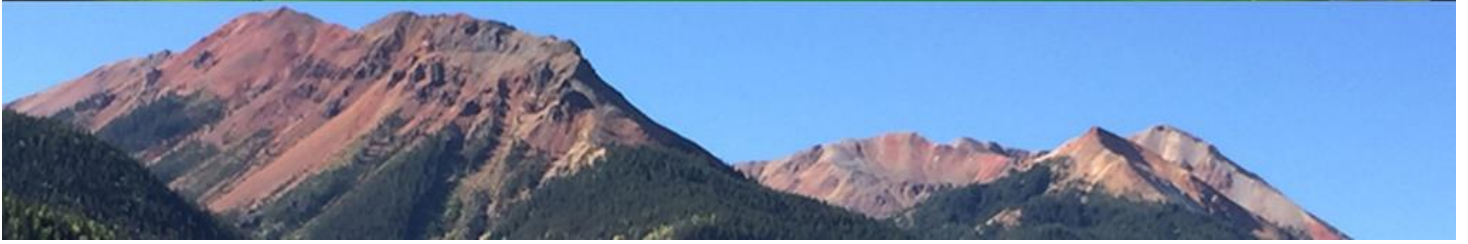


# Earth Manifesto



## A Desultory Assessment of Curious Conundrums

Latest revision: December 24, 2022

These ideas precipitated out of my essay *Huckleberry Finn, the Forty-Niners Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections*, and they demand to be included in this Book Two of the Earth Manifesto.

### An Interlude of Introspection

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!"

This poem led me to muse over the words President Franklin Roosevelt spoke 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 around the world today, and that many millions more are all but certain to find themselves in similar straits as the decades pass and as the human population increases by another one billion people in the next 15 years. Heightened conflicts will inevitably unfold over ideologies, extreme inequities and drastic injustices, and shortages in availability of land, fertile soil, fossil fuels and fresh water. Simultaneously, sea levels will continue to inexorably rise, and climate disasters will intensify, mercilessly wreaking increasing havoc.

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 then would plague humanity from then on."

These philosophic musings reinforced my passionate conviction that humanity must pay closer 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 Rights for Future Generations is needed.

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. These people's motives 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 the tsunami of spending by Super PACS and corporations that was unleashed by the Supreme Court with their governance-corrupting *Citizens United* ruling.

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 take advantage of people and exploit 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!

#### An Incisive and Illuminating Voice Is Heard

Jennifer Siebel Newsom, beautiful-inside-and-out, was the producer, director, scriptwriter and narrator of the important documentary film *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 vital 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, insights, accomplishments, effectiveness, talent or other valuable attributes. Such narrow attitudes affect humanity in far-reaching ways that need to be more clearly understood -- and ameliorated!

The mass media plays a big determining role in contributing to a negative status quo of biased and perversely degrading portrayals of women in our overly patriarchal societies. In significant part, this status quo is a result of the domination of the media by a handful of giant media conglomerates controlled by men in positions of power and ownership and 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 American politics bizarrely ranks 90th in the world in the number of women in Congress or national legislative equivalents. Ninetieth is NOT an adequate showing for us to present to the world in this important gauge of social fairness. Out of a total of 200 countries around the globe, this is a pathetic statistic, revealing one reason why women are treated so unfairly in pay and status and privilege in America. This fact is a sad contributing factor to making our national policies unfair, poorly prioritized, and extremely partisan.

Biases in the media have an effect of hindering progress toward crucial goals like fairly allowing women more influence and better opportunities. Fairer representation for women is needed to improve our policy-making by giving greater consideration to 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 insight is similar to 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 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 helps create deeply ingrained stereotypes of females in our societies, and of males as well. 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 thought-provoking perspectives on male roles and masculinity 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 damning 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 required.

Since females are generally portrayed in a highly sexualized light in movies, on television, in advertising 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.

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 would naturally lead to better representation in the halls of power, and at the ballot box. This would help them gain better opportunities and fairer 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 too severely for too long.

As Will Rogers once said, "We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others." A tragic story is told about many instances of the rights of women having been abrogated in our patriarchal society in the new film *She Said*, which concerns sexual misconduct by powerful men who abuse and/or rape women who have much less power. The film tells the story of sexual harassment and deeply inequitable imbalances in power and sexual dynamics in Hollywood and other places that have allowed powerful men to get away with predatory sexual exploitation. Some of the most notorious of men who have engaged in such egregious sexual misdeeds are Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby and Donald Trump. The film is based on the book *She Said*:

*Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*, which was written by New York Times investigative journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey.

