conservatives during the Republican primary elections in 2012 and was thus forced to tack to the far right on social issues. The degree of his flip-flopping was strange and dishonorable indeed.

Social conservatives have used their rigid opposition to abortion to try to eviscerate all federal funding for the valuable services performed by Planned Parenthood. One reason Republican politicians do this is to pander to the Christian Right. Many religious fundamentalists are opposed to all forms of contraception, no matter how inimical the eventual impacts of this position will be on individual women, society and planetary ecosystems. They somehow believe God is against the use of contraceptives, and that God is in favor of women having babies no matter what the circumstances are that led to their getting pregnant. But it is not God who propagates these ideas, it is dogmatic religious authorities. They realize that the best way to gain new adherents is by having them born, and to then expose them to early indoctrination, because it is exceedingly difficult to convert thinking adults into actually believing Biblical stories are true.

It is unfortunate and sad that ideological opposition to contraception is also affiliated with male-domineering, women-demeaning, manipulative, and control-obsessed ideas about females and sexuality. To paraphrase Mark

Twain, "Religious folks is very reverent about the unborn and the dead, even if they never give a damn about them when they are alive." Yes, indeed!

Sexual drives are basic to our human nature. Males are hormonally and culturally driven to want to have sex, to "score". Men are generally not overly concerned with being responsible for the effects that the fulfillment of these drives can have on the female objects of their lust. Here is another perspective from which it is right to be a strong defender and protector of women's prerogatives.

The notorious Helms amendment, first enacted in 1973, states: "No foreign assistance funds may be used to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions." This policy represents an uncompassionate expression of reactionary elements of American society that demand absolute authority to impose their extreme male domineering ideology on women worldwide. The policy effectively condemns to damnation each and every female who wants to choose not to carry an embryo for nine months once they become pregnant, regardless of the circumstances of how she got pregnant, or who impregnated her, or how grave a threat her pregnancy poses to her own life, or how many children she already has to care for, or how degraded the likely circumstances may be of a child she will be forced to bear. This is gender politics at its ugliest extreme.

While the debate over the Helms amendment raged in Congress back in 1973, the Nixon administration's Agency for International Development issued a statement to Congress expressing its strong opposition. The organization protested that following an era of decolonization, this new restriction was at odds with the fundamental philosophy of U.S. population assistance policy, because of its imperialistic and hypocritical overtones. Moreover, even at that time, experts from within and outside the U.S. government considered the provision of safe abortion services to be an integral component of broader programs involved with reproductive health care. The agency also implied that the effect of removing safe abortion from the range of options provided to women with unintended pregnancies -- an option that had just been made legal for women in the USA nationwide -- amounted to a form of coercion. The Foreign Assistance Act, USAID wrote, "explicitly acknowledges that every nation is and should be free to determine its own policies and procedures with respect to population growth and family planning. In contradiction of this principle, the amendment would place U.S. restrictions on both developing country governments and individuals in the matter of free choice among the means of fertility control that are legal in the U.S."

The Helms Amendment was followed in 1976 with a similar domestic law, the Hyde Amendment. Restrictions on U.S. development and humanitarian programs have also come in the form of executive orders, most notably the Mexico City policy, also known as the global gag rule, which Ronald Reagan enacted in 1984. This policy is important to the story of the Helms amendment because of the additional ways it has burdened access to safe abortions for women in developing countries. Reagan's presidential order prohibited foreign nongovernmental organizations that receive U.S. family planning assistance from using non-U.S. funding to provide abortion services or information or counseling or referrals, and from engaging in advocacy to allow abortions. Since Reagan, the policy has been implemented by every Republican president and revoked by every Democratic president. While the Helms Amendment limits the use of U.S. foreign aid dollars directly, the gag rule went far beyond it by disqualifying foreign NGOs from eligibility for U.S. family planning aid entirely if they gave any support to abortion-related activities. Then Trump Republicans vastly expanded the ruthless reach of such policies. I call for the U.S. government to permanently disavow such retrograde and unempathetic policies.

Jesse Helms was an extremely conservative politician from North Carolina who had a major voice in foreign policy. He was the most stridently conservative politician of the era following the 1960s, especially in opposition to federal intervention into what he considered state affairs (including legislating racial integration in the Civil Rights Act and enforcing suffrage through the Voting Rights Act of 1965). He was a master obstructionist who relished his nickname, "Senator No." He fought in the Senate from 1973 to 2003 against what he considered to be liberalism, whenever it was on the agenda, opposing feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, disability rights, access to abortion, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Helms

used racially charged language in his campaigns and editorials, and was widely known for his racial intolerance. He inflamed resentments against African Americans for his own political gain. A "dirty undercurrent of racism" persists among social conservatives today, especially in the South, and these attitudes discredit the Republican Party. These are good reasons that fair-minded people should reject the far-right Republicans who have seized power in Congress and the White House today.

Because of the Helms Amendment and related abortion restrictions, the U.S. government has limited its ability to fully address the problems of unsafe abortion and maternal mortality. Every year, millions of women suffer serious injuries from unsafe abortion, and almost 50,000 of them die -- almost all in the developing world. Unsafe abortion is a significant driver of maternal mortality, responsible for an estimated 13% of maternal deaths worldwide, and it represents one of the four major causes of pregnancy-related mortality.

In some regions such as Africa and Central and South America, almost all abortions are unsafe, as defined by the World Health Organization. Unsafe abortions are those performed by an individual without the necessary skills, or in an environment that does not conform to minimum medical standards, or both. Consequently, the World Health Organization identifies the availability of safe abortion options as one of seven necessary ways to help provide quality reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health care.

In Brazil, many pregnancies are unplanned because politicians there have made access to contraception services extremely limited. Many Brazilian women would choose to terminate a pregnancy during the Zika virus health epidemic because they do not want to have a child that was afflicted with the associated horrible birth defect of microcephaly, but they are unable to do so because of Brazil's strict abortion regulations. Smarter and fairer policies are needed there, and the Helms Amendment should not contribute to this grave injustice.

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. It 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 ascendancy. This far-reaching change curiously coincided with the advent of alphabets and the time when written words and literacy became widespread in early civilizations.

Dr. Shlain explains 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 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 exactly 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 rights to a fair degree of self-determination in the course of their lives. Here is another arena in which fair-mindedness and collaborative problem solving would be more advantageous than ruthless competition or unempathetic repression!

An Incisive and Illuminating Voice Is Heard

Jennifer Siebel Newsom, beautiful-inside-and-out, was the producer, director, scriptwriter and narrator of an important documentary film titled *Miss Representation*. This thought-provoking film is filled with interesting insights into the powerful influence that mass media outlets like television, magazines, movies and the Internet exercise in creating sexualized, titillating, trivializing and demeaning attitudes toward women. The skewed representation of females in our cultures, dominated as they are by males, distorts important perspectives and diminishes feminine ways of seeing the world. As a result, women are often judged more by their bodies, hair, appearance, clothes and shoes than by their brains, accomplishments, effectiveness, talent or other valuable virtues. Such narrow attitudes affect humankind in far-reaching ways that need to be more clearly understood.

The mass media plays a determining role in contributing to a negative status quo of biased and perversely degrading portrayals of women. In significant part, this status quo is a result of the domination of the media by a handful of giant media conglomerates that are controlled by men in positions of power, ownership and membership on Boards of Directors. It turns out that inadequate representation of women in positions of control in media companies and in politics has an adverse influence on women in society at large. This leads to diminished roles for women and a general under-representation of females in boardrooms, management and national decision-making.

The representation of women in the United States surprisingly ranks 90th in the world in the number of women in Congress or national legislative equivalents. This is a pathetic showing for us to present to the world in this important gauge of social fairness. This is a shocking statistic, out of some 200 countries around the globe, and it reveals a big reason why women are treated unfairly in pay, status and privilege in the USA. This fact is a sad contributing factor to making our national policies unfair and poorly prioritized and excessively partisan.

Biases in the media have the effect of hindering progress toward vitally important goals like allowing women better opportunities and fairer influence. Fairer representation for women is needed to improve our decision-making by giving greater consideration to the valuable perspectives and best interests of the 51% of Americans who are female.

Karl Marx once pointed out a simple sociological fact: "Social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex." Hmmm. The social position of the female sex. This is what Mark Twain meant when he wrote these famous words in his Notebook in 1895:

"We easily perceive that the peoples furthest from civilization are the ones where equality between man and woman are furthest apart -- and we consider this one of the signs of savagery. But we are so stupid that we can't see that we thus plainly admit that no civilization can be perfect until exact equality between man and woman is included."

One measure of the extent to which females are treated unfairly is found in statistics on pay and other forms of compensation for work. These statistics reveal that women still receive only about 80% of the pay men get for comparable work. This outcome is due, in part, to the inadequate representation of women in the upper echelons of decision-making, both in business and government.

The objectification and sexualization of women is accompanied by a cultural idolizing of youth, sexiness, thin bodies, long legs and alluring cleavage. These ways of representing females tend to diminish how women are able to compete and find fulfillment in many roles in society. It's no wonder that many females feel deep insecurities about their appearances, and an unsettling "Impostor Syndrome", as a consequence. This is one reason why they spend so much money on things like clothes, jewelry, handbags, shoes and makeup -- and facelifts, breast implants and other types of plastic surgery that have become a rapid growth industry.

The media also helps create deeply ingrained stereotypes of men in our societies, as well as of women. These characterizations help define the respective roles played by the genders. These associations are complex, so it is difficult to generalize about them accurately, or even to clearly grasp the big picture. But it is provocatively compelling to see that social roles are so deeply affected by the way males and females are portrayed in the media. Jennifer Siebel Newsom's excellent follow-on film, *The Mask You Live In*, provides many thought-provoking perspectives on male roles in society, so it is valuable to see this film for better understanding.

The relative absence of fair representation of a group in the media is known by the daunting term "symbolic annihilation." A sociology professor named Gaye Tuchman divides the concept of symbolic annihilation into three aspects: omission, trivialization, and condemnation. The use of stereotypes in portrayals of women in various cultures is a subsidiary means of symbolically annihilating them. If you consult with any woman, or for that matter any black person, Latino, lesbian, gay man or other devalued minority, they will likely describe some of the nefarious effects that omission, trivialization and condemnation have personally had on them.

King Lear tells the character Gloucester in a tragedy by William Shakespeare: "... you see how this world goes." Gloucester replies: "I see it feelingly." Picture that! We all would be well advised to see things not only more clearly and comprehensively, but also more feelingly! Empathetic understanding is needed!

Since females are generally portrayed in a highly sexualized light in movies, on television, and on the Internet, this misrepresentation distracts everyone from being fully aware of other more important feminine qualities. And since females are often treated as sex objects, there is a correlated inadequate level of respect for them as human beings. This leads to many deep anxieties and insecurities for all concerned, and unfair, dangerous and even violent outcomes.

"Our societies have been hijacked by inconsiderate, sexist, male-domineering, prejudiced, authoritarian and backward-looking folks who have formed uncompromising coalitions with rich reactionaries and religious fundamentalists and social conservatives to oppress women and keep them subservient to men. Keep your hands off my body, buddy, unless I invite you and give you my permission!"

--- The underground Mole's spouse

More than 30,000 women in America become pregnant every year after being raped. Most conservatives want to prohibit each and every one of these traumatized women from having the right to get a safe abortion. They want to criminalize abortion and force these women to carry the abominably-begotten embryos for nine months and then give birth to a child fathered by the rapist. This represents a reprehensible miscarriage of justice.

Republican Representative Todd Akin of Missouri declared in August 2012: "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." His ignorance and arrogance is astounding! He added, "I think there should be some punishment, but the punishment should be on the rapist and not attacking the child." As a gal from Hannibal, I am appalled that this anti-feminist man even had a chance of replacing Senator Claire McCaskill as one of our Senators from Missouri. The mainstream has moved toward the lunatic fringe as the Republican Party has jerked toward the extreme right. They want to give personhood to huge corporations, and now they seem to want to even give it to the sperm of rapists!

The official 2016 platform of the Republican Party stunningly called for a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortion without any explicit exceptions for victims of rape or incest, or to protect a pregnant woman's life. These stances are extreme anathema to the well-being of women and their dignity, right to personal freedom, and ability to exercise a reasonable degree of self-determination in their lives. As Will Rogers once said, "We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others."

One of the worst places for women turns out to be in the male-dominant culture of the U.S. military. According to Rep. Jackie Speier, women in the military are much more likely to be raped by fellow soldiers than to be killed by enemy fire. "The Department of Defense estimates that more than 19,000 service members were raped or sexually assaulted in 2010. Due to a military culture heavy on retaliation and light on prosecution, only 13% of the victims report the rape." The situation doesn't appear to be improving much, according to the documentary film *The Invisible War*. It is a national disgrace for the Department of Defense to fail to be more honest and effective in fairly and adequately addressing this problem.

Speier specifically mentioned the case of Sergeant Rebekah Havrilla, who asserted she was raped during her time in the armed forces and later sought assistance from a military chaplain. The priest told her that "it must have been God's will for her to be raped", and he recommended for her to attend church more often. This advice was ridiculous! Circumstances like this call for courageous and far-reaching reform and fairer treatment. Insensitive religious fundamentalist patriarchal clerics should be denied defining roles in the U.S. military.

One of the worst of the sexist perspectives that has been broadcast in the media was a comment that has been judged one of the *10 Stupidest Things Pat Robertson Ever Said*: "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians." Oh, my God! Memo to Pat Robertson and Todd Akin and your twisted ilk: Your brains are playing tricks on you. Don't believe everything you think! Your bigoted beliefs and delusional perspectives seem to extend far deeper than mere insensitivity, and toward consequentially malicious intent.

Robertson should be marginalized for such attitudes rather than being allowed to preach them on a national platform. When he spews narrow-minded, biased and hateful beliefs, there should be a fairness doctrine to set forth critiques and countering perspectives. Attitudes like Pat Robertson's are partially a backlash against the feminist movement of the 1960s, because that social movement led to significant gains in women's education, empowerment, opportunities and a modicum of liberation.

People on the right of the socio-political spectrum strive to gain power by exploiting the fears, resentments, prejudices, gullibility, paranoia and parochial religious convictions of the people. Some folks on the political left may be guilty of some similar vices, but at least their agenda is not so brazenly and narrowly focused on concentrating power, wealth and political influence in the hands of the few.

The Republican establishment is realizing that they have pandered too much to a base that is too base. The Age of Reason has not ended, so these politicians should stop the assault on women's rights. It's clearly time for them to do some honest soul searching, and to act in more fair-minded ways. When the #MeToo movement erupted on the national scene, it began to have far-reaching repercussions that portend faster change.

Tiffany Twain is a strong proponent for the freedom of expression. Yet she wonders why there isn't some sort of penalty for dishonesty, intentional obliviousness and disingenuous claims based on skewed priorities and misleading values. Psychological and practical motives behind evangelical obtuseness, bigotry and reprehensibly manipulative mean-spiritedness are deep-seated. It's too bad someone can't invent a new gadget that can be used to assess the actual legitimacy of every point of view, and thus provide citizens with a valuable gauge for ranking various opinions in a kind of grand Meritocracy of Ideas. We need such a gadget because we are collectively failing to properly educate people in critical-thinking skills, open-mindedness, common sense fairness, hypocrisy detection, emotion manipulation and the eminent value of cooperative problem solving.

Jennifer Siebel Newsom has called for a reinvigorated movement to change the current sad state of women being misrepresented in our society. She hopes that the bright light of awareness will lead to positive, fair-minded, and Earth-respecting social change that will give more influence to feminine worldviews. A more respectful reflection of females in the media might allow them to be better represented at the ballot box and in the halls of power, and to gain fairer opportunities and compensation in the work place. Media images should give more respect to women as legitimate human beings whose interests, perspectives and rights to equal treatment have been denied or repressed for too long.

The Pernicious Effects of Seductive Advertising and Manipulative Propaganda

More than \$200 billion is spent annually on advertising in the U.S. to stimulate demand for products and services, and to sway people's opinions. This amount exceeds the GDP of three-fourths of the countries in the world. What a colossal waste! As a manipulative form of indoctrination, this marketing and advertising results in a wide variety of outcomes that are misguided, socially undesirable and frequently harmful, especially when considered from a big picture perspective. Advertising negatively affects children, whose minds are not yet fully formed or capable of realizing that such persuasion can be untrue, distorting and manipulative, and it may even have damaging impacts on their mental development.

Americans once thought that the Communist Chinese government pervasively brainwashed its citizens. Chinese leaders, like most authoritarian rulers, have freely used scurrilous tactics like repressing free expression, suppressing information, censoring the press, and stifling dissent. Yet just think of the insidious effects in our own "free world" that result from spending over \$200 billion each year on persuasive propaganda targeted to influence people's decisions, desires, self-images and political opinions. One rude result is that it has given us domineering Republican rule by authority- abusing males who deny facts, suppress information, attack the press and stifle dissent!