The underground Mole's spouse spells out the underlying situation succinctly: "Our societies have been dominated by sexist, male-domineering, inconsiderate, prejudiced, authoritarian and backward-looking folks who have formed uncompromising coalitions with wealthy reactionaries, 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 or give you my permission!"

Thousands of women in the U.S. become pregnant every year after being raped. Many 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 an unwanted child fathered by the rapist. This represents an unbelievably reprehensible miscarriage of justice.

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, health, rights to personal freedom, and ability to exercise a reasonable degree of self-determination in their lives.

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. She later sought assistance from a military chaplain, and the priest told her that "it must have been God's will for her to be raped." He recommended that she attend church more often. That advice was deeply offensive! 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 was 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 Robertson and his twisted ilk: Your brains are playing tricks on you. Don't believe everything you think! Your bigoted beliefs and delusional perspectives and hubristic attitudes seem to extend far deeper than mere insensitivity, and toward consequentially malicious intent. The goddess Nemesis watches intently, and is becoming agitated.

Pat Robertson should be marginalized for such attitudes rather than being allowed to preach them on a national platform. When he and those like him spew 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 and opportunities, and a salubrious modicum of liberation.

People on the right of the socio-political spectrum strive to gain power by exploiting the resentments, prejudices, gullibility, fears, paranoia and parochial religious convictions of the people. Some folks on the political left may be guilty of similar vices, but at least their agenda is not so brazenly and narrowly focused on the harsh expediency of 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 positive 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, hypocrisy, intentional obliviousness and disingenuous claims made to further skew priorities, and mislead people to false 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 us 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, hypocrisy detection and emotion manipulation, and the eminent value of common sense fairness and cooperative problem solving.

### 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 frame of being -- for this sometimes particularly 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 engravings on metallic pages from the Deity level to the level of revelatory 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 outrageous 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 find ways to 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 reasonable conclusion to reach 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 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, including anthropogenic climate disruption, resource depletion, the extinction of many species, rapid population growth and dire poverty. Each and every person should feel a larger responsibility for supporting such goals. **Note to wealthy people: you can afford to do a lot more!** Pillars of our communities, please agree to progressive taxation 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 activated 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 steeply graduated, and provide more funding. It is an inadequate plan to leave such positive goals to the vicissitudes of voluntary philanthropy. This reform will make sure that the people who can most easily afford to help make our societies fairer and healthier will 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 -- and a greater willingness to protect it. Parks and open spaces improve our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, so they deserve better protections. This understanding is an idea that originated with Parks Victoria in Australia, and is now part of the U.S. National Park Service's 5-year *Healthy Parks, Healthy People Strategic Plan*. This commendable effort acknowledges the role parks play in contributing to social wellbeing and the sustainability of the planet.

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 critical natural areas for short-term private profiteering, just as it should not abandon art, science, good public education, honest ethics, endangered species or other aspects of 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!

### 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 toward others, and also an ethical inter-generational responsibility -- hence, again, the need for real strong commitments to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

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 right, but gun owners should be required to be responsible for keeping their guns safe from accidental discharges by their kids, and to refrain from murdering their spouses, 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 reasonable justification, so we should re-authorize the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that was in effect from 1994 to 2004, and implement better gun safety plans.

Another freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights is the free exercise of religion. I personally find it interesting that Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity more than 1,700 years ago, back in the year 313 CE, 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 of 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. This document 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 sets forth a surprising, controversial and 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 a Christian 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 advantageous, so it is better 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 concerns the era of King Tut's father in ancient Egypt, and it is well worth reading.

A virtual marriage of church and state has often throughout history proven to be a dastardly affair. This is why 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 are robust checks and balances 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, right-wing voices are too dominant in almost all established religions. It would be a far safer and more humane world if liberals and moderates in every faith were able to exercise greater influence. Extreme conservatives bring pathological shame to their creeds through intolerant attitudes toward others, and reactionaries 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 (the since deceased) Rush Limbaugh, Fox News political commentators, the disgraced Jerry Falwell, Jr., Mitch McConnell, Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, and members of The Family, a secret Jesus-loving group of fundamentalists who pander to the rich and powerful. In odd ways, these partisans often emulate the repressive Ayatollahs who rule in Iran. They even resemble 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, 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!