Marketing and promotion contain subliminal messages that are highly manipulative. Such forms of conditioning are pathetic aspects of our economic system. Even more pathologically, these messages are driving forces in determining our values. As a result, we have become pawns of those who slickly create demand, and who work to manufacture consent and exploit people's hopes, fears and emotions. Sly sales tactics and seductive advertising use persuasive testimonials, sexy imagery, simplistic slogans, deceptive demonstrations and amusing parody to influence people. Such strategies often appeal to people's base instincts for dominance over others, or exploit desires to be titillated, or take advantage of people's propensities to conform or seek higher perceived status. And they tend to undermine or diminish higher and more wholesome and virtuous instincts.

Advertising on television and radio, and in newspapers and magazines, tends to indoctrinate us with false values. It effectively enshrines the gods of materialistic consumerism on the highest pedestal of our imaginations. The message of advertising often seems to be that happiness is found above all in the possession of things. Much marketing subtly preaches that you shouldn't be happy with what you have, or that you should get all you can for yourself and that you should get it as quickly as possible. Advertising champions shopping, pleasure seeking, variety, indulgence and luxury. It exploits people's desire to achieve high status by acquiring material goods, and has made buying and owning things a central means for us to make ourselves feel "cool" or special or worthy.

Advertising has been described as "the manufacture of discontent". When designed to have such an influence, advertising should be restricted. Our shopping-seduced consumer culture is causing us to fail to appreciate truer values. We have supersized our meals, our houses and our vehicles, but these "gains" have come at high social and environmental costs, so they are diminishing the true quality of our lives. I have faith in the potential for people to develop richer lives without at the same time harming others or rashly impoverishing the planet.

Mark Twain once wrote: "Civilization is the limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities." It would be smart for us to devote more resources to satisfying essential and basic needs, rather than frivolous, egocentric, triumphal or excessively materialistic desires that waste resources.

The demand for unneeded things is increased by clever product promotion, planned obsolescence, changing fashions, the encouraging of perceived obsolescence, and the disposability of goods. These things stimulate employment and profits, but they result in undesirable waste, excessive damages to ecosystems, and the undermining of vital initiatives aimed at conserving resources. These undesirable outcomes are inimical to all of our descendants!

Product advertising generally does not contribute to wholesome values because it conditions folks to envy others and to want to be envied, or to be jealously protective of privileges and possessions. It uses celebrity, sex and subtle psychological persuasion to sell products. Advertising and the media divert people's attention from vitally important perspectives by glamorizing youth and using intrigue, scandal, violence, sensationalism and distractions in the news. It also hypes up sports spectacles and focuses on the vaunted glory of victory, and the contrasting agony of defeat, to keep people from thinking about more important issues. A sinister side effect of these influences is to encourage winning at any cost, no matter how unethical.

And now there is the sadly retrograde Trumpian Reality Show. Fascinating! We'll destroy the planet, but the rich will get a lot richer. For a while.

One aspect of this state of affairs is that the people who have the most money, power, assets and privileges always demand more and more for themselves, year after year after year. They want to pay lower tax rates, despite the fact that their unfair influence has already gotten effective tax rates on millionaires and billionaires reduced to a level that is near the lowest today since before the Great Depression.

Slick marketing contributes to making shopping into a ritual that is oriented toward ego satisfaction. In doing so, it contributes to a loss of awareness of positive values such as responsible thrift, healthy moderation, genuine connectedness, generosity of spirit, integrity of character, and a good appreciation of fair-mindedness and honest communication and thoughtfulness and civic responsibility.

"Advertising is a valuable economic factor because it is the cheapest way of selling goods, particularly if the goods are worthless."

--- Sinclair Lewis

Another aspect of gross commercialization is the manipulation of children for marketing purposes. Advertisers shrewdly use a "Nag Factor" to exploit the credulity of children and their susceptibility to subliminal persuasion. This form of advertising is targeted to manipulate kids into nagging their parents to buy things like fast foods and toys and electronic games. One of the most harmful outcomes of marketing to young children is a resulting excessive indulgence in unhealthy junk foods like fat-laden hamburgers, salty foods, and sugary cereals, candy and carbonated soft drinks. Fast-food chains spend huge sums of money to promote toys that children will nag their parents to get. Promotions like this contribute to our nation's epidemic of childhood obesity and diabetes and other health problems.

Saturation marketing by the toy industry also affects young minds by diminishing their imagination through corporate tie-in toys that tend to constrict the abilities of young people to engage in activities like spontaneous play. These trends basically brainwash children into being consumers rather than being good citizens or healthy, virtuous and emotionally intelligent human beings. Whereas Tom Sawyer cleverly got his friends to do his chore of whitewashing a fence, corporate advertisers are using their power of persuasion for much more insidiously exploitive purposes.

Some advertising falls in the category of *Deadly Spin*. This is the title of a book by Wendell Potter, a former public relations executive for two of the largest health insurance firms in the United States. Potter became so disgusted at tactics these corporations used that he quit his job and set out to tell the world the truth about what is really happening, describing "in astonishing detail how corporate America sets the public agenda by manipulating the news media, buying politicians and effectively misleading consumers."

It is amazing how successful rich people and big corporations have been in using clever advertising to get people to vote against their own best interests, and to allow ever more of the economic pie to be grabbed by the Few at the expense of the Many. We clearly would be wise to find better ways of managing our affairs. We should begin to cooperate together a bit better, and we should find ways to prevent the propaganda of the privileged from subverting honorable intentions and sensible initiatives that advance the common good.

In particular, it seems starkly clear that we need a better master plan than formulating policies that create ever-bigger disparities in wealth and economic security between the super-rich and all other people.

The Need to Defend People's Rights

Consider another question: Shouldn't every woman have a right to be able to protect herself by using contraceptives to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies? Religious fundamentalists, along with economic conservatives who advocate tax cuts over all other values, apparently don't give a damn about the true health of women, or about public services that help children to flourish. These are shameless opportunists who are prudish and domineeringly allied together to prevent sexual permissiveness, contraception, and the termination of any pregnancy. When a man impregnates a woman, they fervently defend the "rights" of the egg/sperm zygote and embryo, instead of standing up for women's freedoms and fair prerogatives to decide for themselves in matters that consequentially affect their lives. And because economic fundamentalists oppose fairer and more progressive national tax plans, the social programs that help women and children are being cut mercilessly. Trump Republicans are turning out to be worse villains in this regard than any previous leaders.

Millions of children die in the world each year because they are poor and malnourished. This fact makes it clear that if we were truly committed to saving human beings, we would start with ones who have already been born and are living challenging existences, rather than staunchly defending the right of an embryo to survive just as soon as a sperm fertilizes an egg.

"I don't repeat gossip, so listen carefully." Social conservatives talk about freedom from interference by the government, yet they are committed to allowing the government to interfere in women's lives and violate their rights to self-determination. Ever since the libertarian-leaning Tea Party helped Republicans gain a majority in the House of Representatives, they have acted as a driving force behind assaults against women's reproductive rights and healthcare. Not only are they trying to eliminate all government funding for Planned Parenthood clinics that help disadvantaged women, but they also want to eliminate the Title X Family Planning program and contraceptive provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

Title X is a federal grant program dedicated to providing comprehensive family planning services and other health care programs to individuals. Title X gives priority to persons from low-income families or uninsured individuals who cannot afford the services available to women who have more money. Title X providentially provides contraceptive services at more than 4,500 community health centers across the nation. By doing so, it prevents an estimated one million unintended pregnancies each year. Even if only half of these unwanted pregnancies would otherwise end in abortion, Title X prevents 500,000 abortions every year. Those who oppose abortion should therefore strongly support Title X. Those who are against contraception? Get a life!

Social conservatives also generally want to slash funding from the Children's Health Insurance program that promotes good nutrition and health for children, and they let the program expire on September 30, 2017 because they were so busy trying to repeal Obamacare and figure out more ways to give big tax breaks to the rich. Conservatives also want to cut spending from the Head Start program that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health and nutrition to low-income children. At the state level, social conservatives have launched a veritable cluster bomb of restrictions against abortions, so their priorities seem forebodingly clear: they care much more about a fusion of eggs and sperm and their own narrow-minded ideologies than about real living people, and they want to control women and repress their rights and prerogatives.