### 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 implications of the 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 extraordinarily jealous deity who was being infinitely strict when He subsequently promised in the Ten Commandments to punish children of those who failed to believe faithfully in this tall tale, and to punish these innocents for three or four generations if their parents worshipped any other concept of the divine than the one the Bible proclaims. That's preposterous!

Scholars who study the anthropological and psychological meaning of mythological beliefs give us 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 alternatively that they repress. Lest we dismiss these mythologies too lightly, we should recall that the worldviews 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 inculcated into 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 adequate opportunities to pursue happiness in a reasonably just society characterized by a well-run government with strong voting rights, 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 workers and women and minorities, along with good protections of the environmental commons.

The other American Way is like a bad dream, a system of ruthlessly-enforced inequalities between a 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 and excessively costly healthcare system, an underfunded educational system, a crumbling national infrastructure, a costly and unfair criminal justice system, deep-seated gender and racial discrimination, and foreign wars being fought for resources, ascendancy, diversion and bigger opportunities to make profits at the expense of others while contributing to grave damages to the environment.

#### Another 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 now deceased Antonin Scalia asserted in the *Citizens United* ruling that they did 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." That's laugh-out-loud ridiculous! As the astute Jim Hightower assessed the appearances, he 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." BIG MONEY = NEGATIVE INFLUENCE.

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 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 since 2012 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 interests. 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 fairly 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 buying influence and their spin, ideologies, fear-mongering, and negative attack ads.

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., was a billionaire who contributed over \$400 million to Republican candidates and conservative causes between 2016 and his death in January 2021. Even he had opposed the *Citizens United* ruling. He once 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 -- and then threw in with getting Trump Republicans elected and helped enable them to get away with arrogant abuses of power and flagrant refusals to be held accountable. Subpoena! Adelson's spending completely dwarfs the contributions of millions of regular Americans. Such influence is clearly an impactful and undesirable 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 that allowed prejudiced racism to be institutionalized against African Americans for decades. Right up there with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling made by a conservative Supreme Court that legitimized segregation and ended the post-Civil War Reconstruction. And right up there with the fear-driven and 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 ironically 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 Clarence Thomas, who began his tenure on the high court by failing to ask a single question from the bench in more than nine years, has publicly mocked *stare decisis*, a Latin term meaning "to stand by things earlier decided." It is an outrage that the Supreme Court has made a sudden Trump-stamped overturning of precedents, like the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision that guaranteed women a right to have an abortion.

Stop in the name of love! And stop obstructing progress toward a more reasonably fair, safe and healthy society. Reasonable people call for a new generation of more fair-minded Justices to be given responsibility for fairer jurisprudence. Instead, we got three Trump judges, and precedents are being violated at an alarming rate.

*Gerrymandering plays a big role in our nation's failure to fix inequities by polarizing the populace and preventing reforms. For instance, people in Georgia opposed a new Republican anti-abortion law 49% to 44%, "yet the bill easily cleared the GOP-dominated state legislature." As reported by Mother Jones magazine in May 2019, "Extreme gerrymandering helps insulate GOP lawmakers from any public backlash over their votes."*

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 require 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 Thomas, the wife of Clarence Thomas, is an active leader in the Tea Party and collaborator with insurrectionists. The clever and wily rascal Tom Sawyer uses a broad brush to slather crimson letters on a whitewashed fence; they read, "Impeach Clarence! (And Alito.)"

The billionaire Koch network has been instrumental in supporting several front groups and foundations that pump huge sums of money 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 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, religious fanatics and ideological factions like those involving the Federalist Society and Koch Industries. Many of 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 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. Twelve-year terms would make the Court significantly more responsive to evolving needs and exigencies. Amend the Constitution! Or pass the proposed Judiciary Act to expand the number of Justices on the Supreme Court, and fill the positions with non-partisan and less ethics-deficient judges.

### 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. Our right brains are associated with images, emotions and intuitive understandings, and feminine ways of seeing the world. The left brain is associated with analytical thinking and 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, because they stimulated neural synapses and forged new connections in the analytical left brain. Shlain speculated that this change also 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 denigrate females and diminish their roles in society, in addition to being hyper-competitive, discriminatory, overly patriarchal, pathetically misogynistic and excessively damaging to Nature. And they worship a male God. Strange images of Muslim women wearing veils or full body burqas symbolize this ossified situation. Disrespect of women's rights and dignity, and of 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 issues like this should read *A Feminine Vision of an Achievable Better World: Anima Should Reign!*

### 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 -- and starkly so with the multiple crises of pandemic times since March 2020. 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 suddenly begin to crumble in a breathtakingly short period of time? As the Arab Spring sags under the oppressive weight of authoritarian regimes exerting too much power, and as a global pandemic lays the world low, embraces of positive adaptive change are obviously needed. (Harsh Islamic Shariah law is surely NOT the answer!)