Co-opted by master manipulators like the billionaire Mercers and the nefarious Koch Brothers, believers in Tea Party doctrines go along with many types of corporate welfare schemes and perks for rich people, but oppose most of the basic mechanisms that help create the common good. They thereby fail to understand one purpose for which our great Constitution was established, as stated in its Preamble: to promote the general welfare!

The Evolution of Social Roles of Males and Females

All the major religions of modern Western civilization posit that a domineering male God created the Universe and rules over it. This religious worldview, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before about 1750 BCE, all prehistoric cultures since the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution, some ten or twelve thousand years ago, worshipped Mother Earth goddesses and female deities of fertility and propitious providence. Before the Agricultural Revolution began, our *Homo sapiens* ancestors were nomadic hunters and gatherers for more than 150,000 years from the times our species first became distinct from earlier progenitors, and evidence reveals that these ancients also likely honored motherhood, children, female deities, wild animals, and the natural world.

In his book *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*, Dr. Leonard Shlain provides a fascinating thesis for how male domination of modern times came to be. He draws correlations between the overthrow of divine feminine deities and the concomitant rise of patriarchal cultures. After pointing out that the historical timing of this development happens to have coincided with the advent of alphabets and the written word and an accompanying rapid expansion of literacy, he adduces extensive evidence that, at the same time that the rise of patriarchal male gods took place, harsh and sexist codes of written laws came into being, like Hammurabi's Code, a female-status demeaning, eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth set of laws that were promulgated in about 1750 BCE.

Dr. Shlain explains this coincidence by pointing out the discovery by neuroscientists that the two hemispheres of our brains perform different functions. The right brain is associated with images, emotions, intuitive understandings and feminine ways of seeing the world. The left brain is associated with analytical thinking, literacy, and masculine ways of viewing the world. Dr. Shlain's provocative thesis is that a functional shift took place from right-brain dominance to left-brain dominance after alphabets were invented, stimulating neural synapses and forging new connections in the analytical left brain. Shlain speculated that this change facilitated cultural shifts in which males became more domineering. The importance of this idea lies in the fact that one primary legacy of male-dominated societies is an inadequate amount of respect for fairness doctrines, women's rights, and the health of Earth's ecosystems. Such attitudes have far-reaching undesirable implications for everyone in the future.

Today, most cultures worldwide are characterized by attitudes and impulses that are female role denigrating, hyper-competitive, Nature-damaging, women suppressing, excessively patriarchal and pathetically misogynistic. And they worship a male God. Strange images of Muslim women wearing veils or full body burqas symbolize this trend. This disrespect of both women's rights and ecological sanity is causing epic existential problems. A new paradigm of understanding is urgently needed, and a new vision of how to live well on Earth. We should cultivate new understandings of fairer and wiser ways forward! Readers interested in gaining deeper perspective about these issues should read *A Feminine Vision of an Achievable Better World: Anima Should Reign!*

Gallant Gal Challenges Establishment

One thing is becoming increasingly clear as the economic deck becomes more and more stacked in favor of the few, and as disparities of wealth in our society become more starkly extreme, and as many people on Earth experience increasing economic insecurity. The only way we can achieve the ecological and social greater good of people today, and of all people in future generations, is with the cooperation and contributions of people who can easily afford to pay more to help preserve the planet in a habitable condition. Unfortunately, just as this need is reaching gargantuan proportions, those who can most readily afford to pay a bigger share of society's costs are becoming ever more eager to evade this basic responsibility. Wealthy people and big corporations are becoming increasingly influential in making sure that our national tax laws are structured in ways that allow them to pay low rates of taxes on their incomes, dividends, capital gains and inheritances.

An activist movement of people is needed who will courageously step forward to prevent society from melting down due to the increasing desperation, economic insecurity and healthcare vulnerability of poor people and the declining middle class. Strong advocates are needed for the best interests of young people, and for those who are being subjected to discrimination in opportunity and legal justice, and for every person yet to be conceived in future generations.

Here is another aspect of this issue. Giant corporations use their power to rig the rules in our society to allow them to foist many costs onto society that are incurred in the processes of producing goods and providing services. These externalized costs include ones related to mitigating harms caused by pollution and toxic wastes, and providing healthcare to workers, and helping pay for damages caused to individuals and communities.

Big corporations and investors are, in essence, perpetrating an institutionalized scam that artificially inflates profits. These profits give investors higher returns, but they do so at the expense of everyone else. In addition, tax reductions that George W. Bush's administration enacted served to compound this problem by giving investors bigger benefits at the same time that environmental harms and social ills associated with modern economic activities are increasingly being foisted onto society to achieve this artificial boosting of profits. And Republicans doubled down on this swindle with their debt-financed Tax Cut bill in December 2017. It is becoming ever more urgent for us to find fairer ways to finance initiatives for environmental and social justice. One fair solution would be to require investors to pay a small transaction fee to help cover these costs. Professor Robert Reich's insights in *Supercapitalism* make this point clear.

In general, business, consumer and investor goals have been given too much influence in our societies, and more vital "good citizenship goals" and long-term prosperity have been subordinated to greed and the goals of narrowly focused interest groups. Too much power is given to corporations, investors and speculators who are driven by the compulsion to gain profits in the short-term. This negatively affects working people and the well-being of communities and the health of the environment. These adverse outcomes are being promoted through political expediencies, misleading economic measures, irresponsibly shortsighted objectives, sometimes odd accounting gimmicks, and the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon vs. FEC* rulings, which allow unlimited and secret campaign expenditures by rich people and giant corporations.

All these trends are on a collision course. Though there are many commendable exceptions, people in general tend to become more politically conservative as they get wealthier, and they tend to develop a more pronounced disinclination to pay progressively higher taxes on higher levels of earnings. Many people strive to evade taxes, and often deny that progressive systems of graduated taxes on income and capital gains are eminently fair, even though this is a simple fact. Graduated tax systems are fair because every taxpayer is required to pay exactly the same amount of tax on every dollar they earn.

This riff is repeated in a number of Earth Manifesto writings, because it is crucially important, and yet widely misunderstood. In a system of progressively graduated taxes, every person pays the same amount of tax on every level of their income. As an example, every person who makes an Adjusted Gross Income of \$1 million pays the same amount of tax on the first \$50,000 they make as someone who earns only \$50,000. The same is true at every level of earnings. In fact, most of those who make \$1 million in a year pay lower tax rates than those who earn incomes from nose-to-the-grindstone work, due to the fact that a bigger proportion of the earnings of wealthier people tend to be made in capital gains on investments, which are assessed much lower tax rates than the ones that apply to wages.

Our economic system has been "gamed" to reduce top marginal tax rates on the highest incomes. Politicians facilitate this abuse of power by those with capital and Big Money. These eminences rely on the subterfuge of ideological propaganda to achieve this goal, promising that benefits will trickle down to everyone, despite the overwhelming evidence that, in reality, regressive tax breaks mainly cause wealth to gush up!

Emboldened by success, I guess, rich people want to get more and more for themselves. And they defend this rigged status quo. They often jealously hold grudges against the hordes of the envious Have Nots, the lazy bums! "No more time off for you!" If you've got an attitude problem, you're fired!

Right Brain, I Said, Not Right Wing!

I often think of the ancient Chinese blessing and curse that says, "May you live in interesting times." We sure do live in compellingly interesting times -- for better and for worse. The pace of change in communications, technology and social transformations in world affairs has been accelerating markedly during the past several decades. But who would have anticipated that, in the Middle East after many long years of patriarchy, monotheistic supremacism, authoritarianism and harsh repression in Arab nations ruled by dictatorial regimes, corrupt and tyrannical governments would begin to crumble in a breathtakingly short period of time?

The first domino to fall was in Tunisia. Ben Ali, the long-time President of Tunisia, was suddenly overthrown on January 14, 2011. He had come to power in a bloodless coup in 1987, yet after almost 24 years of autocratic rule, a sudden spontaneous uprising began when a frustrated and humiliated street vendor set himself on fire in December 2010 to protest the confiscation of his wares. One analyst made a trenchant observation: "Events in Tunisia have shown the risk of a pressure-cooker effect: If you have a system of intense suppression without addressing the causes of discontent, a crack in the system can lead to an explosion." Danger!

Let us heed this lesson here in the land of the free and the home of the brave. Increasing inequalities should not be the bottom line result of so many of our national policies.

Soon after the revolt in Tunisia, the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt crumbled. Hosni Mubarak had been Egypt's ruler for almost 30 years, but he was forced to resign after 18 days of protests and much violence that followed the Tunisian uprising. Soon thereafter, terrible civil strife broke out in Libya, where the madman Muammar Gaddafi had wielded ruthless power from the time he seized control in a military coup in 1969. Many months of violent turmoil ensued, and Western allies undertook an air war intervention, and then the Libyan government finally fell and Muammar Gaddafi was killed. Terrible instability ensued.

Significant social unrest and violence have also roiled Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, Turkey and other Arab nations. Syria has become the most violently repressive of these countries, with more than 400,000 people estimated to have been killed so far in tragic sectarian warfare. Free your people from the ruthless tyranny of your rule, Bashar al Assad! Violent conflicts spilled over into Iraq in the summer of 2014, with ISIS projecting power, and bombers from the U.S. and Russia and other nations have since then routinely rained destruction from the skies, exacerbating dislocations, terrible harms, heightened risks, repressive rule and extremist opposition.

There are many ways to explain these surprisingly sudden developments in the Arab world. One of the most persuasive is that freedom is "the magnetic true north for humanity", so when personal and political liberties are repressed for too long, energy accumulates like the resistant friction that builds between two slowly moving tectonic plates before being released in a shocking earthquake. Something eventually must give, and inevitably it does. This may take the form of a big earthquake like the devastating earth tremor near Japan on March 11, 2011, or of violent turmoil like the unrest that is shaking so many Islamic nations today.

Most Americans can viscerally relate to the explanation that a desire for freedom is one of the most powerful motivating forces in human affairs. The main focus of unrest in Middle Eastern and North African countries has been on high unemployment, a lack of good opportunities, widespread political corruption, violations of human rights, and the general state of inequalities, injustices and repression in Islamic societies. Other factors in this revolutionary zealotry are the increasing desperation of the majority of people and high costs for necessities.

Another factor that significantly affects the strife in Arab nations is the astonishingly young average age of people in these countries. The median age in Egypt and Libya is a mere 24 years old, compared to about 38 years old in the U.S. The median age is even younger in Syria at 22, and in Yemen it is only 18! Having attended

one of the most liberal universities in the States in the late Sixties and early Seventies, I am keenly aware of young people's idealism, potential fervor and sensitivity to injustice, as well as to hormonal drives. On American university campuses, the late Sixties were an era of calls for an end to the murderous war in Vietnam, and for passionate demands for personal freedoms and social justice, so it is no surprise that similar impulses have resulted in powerful expressions of youthful anger in Middle Eastern nations.

The "pressure-cooker effect" is seen once again to be creating heightened risks of instability. It is foolhardy to turn up the heat on a pressure cooker of frustration, resentment, anger and desperation that is stoked by unfairness, corrupt governance, a lack of opportunities and repressive rule whether in Arab societies or our own.

There are no doubt deeper and more complex reasons for the unrest that percolates beneath discontent in Muslim countries. Some of these undercurrents will be explored below, because they are viscerally important perspectives. Note, however, that there is often considerable merit in the principle of "Occam's razor", or the law of parsimony. This principle states that the simplest explanation of any phenomena is often the best one. Ideas that make the fewest assumptions amongst competing hypotheses frequently happen to be more accurate than elegantly speculative ones.

Leonardo da Vinci once observed that simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. I like this idea! But, while many people are predisposed to prefer simple explanations rather than more nuanced and abstruse ones, that doesn't necessarily mean these opinions are accurate. Those who are enamored with simple ideas often have suspect motives. Evangelical Christians, for example, LOVE simple explanations! I mean, "Presto! -- God, etc." This does not make such presumptuous explanations more probable. Non-infidel Muslims also embrace simplistic views of the world. "Presto! -- Allah, etc." Whatever!

My personal "religion" is one that has an overarching principle: the best worldview is one that sensibly gives a reasonable modicum of mutual respect to all people, no matter what their religious faith. Such a belief system would be much better for humanity than the whole passel of conflicting dogmas of religious establishments put together. As natural resources become scarcer, conflicts of interest become more intense around the globe and people with outsized power and influence are becoming more jealously uncompromising. At the same time, commitments to social justice and mutual security seem to be becoming harder to achieve. But it sure would be advantageous to try harder to restructure our economic and political systems in ways that would be most likely to create conditions that will prove to be more favorable. Let us emulate Thomas Paine who wrote in *The Rights of Man*: "Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

I personally prefer existential philosophies that have core tenets of compassion, empathetic acceptance and a measure of what Buddhists call loving-kindness. A wholehearted embrace of peaceable coexistence and live-and-let-live sensibilities and Golden Rule morality should be paramount. Human civilizations already face enough dire challenges with a total of more than 7.6 billion of us alive, so we need to find effective ways to minimize conflicts over profits, energy, mineral resources, fresh water, economic development, fertile soil, forests and fisheries. We also need to find win/win solutions, and some real good ways to prevent downstream pollution -- in both place and time.

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

--- The 13th century Persian Muslim poet Rumi

We simply cannot accept ethnocentric intolerance, hyper-manipulative divide-and-conquer demagoguery, and dogmas that proclaim my-God-is-better-than-your-God. Many religious establishments attempt to embellish their moral credentials by stressing love, peace, Golden Rule fairness and the virtue of helping those who are poor and downtrodden. But when reactionaries within various churches foster religious intolerance and racial discrimination, or the subjugation of women, or anti-gay sentiments, it becomes necessary for every nation to create a Bill of Rights guaranteeing all citizens fairer protections under the law. A strong separation of church and state is necessary to achieve this resolve.

It is a truism of nature that there is always more than meets the eye, so there is more to full explaining than just providing straightforward ideas. Here is where the brilliant Dr. Leonard Shlain comes in again. He really may have been onto something in his observations about cultural shifts related to the increasing use of images in our world today. Images on television and the Internet are entering our collective consciousness, along with images in photography and documentary films, and these images may actually be having a pronounced positive effect on the way we see the world.

Dr. Shlain intriguingly postulated that our increasing use of visual mediums like these might cause a shift from our word-oriented, male-domineering, analytical left-brained thinking back toward a more intuitive, empathetic, open-minded, fairness-championing and feminine right-brain-oriented outlook. Dr. Shlain's contention was that a previous revolutionary shift in the opposite direction had already occurred early in recorded history after the advent of alphabets and their pictographic predecessors, cuneiform and hieroglyphics. This had caused human cultures to shift from image-oriented, feminine-deity worshipping, right-brained, women-respecting worldviews to word-oriented, male privilege enshrining, male-deity worshipping, left-brained worldviews that have had the effect of disrespecting women, undermining peaceful coexistence and assaulting Earth's ecosystems ever since.

Dr. Shlain speculated that the neural connectivity of our brains shifted from the right to the left hemisphere as we paid more attention to conceptual abstractions associated with words and language. Now that we are using more image-oriented mediums, he suggested that maybe a shift would occur back toward a better balance in our societies. This development should surely be welcomed, for maybe now we can begin to reverse the inimical shift that accompanied the overthrow of the divine feminine and the concomitant setback for the rights and prerogatives of women in civilizations ever since.

Such a new image orientation might contribute to reversing the ascendancy of left-brained machismo analytical obtuseness. The disturbing triumph of reality TV con man Donald Trump in national elections last November undermines hopes for saner seeing and acting. Will women achieve more respect and fairer rights in the Muslim world as a result of the revolutionary unrest that is transforming those nations today? I hope so! Stay tuned! (Harsh Islamic Shariah law is surely NOT the answer!)

Parenthetically, picture this: Our brains need to shift right, while our social attunement must shift moderately to the left. Let's all get with the program!

Perspective on Disciples of "Tough Love"

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche adduced a Strict Father "tough love" adage: "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." -- Oh, is that so? Pain and suffering are inevitable parts of life, so it is natural to try to ease suffering by rationalizing it, or by believing in a compensatory afterlife, or by indulging in escapist outlets like the use of alcohol, drugs or other means of denying or temporarily forgetting adversities. We sometimes choose to see physical and emotional suffering as being capable of having a positive effect on us because hardships can radically alter our worldviews and transform our perspectives with respect to our own mortality. This old adage that says suffering makes us stronger emphasizes positive values that can come from having endured hardship. "Adversity builds character." But let's listen to a differing perspective:

"Our brain is a meaning-making machine, designed to sort vast and varied sensory information into coherent, orderly perception, organized primarily in the form of narrative: *this happened, which led to that, which ended up so*. When two things happen together, we assume they are meaningfully linked, and then we rush to bind them in a quite unholy cause-and-effect matrimony."