The "pressure-cooker effect" is seen once again to be creating heightened risks of instability. It is surely foolhardy to turn up the heat on a pressure cooker of frustration, resentment, anger and desperation that is stoked by unfairness, corrupt governance, repressive rule, power abuses by corporate entities, and a lack of opportunities, in both Arab societies and 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", also known as the law of parsimony. This principle states that the simplest explanation of any phenomena is often the best. 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 complex ones, that doesn't mean these opinions are accurate. Those who are enamored with simple ideas are often victims of propaganda and indoctrination in false beliefs, and many 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 way of being is to sensibly give 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 and conflicts of interest become more intense around the globe, people with outsized power and influence are ironically becoming more jealously uncompromising. At the same time, sensible 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 favorably consistent with the common good. 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 more than 8 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 better 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 and hyper-manipulative divide-and-conquer demagoguery. It is dangerous for religious folks to champion 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 social 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 may have really been onto something in his observations about cultural shifts related to the increasing use of images in our world today. Affective images on television, YouTube and other sites on 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 rights and prerogatives of women in civilizations ever since.

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!

#### 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 range 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 regarded the Chinese Communist government as brainwashing its citizens. Chinese leaders, like most authoritarian rulers, have freely used scurrilous tactics like suppressing information, attacking and censoring the press, repressing dissent, violently stifling the freedom of expression and covering up wrongdoing. 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 excessive Republican influence by authority-abusing males who deny facts, suppress and distort information, dispute scientific evidence, attack the press and stifle dissent!

Marketing and promotion tend to contain highly manipulative subliminal messages. 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 sexy imagery, simplistic slogans, persuasive testimonials, 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, radio and online, and in newspapers and magazines, tends to indoctrinate us with false values. It in effect enshrines the gods of materialistic consumerism on the highest pedestal of our imaginations. Advertising messages often portray happiness as being 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 glamorizes 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 main means for us to make ourselves feel "cool", 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 and damage ecosystems.

The demand for unneeded things is increased by planned obsolescence, changing fashions, clever product promotion, the encouraging of perceived obsolescence and the disposability of goods. These things stimulate employment and profits, but they result in undesirable waste, excessive harms to the environment, and the undermining of vital initiatives aimed at conserving resources. These outcomes are inimical to all 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 glorifying 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 crucial issues. A sinister side effect of influences like this is to encourage winning at any cost, no matter how unethical.

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 oriented toward materialistic 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.

Sinclair Lewis lent an incisive perspective to this: "Advertising is a valuable economic factor because it is the cheapest way of selling goods, particularly if the goods are worthless."

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. Corporate tie-in toys tend to stunt abilities of young people to engage in activities like spontaneous play. This basically brainwashes 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 the 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.

### 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 shams and deceptions that politicians use to manipulate people, like those that rationalize a highly inequitable new Gilded Age economic agenda or aggressively imperialistic military adventures.

Unfortunately, dishonesty pervades our politics today. Republican presidential candidates in early 2016 hurled charges at each other of "Liar! Liar!", and many people may recall that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid had 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 embarrassing, given that his father George Romney, a former Governor 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 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 amplified.

Mitt Romney refused to provide more information about his tax returns because he knew how bad the optics looked of information about his wealth. Very few honest Americans have had bank accounts in Switzerland, like he once had, or have squirreled money away in tax havens in places like Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. The two tax returns he released showed 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, so yes, he was a big success in evading

payment of his fair share of taxes. (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 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 the future who are being saddled with record levels of federal debt and interest expense obligations 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 rich people have been gaining most of the benefits of our capitalist system for themselves at the expense of working people, the young, students, poor people, those in the middle class and almost everyone in the future. They have done this by using tax avoidance strategies that are perfectly legal, according to 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 strong opposition and severe 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. They say 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 the fall of 2012. His convincing point resonated with the American people when 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 true that President Obama was not able to fix the economy as fast as millions of jobless people would have liked, but this fact was due largely to ruthless efforts by Republicans to sabotage his economic initiatives.

Republicans basically promised at their 2012, 2016 and 2020 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.



## 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 commentators on Fox News and other even more extreme alt-right provocateurs who try to provoke culture wars, and make them worse. The main issues they have exploited are related to illegal immigrants, fears of terrorists, reproductive rights for women, and rights for LGBTQ people. The excessively influential NRA, for its part, nefariously lobbies against any restrictions whatsoever on owning handguns, rifles, assault weapons, high capacity magazines for rapid-fire ammunition, and noise suppressors ('silencers') that can prevent nearby potential victims of becoming aware of imminent danger from a mass shooter.

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 the departed 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 of more than 12 years down the road in 2022. 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 the Republican Party today has coalesced in a defensive

scrum around their top goal of dictating a hard right agenda. They have suppressed the fractious factions that threaten to splinter these public trust-betraying folks, though the intolerant Trump wing seems temporarily to have vanquished establishment Rump Republicans. The fact is offensive to many traditional Republicans that Trump gained ascendancy 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-Black, anti-Muslim, anti-gay, and opposed to protections of the environment and precautionary climate action. It also rankles many people that Trumpers stand against the rights for women to make reproductive decisions about their own destinies. While the establishment wing 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 witnessed a stunningly contradictory and amazingly obtuse rejection of the recommendations of the Republicans who did the soul searching. Sometimes it really does seem, oddly, that many Republicans resemble ideological Texas education dogmatists, who prefer to prevent people from learning 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, chairman of the Republican National Committee at the time, 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 to his career 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 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 described 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 were 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 thus, in effect, joined the movement to build walls, intensify efforts to take women's reproductive rights away, prevent sensible gun regulations and double down on regressive tax breaks. 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 the rump group of establishment conservatives lost control of the Party, 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 this 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 extremely unfortunate outcome for humanity, a devious hubris-filled bullying selfish greedy demagogue managed to win the presidency, and we all are suffering the on-going negative consequences.

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 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 critical of independent expenditure groups, including the anti-tax Club for Growth, because they try to play kingmaker in the candidate selection process, and outside groups contribute to creating a splintered Congress with little social cohesion. One undesirable result is 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 reminds me 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!

#### 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 common 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 general welfare. 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, inequitable national planning and fraudulent activities, all of which contributed to wreaking wide-reaching harm on billions of people worldwide during the 2008-9 financial crisis and recession.

Economic fundamentalists like 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 should 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. These executives rigorously control headcount in the workforce, and externalize many costs onto taxpayers and people in future generations.

Canadian author Naomi Klein writes 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 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 fairer and smarter 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."

Before the pandemic began, I wrote: "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 in the next few 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 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 results in 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 wiser 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 propagating such devious spin, wealthy interests have succeeded in getting very low tax rates for rich people and giant corporations for almost four decades, and in imposing a degree of austerity on others.

Since all economic activities are intrinsically affected by the prevailing rules that are established, we would be wise to create fairer rules and adopt better practices and priorities. Intelligent incentives should be put into place to achieve socially desirable goals. Pragmatic and optimal solutions for society as a whole should be developed. All people in the future 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 interests receive, even in the face of high agribusiness profits and costly levels of federal debt.

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

--- Mark Twain

### 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 health and 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 boosting of profits. And cunning 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 social and environmental justice. One fair solution would be to require investors to pay small transaction fees on all Wall Street activities 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, odd accounting gimmicks, and the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling that allows 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 important yet widely misunderstood. In a system of progressively graduated taxes, every person pays the same amount of tax on every level of their income. Every person who makes an Adjusted Gross Income of \$1 million, for example, pays the same amount of tax on the first \$50,000 of their taxable income 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. This rigging is judged secure by the scoundrel riggers!

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!

#### Further Reflections on Republican Follies

The astute political commentator 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, *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."

E.J. Dionne said back then 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."

Some 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 white nationalism and who have been conditioned to 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 don't 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 had 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 almost 140 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 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 -- a

slimy man who was a colleague of the communist-baiting demagogue Joseph McCarthy. Trump was also enamored with speeches Adolf Hitler made between 1919 and 1939. His first wife Ivana once said he kept the book of these speeches collected in *My New Order* by his bedside, so he had not been taught normal social values like 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."

Rick Wilson, author of *Everything Trump Touches Dies: A Republican Strategist Gets Real About the Worst President Ever*, makes the poignant point that the GOP 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 are being sown. Their propaganda and the extremely anti-egalitarian 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 rejected.