--- Noam Shpancer, PhD., *What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Weaker*, Insight Therapy

Superstitions are a result of such striving-for-meaning thinking. Such thinking can lead us to fall prey to what is known as "confirmation bias" in which we choose to believe things that may be absurdly and demonstrably untrue. In reality, trauma and hardship have neurobiological impacts that can lead to subsequent mental health disorders, even long after the trauma. This is why Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is such a terrible affliction for millions of men and women who have been involved in gruesome wartime experiences. When someone is

involved in a traumatic event, distinct long-term negative physiological and psychological impacts can result. In general, trauma and hardship are NOT particularly good for us!

Noam Shpancer concludes that "Mayhem and chaos don't toughen you up, and they don't prepare you well to deal with the terror of this world. Tender love and care toughen you up, because they nurture and strengthen your capacity to learn and adapt, including learning how to fight and adapting to later hardship." From this perspective, it is sad that fairness of opportunity in our society has been given much less emphasis in order to satisfy right-wing ideologues and proponents of regressive tax schemes. The Reagan revolution of the 1980s ushered in a resurgence of conservatism in politics. This ideology, by demanding low tax rates for the wealthy, thus serves to increase the gap between the top 1% and all others. When we allow our national priorities to be hijacked into implementing policies that increase inequalities, then more intense hardships result for the majority of Americans. This is a master plan that inadvertently fans the flames under a dangerously explosive social pressure cooker. Better social insurance policies are needed!

Trends toward less fair and diminished opportunities within the populace are negative for society as a whole. Accompanying ideologies that advocate laissez-faire governance regardless of how much they degrade the environment have the effect of radically diminishing opportunities for all people in future generations. Besides, unempathetic "tough love" often seems to be an expression of motives of greed, selfishness, jealousy and "hate masquerading as love". These are not good things!

Population and Politics

Arizona Senator John Kyl seriously misrepresented the facts in April 2011 when he stated that "well over 90 percent" of the services of Planned Parenthood are for abortions. When he was challenged, his office declared, "His remark was not intended to be a factual statement." I guess not! There is a BIG difference between the actual proportion of 3% and 90%. Such devious distortions are deeply unethical. Other right-wing personalities like conservative political commentators Laura Ingraham and Glenn Beck also grossly misrepresented the nature of services provided by Planned Parenthood back then to promote hard-right causes. Glenn Beck once suggested that only "hookers" use Planned Parenthood services. Rhetoric like this might be good for pandering to reactionary biases, and for drumming up support from angry and frustrated Republicans, but such distortions are pathetic and disgusting. This is one aspect of "the politics of resentment", and it is getting real ugly!

Consider the fact that millions of children die in the world each year due to malnutrition and poverty. Efforts to wage a war on poverty have morphed instead into a war on poor people. This is due to the effectiveness of efforts by the wealthiest people on Earth, who own half of all the world's wealth, to get their way by using the power of their money to impose austerity on everyone else.

It is time we give higher priority to saving human beings who have already been born, rather than staunchly defending the right of a clump of cells to survive just as soon as an egg and sperm unite. It is a damning indictment of ideologues who defend absolute protections for clumps of pre-conscious cells when these uncompromising partisans show deep disdain for the rights of self-determination for all women and for the health and well-being of children who have already been born. This is especially true in light of the growing realization that anti-choice conservatives are contributing to an unfolding global population explosion that is accelerating the rate at which we are collectively damaging the health of vital ecosystems like fisheries, wildlife habitats, forests, rivers, lakes, and oceans. It is madness for humankind to be doing these things, and further to even be inadvertently altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere and normal weather patterns to which all life is providentially adapted.

Delegates to the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development explored the links that exist between sustainable development and population-related policies that deal with family planning, fertility, birth control, sex, reproductive health services, maternal and infant mortality, the education of women, and gender equity. The delegates gave official recognition to the fact that family planning counseling is important for pre-natal care and safe delivery of babies, as well as for post-natal care and responsible parenthood. The

Cairo delegates concluded that services should be provided to people in nations worldwide to help prevent AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, delegates recommended that female genital mutilation and the cultural attitudes that contribute to it should be strongly discouraged. Honor killings? "Don't get me started!" These are important issues. We should not allow religious extremists, political partisans or culture-war conflicts to undermine fair-minded approaches to dealing with them.

A Word on Genesis

There is a deep underlying meaning of the narrative in the biblical story of the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. It is enlightening to more fully understand this story. Serpents were honored in ancient times as potent symbols of feminine power. So when God created Eve, the first woman according to the Bible, she was blamed soon thereafter, along with a serpent, for disobediently defying God's prohibition of partaking of the fruit of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil". This act of blaming should be regarded with warning bells that sound to alert us to the curious allegorical and practical motives of the story.

Those who created this concept of God as an extremely expectant, inscrutably unjust and rather whimsically stentorian Supreme Being claimed that 'He' vowed to punish all of humankind forevermore for this supposedly terrible transgression. Obedience was valued as the highest virtue in male-dominated patriarchal cultures that spawned this tale. This God was seen as an extremely jealous deity who was being infinitely strict when He subsequently promised in Ten Commandments to punish children of those who failed to believe faithfully in every word of this tall tale, and to punish these innocents for generations if their parents worshipped any other concept of the divine than the one the Bible proclaims.

Scholars who study the anthropological and psychological implications of mythological beliefs provide us with fascinating revelations about such beliefs. Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen, for instance, has written two books, *The Goddess in Everywoman* and *The God in Everyman*, in which she evaluates both female and male archetypes and stereotypes. These are powerful inner and outer forces that profoundly affect us all, and are mirrored and embodied in the deities of the Greek pantheon.

Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology reveal a richly textured portrait of both the honorable and the ignoble aspects of human behaviors, and of the roles our cultures emphasize and reinforce -- or that they alternatively repress. Lest we dismiss these mythologies too lightly, we should recall that the projections in these cosmological belief systems dominated the religious and spiritual thinking of Greek and Roman civilizations at the apex of their glory, power, influence and intellectual achievements for many centuries.

The entire spectrum of human qualities embodied in the archetypes of the human mind is an aspect of what the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. Each and every one of us is profoundly affected by these archetypal influences, which are inherited in the genes that define our instinctual behaviors. All of us are also powerfully influenced by subliminal stereotypes transmitted to us through the cultures in which we live.

The relationship of dominant belief systems to deep-seated gender inequalities in our societies is compelling. So is their correlation to unequal opportunities, widespread pay inequities, and other forms of discrimination against women in countries worldwide. As Hillary Clinton noted when she was Secretary of State in 2010:

"Women's equality is not just a moral issue, it's not just a humanitarian issue, it is not just a fairness issue. It is a security issue, it is a prosperity issue, and it is a peace issue. It is in the vital national interest of the United States of America."

In a musical response to the on-going upsurge in GOP misogyny and attacks on Planned Parenthood and such things, a woman named Lauren Mayer composed and sang the song, *I Didn't Come From Your Rib (You Came From My Vagina)*. Watch this YouTube video to see and hear the funny lyrics about the Republican "war on women", which is truly infuriating because of attitudes that value women only "if we're gestatin' ...".

Bif! Baff! Dao! Whatever happened to Wonder Woman, now that we really need some of her heroic exploits to help save us? For that matter, is there any way we could resurrect the great superhero Superman, the "caped

crusader"? He was, after all, not only able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but he also used his arsenal of super powers to fight for Truth, Justice, and the American Way.

What exactly is the American Way today? Two visions come to mind. One is a dream of free people being given an adequate opportunity to pursue happiness in a reasonably just society characterized by a well-run government with an affordable system of good public education, a balanced criminal justice system, and universal healthcare for every person who might get injured or sick. This American dream laudably includes a strong middle class and fairer treatment of women and minorities, along with sensible protections of the environment.

The other American Way is like a bad dream, a system of ruthlessly-enforced inequalities between a very small minority of rich people and the vast majority of others. This system requires enforcement by rigid dictates, and it is a nightmare characterized by an inadequate educational system, a crumbling national infrastructure, a costly and unfair criminal justice system, deep-seated gender and racial discrimination, an excessively costly healthcare system, and foreign wars being fought for resources, ascendancy, diversion and bigger opportunities to make profits at the expense of others while contributing to extensive damages to the environment.

A Digression on Words and Language

The Muslim world is outraged about having any image whatsoever portrayed of their God, Allah. This fact was demonstrated by a violence-provoking controversy that concerned political cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. Why, one might sensibly wonder, is it such a blasphemy to show visual depictions of Muhammad? Why, for that matter, do FOUR of the Bible's Ten Commandments thunder on about believers making no idols and exclusively accepting the Bible's supposedly divine WORD, and avoiding the misuse of God's name, and jealously threatening to supremely unjustly punish "the children unto the third and fourth generation" for any such "iniquity of the fathers"?

These are important questions simply because millions of people figuratively draw a line in the sand to defend their fervent religious beliefs that posit the existence of One and Only One True God. These people show much more concern for their parochial religious beliefs than they do about more crucial issues like committing ourselves and our societies to religious acceptance, or guaranteeing rights to people in future generations.

Mark Twain whistled at the preposterousness of religious issues like this in *Letters from the Earth*, a book published posthumously in 1962. Likewise, Thomas Paine wrote *The Age of Reason*, which has been described as "one of the most persuasive critiques of the Bible ever written". Thomas Paine's benevolent goal in all of his writings was to improve the condition of the common people and to deliver them from oppression, ignorance, poverty and hardship. He tried to do this by advocating the blessings of good, fair-minded governance. Thomas Paine, like the famous Voltaire, abhorred superstition and false theologies, and maintained a humanitarian vision of morality, justice and spiritual belief.

In *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine (a "Doubting Thomas" of the first order!) writes these words: "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."

New light has been shed, in the century since Mark Twain's death, on objective understandings of the biological evolution of life on Earth, and of the physical genesis of the Universe. When we cultivate understandings like these, along with modern economic, sociological and psychological insights, we should be able to gain better understandings of the essence of thinking that underlies the folly of ignoring crucially important issues.

Perhaps it would help to recognize how the two distinct hemispheres of our brains work, and to be more familiar with Dr. Leonard Shlain's brilliant and compelling theories in *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*. I will elaborate once again. It is a tricky business providing "absolute truths" to people about the unknown, the ineffable and the indescribable. Possibly anticipating the evolution of much better understandings about the true nature of the universe, holy books resorted to the suppression of images of what deities looked like. They probably did this to avoid having visual misconceptions eventually exposed as ridiculous and erroneous. At some point before

most of the world's holy books were written between about 900 BCE and 650 CE, human societies underwent many millennia of a revolutionary transition from being agrarian, right-brained, image-oriented, cooperative, feminine-respecting and Mother-Earth-honoring to being left-brained, analytical, warrior-culture focused, male-championing, word-oriented, materialistic, and wantonly exploitive of the Earth's resources.

In this challenging interregnum of change, human worldviews and ideas were in a profound state of turbulent flux. So were social mores, gender roles, abstract concepts, religious beliefs, philosophies, and both economic and social ideologies. During times of rapid technological change -- like those we happen to be experiencing today -- profoundly transformational changes are more likely to occur, for better or for worse.

Words, and indeed languages themselves, contain deep perceptual predispositions and inherent presuppositions and a subjectivity of notions. These are what John Steinbeck referred to as personal "warps". Reality might not, in fact, be what it seems, and its dimensions are deeper than our possible comprehension. This is true in terms of everything from the mundane to some of the most abstruse scientific ideas of all -- those of quantum physics and spacetime.

It is clumsily difficult to conceive of truly expansive understandings, or to wholeheartedly embrace them. Our vision is blinded by a number of complicating factors. For one, biases that are acculturated from birth strongly affect the way we see the world. Marketing, product promotion, ideological spin, and propaganda and outright untruths also influence our comprehension. Words and languages themselves affect our perspectives, subtly distorting our perceptions of reality and our experiences and circumstances.

Roget's Thesaurus is the original bible of words and their associations and synonymous meanings. Peter Mark Roget (1779-1869) created the first thesaurus for precisely "two classes of persons" -- one being those who are seeking just the right word to express an idea most exactly, and the other being "metaphysicians engaged in the more profound investigation of the Philosophy of Language."

Let us cultivate clearer understandings of words, language, linguistic framing, uncertainties and beliefs, and of transcendent issues like ecological sanity. Let us "Invoke a little moxie," as Tiffany Shlain recommends, and collaborate together boldly to create saner societies. We can do this, and we really should!

Lightening Illuminates the Dark

Mark Twain was a master of telling stories and tall tales. In an article titled "Our Hippest Literary Lion" in *Newsweek*, Malcolm Jones wrote about Mark Twain: "Everything he thought or did came back to language, to words, playing with them, arranging them and rearranging them. It was how he made sense of what was, to him, an otherwise senseless universe. <The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter>, he once said. <It's the difference between the lightning bug and lightning.>"

The Chinese philosopher General Sun Tzu asserted in *The Art of War* that it is vital to study and understand clearly the circumstances surrounding war. When lightning flashes on a dark, stormy night, it instantaneously illuminates the surrounding scene, momentarily etching it on our retinas and memories in a flash of light. In the fog of war, political and military leaders deal not only with the logistics of fighting, but also with manipulations of the masses to get *We the People* to go along with the sordid, tragic and excessively costly circumstances that contribute to causing violent conflicts.

"All warfare is based on deception."

--- *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu

The Department of Defense coined the term "perception management" to refer to aspects of information warfare. Wars are based on deception in two entirely different senses. A dense fog of deception surrounds the strategies of war and its tactics, logistics, knowledge about enemy forces, and secrets of one's own military weaknesses. A second set of wide-ranging deceptions is used to enlist public support for wars and to maintain the enormously expensive standing armies and other military forces that the U.S. has had for many decades. A critical aspect of launching wars of aggression, like those against Afghanistan and Iraq, involves public relations

at home. Such wars must be "sold" to the people. A primary focus in this sales effort is to exploit people's fears, ignorance and patriotic nationalism, and to use secrecy and misinformation to deceive American citizens.

One strategy that makes it easier for leaders to prosecute wars is the expediency of foisting the costs of wars onto future generations, instead of requiring people to pay for them today. Another tactic is the creation of an "all-volunteer" army to hide the sacrifices being made by enlisted men and women who do the actual fighting and dying. These volunteers generally happen to be persons who do not have much power or better opportunities.

Lightning flashes on the sordid details of war, revealing egregious instances of deception. Both the episode that involved Jessica Lynch in Iraq and the story of Pat Tillman in Afghanistan reveal attempted deception and a farce of military propaganda. Jessica Lynch was used as a pawn in a film production to make the American people think that the Iraq war involved heroics as we launched our deadly Shock-and-Awe invasion. The story of Pat Tillman, a professional football player who patriotically volunteered for military duty after the 9/11 attacks, also reveals the overarching willingness of military authorities to lie to the public and cover up the truth all the way up the chain of command to the highest levels. Check out the documentary film, *The Tillman Story*, for further illumination. Also, see the expansive dissertation in this manifesto, *Reflections on War - and Peace*.

Lightning flashed on harsh treatment of prisoners when photos of torture tactics were disclosed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These pictures revealed that such activities were *Standard Operating Procedure*, as evocatively revealed in Errol Morris' documentary film by that name. Other forms of "perception management" have been used as propaganda tools. These include the demonizing of foreign leaders, exaggerations of threats from abroad, the manipulation of the media, and the use of phony "false flag attacks". During the George W. Bush administration, public viewing and photographing of military caskets that were bringing the bodies of dead soldiers back home were prohibited, presumably to conceal the reality of the horrors of war. I call for more honesty from our government in such matters!

We need a better master plan than to militarily occupy entire foreign nations. We should save the expense of stationing so many hundreds of thousands of military personnel and their families abroad. We should cut our spending on the military instead of outlaying more money than almost all other nations on Earth combined. We should honestly assess the extent to which the USA is maintaining an unjust hegemony of domination financed by unaccountably wasteful spending, like that on the incredibly costly F-35 warplane, "the most expensive military weapons system in history". And unending aerial bombing campaigns? Arrrrgh!

Mark Twain had become one of the most prominent and well-known personages on the planet by the final decade of his life. He was not just a writer of novels, a witty humorist and an entertaining speaker, but also a citizen who took courageous stands on important national issues such as his opposition to the occupation and annexation of the Philippines by the United States in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898.

The master manipulators of our modern war policy have managed to parlay the post-Cold War superpower of the U.S. into an empire with military personnel stationed in more than 130 nations around the world, and our armed forces have aggressively been stationed in many nations in the Middle East for decades. Our leaders have shrewdly managed to get the American people to go along with this foreign policy, even though it involves costly, irresponsible and inadequately accountable procurement and a form of nationalistic empire-building militarism.

The military-industrial-congressional complex has achieved this all but criminally misguided and wasteful goal by using propaganda, Big Lies, fear-mongering, discriminatory exploitation of people who do not have any better opportunities, and the risky and deluded expediency of record levels of debt financing.

Republican leaders have enlisted the support of reactionary conservatives and the Religious Right to advance this agenda by stoking and exploiting divisive hot-button social issues. This tactic has been used to take advantage of the fervor of faithful American religious believers to gain their complicity and propel this empire-building crusade. One of the dishonorably pathetic driving forces behind this misbegotten foreign policy is a narrow goal of making profits on military extravagance and the lack of accountability in Pentagon spending.

One reason our foreign policy is failing is because we portray our "enemies" in caricatures. Diplomatic dialogue has been rejected too often, or we have refused to negotiate fairly. Our partisan politics are organized in such ways that they often lead in the wrong direction. At a time that we need better international partnerships and more good will, we are failing to achieve such goals. We should be providing farsighted development assistance to prevent nations from becoming failed states. We should be helping people who live in extreme poverty in order to staunch instability associated with such degradation. We should stress mutual security and peaceful coexistence with other nations, and deal more effectively with environmental threats that are likely to harm the prospects for peace, prosperity and stability in the future. We should accomplish these things by reducing the spending of huge amounts of money on military overreach.

One result of our being on the wrong track in foreign policy is that we have lost perspective on the real challenges facing our crowded planet. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has failed to play an adequate leadership role in sustainable energy policy, or in international environmental protections, or in initiatives to prevent climate disruptions. We have failed to act as courageous leaders in supporting methods to prevent population overshoot, or doing enough to alleviate poverty around the globe. We have invaded Middle Eastern countries at a high cost in both money and terrible human adversities, with horribly destabilizing outcomes.

This tragedy is an obtuse misdirection of human energies. We spend too much money on aggressive military approaches despite the fact that the biggest foreign policy challenges today are environmental, economic and political, and are not solvable by military means. Our failure to invest more money in foreign assistance as a tool to promote global stability and sustainability is extremely myopic.

Consider the example of the landmark agreement reached in July 2015 about the future of nuclear programs in Iran. This agreement was hammered out after years of diplomacy between the United States, Russia, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Iran. Revealingly, hard-liners in the U.S. have vituperatively opposed this agreement, and this embrace of far-right stances jarringly exposes the extreme positions and contrary attitudes promulgated in the echo chambers of the rabid Republican base. We should rightly choose to elect new representatives who are more moderate and willing to help create a mutually secure world. The chaotic Trump administration is taking us in a high risk wrong direction in this regard.

The intervention by the U.S. Air Force into the civil war in Libya in 2011 was given the name "Operation Odyssey Dawn". Pundits speculated that this name sounded like the name of a ship on the Carnival Cruise Lines, or a bad "Yes" album, or a slithering stripper. A insightful commentator remarked that it is actually a middling good name for a military intervention abroad, because in Homer's *Odyssey*, "Odysseus wandered aimlessly for years, barely escaping one disaster after another, and losing most of his soldiers in the process." We sure do need change we can believe in -- positive change, bold change, and fair-minded change.

A Visualization Exercise with a Poetic Purpose

Visualize standing on the precipice of a commanding viewpoint near the summit of a towering mountain peak. Far below, the invigorating sounds of cascading waters of a clear mountain stream can faintly be heard. The only other sounds near the summit are singing birds and the gentle rustling of the wind in the boughs of evergreen trees below. "Here," said Zorba the Greek in a similar spot, "a gentle, sober spirit could cultivate a religious exaltation that would match the stature of men. Neither a precipitous, superhuman peak, nor a lazy, voluptuous plain, but what is needed, and no more, for the soul to be elevated without losing its human tenderness."

From an impressive viewpoint like this, with beautiful natural scenery, it is good to stretch a bit, breathe deeply, and exhale fully. It has been proven that epiphanies occur more frequently in such places. Just ask any person you find hanging out in such a place. Tell them you are writing a manifesto, and that you wonder if they have experienced any epiphanies in the awesome and powerful presence of big vistas in nature. The responses you receive might surprise you -- or confirm your every hunch!

Commanding views and the effect of exertions involved in clambering to such elevated spots can inspire good moments of reflection, and feelings of incipient potential epiphanies. As mountain climbers are aware, expansive

views invigorate the imagination. A naturalist, sitting beside a clear and chortling mountain stream, might add that intimate awareness of the fine details of close-up views can be equally illuminating. Analysis and synthesis together can help us gather our wits and make progress toward intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.

Visualize in your mind's eye being on a vantage point with a view similar to the ones shown on the masthead of the *Earth Manifesto* Home Page and many of the essays in it. A brisk offshore breeze is blowing in the wake of a storm that featured towering cumulus clouds and locally-unusual lightning and thunder. On December 21, 2010, in the early morning hours of the Winter Solstice, a good omen occurred when a full eclipse of the Moon took place. Such an eclipse will not occur for another 500 years on the exact date of the shortest day of the year. Huck and Jim might have supposed it was a propitious sign. Let's claim it was, and hope it turns out to be so!

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 the *Earth Manifesto*. John Fowles. Will and Ariel Durant. The Dalai Lama. Pope Francis. Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. Galileo Galilei. Voltaire. Dante Alighieri. Thomas Paine. Mark Twain. Jack London. John Steinbeck. Ed Ricketts. Bill Moyers. Paul Hawken. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charles Darwin. Albert Einstein. John McPhee. Bill Bryson. Carl Jung. E.O. Wilson. George Lakoff. Ayn Rand. Karl Marx. John Maynard Keynes. Milton Friedman. Joseph Stiglitz. John Kenneth Galbraith. 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 that germinate in the arcane interstices of our minds percolate and evolve. In a sense, they are the collective expression of a boldly progressive strain of evolving thought. These ideas posit that a revolution in our worldviews is necessary to throw off the yoke of business-as-usual activities and to offset arguments of apologists, promoters and enforcers of the status quo, and of retrogressive social and political movements.

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

--- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The revolution we need is a peaceable one within our minds, not a violent one in the streets. Comprehensive understandings of problems and issues are needed, and such understandings 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 that are 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,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain Hannibal, Missouri

April 1, 2018 (First composed on April Fool's Day, April 1, 2011, and updated occasionally thereafter.)

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 ..."

Right on! 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 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 keep the people from uniting to create a fairer, 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 inegalitarian conditions and unsustainable national plans. And by effectively promoting a growing economic insecurity of the vast majority of American workers who must live from paycheck to paycheck, and using policies that minimize minimum wages and squelch labor organizing, they will be able to continue gaining the preponderance of the national wealth for themselves.

Contrasting Strokes of Insight

Imagine being a member of a book club with some friends who are interested in understanding more about how our brains work AND about issues like the insights achieved by people who have had Near Death Experiences. Your group decides to read the following two books, one after another, both of them written by neuroscientists:

(1) *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*, by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. Ms. Taylor had a massive stroke at age 37 that severely impacted her left-brain analytical capabilities, and she gained some amazingly thought-provoking insights from the experience.

(2) *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, by Dr. Eben Alexander. Dr. Alexander had a rare brain infection that suddenly caused him to suffer a full *grand mal* seizure that sent him into a comatose state for a week. During his coma, he felt that he experienced definite proof that there is a God and angels and Heaven and an afterlife.

I'd personally love to hear about the book group discussion that ensues, and what people think and feel about these two descriptions of extraordinary human experiences!

I'll tip my hand: I loved the insights that Jill Bolte Taylor gives to readers, and in contrast, when I read *Proof of Heaven*, it made me think of a clever observation about the 17th century French philosopher René Descartes, whose experiences had led him to definitively proclaim, in effect: "I think, therefore I am. (I think.)"

Jill Bolte Taylor's full recovery took many years, but she gained profound insights by seeing the effects of her left-brain stroke and vividly remembering them once she recovered and was able to share her insights through the critical lens of her scientific knowledge of brain anatomy and neurology. Her rightbrain awareness way of perceiving the world is well worth reading about, or listening to on her TEDx talk.

It is ironic that Dr. Taylor related her holistic expansive right brain awareness and experiences through her left-brain analytical abilities after she had recovered. Most of our observations and judgments are formulated in frameworks of words and language, which is the province of the word-oriented left brain. This is largely how our conscious minds interpret the world. To the left hemisphere of the brain, the perspectives of the image-oriented right brain are substantially a mystery. We are generally unable to access the deeper ways of seeing. But the holistic ways of perceiving that are the province of the right hemisphere of the brain are crucially valuable, so we should make more concerted efforts to comprehend them!