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

But Trump managed to win, with the help of Russian interference in the election, and then the American people were stuck with a bitter interlude of chaos, scandal and authoritarian leadership by men who wanted to rashly undermine public health, safety, progress and the common good. And rich people and giant corporations were allowed to continue exerting domineering influence. When Republicans were in control of the Executive branch and the U.S. Senate, they reshaped the Supreme Court by ramming through partisans Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett, who tend to side with rights of corporations over those of people. The resulting outcomes are scary, for they will have long-lasting negative effects on the future.

The Republican Party should try to find a more honest means of governing than by preying on people's economic insecurities and taking advantage of people's grievances and "us versus them" identity politics. It is reprehensible that they implemented debt-financed tax cuts, sabotaged Obamacare, and did such a poor job at controlling the pandemic, and that they engaged 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 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 5-4 ruling by the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case in January 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 and 2020 national elections? The problem caused by dark money tragically got much, much worse! The tsunami of dark money today is, in effect, reducing the influence of tens of millions of Americans.

There are two competing subsets of this subversion of the public good. One of them, 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 corporate entities. 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 drastically 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 a kernel of truth. 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 healthcare, education, opportunity, income and wealth, and the world is out of balance due to wasteful uses of resources and environmental degradation. The blame belongs with both parties in our political duopoly system, but conservatives deserve 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 a San Diego Civic Center building: "The noblest motive is the public good." Franklin 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." Let's keep in our hearts a high regard for the public good!

#### A Digression on Family Planning

The number of human beings alive on Earth reached 8 billion people in November 2022. The environmental and social 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 indicate that there will likely be 10 billion people on Earth soon after the year 2050, and just over 11 billion in 2100. The population in the U.S. will probably increase from about 333 million today to something like 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, and dash us into limits. 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 structural racism in our society and the racial biases 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 great time to establish precedents of fairer treatment of minorities! Duh.

Inequities in opportunity, legal justice and incarceration have been increasing drastically in recent decades, 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!

Males play big roles in getting women pregnant, yet many of them uncompassionately and irresponsibly make efforts to evade obligations that result for any children produced. Many are also, offensively, supporters of policies that deprive women of their right to make a decision to choose whether or not to have a safe and legal abortion. If men were ones who got pregnant, abortion would be regarded as sacred. Such double standards are unacceptable.

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 almost QUADRUPLE! 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, shelter 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 millions of 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, along with the need for cooperation to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of Earth's ecosystems. Right now, the shortcomings of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development are turgid, indeed, and sadly Brazil under the Trump-like Jair Bolsonaro joined the mass psychosis trend toward right-wing rule. 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, political unrest, violent conflicts, 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 reduce rates of population growth and find better ways to mitigate these problems. And we must figure out how to run sustainable societies that are not dependent on economic schemes that require endless growth in the number of people in the populace.

Consensus expectations once 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, most of the environmental and social problems that face humankind will become critically worse. The best plan would be to strongly support plans and policies that help ensure a better quality of life for those alive, and also promote 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, social security, maternal healthcare, contraception and family planning services in all nations. People everywhere should work together to accomplish this goal.

There has been stubborn opposition to Planned Parenthood in the both houses of Congress in the past dozen years, due to the election of many extreme conservatives in Congress and state legislatures. 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 spending in its clinics is related to providing services that are vitally important to women's health. Only 3% of the budget for Planned Parenthood is spent on providing abortion services. Roughly one-third of its spending is devoted to contraception services, another third for the testing and treatment of sexually-transmitted diseases. Almost a third is spent for cancer screening and prevention and other needed health services. These services are vital for millions of low-income women and teenagers, so opposition to Planned Parenthood is a perverse form of gender and class discrimination and paternalistic prejudice. Extremist attitudes and agendas should not be allowed to dictate national policies.

Contraception helps prevent sexually transmitted diseases, so support for expanded contraceptive services is important for the overall health of the people. Contraception also helps prevent pregnancies. The main reason any woman has an abortion is because she has become pregnant when she didn't want to be. By preventing pregnancies, the use of contraceptives prevents tens of thousands of abortions in the U.S. each year. Opposition to contraception by social conservatives is a sexually prudish, socially backward attitude that is basically misogynistic and practically antediluvian, so it should not be given 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 facilitated by a 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 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* ruling, 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, and succeeded in capturing the courts. And then, of course, the excessively political and out-of-mainstream far right conservatives on the Supreme Court ruled to overturn abortion rights in June 2022.

It had been heartening 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 fortunately prevailed for a while, and recognition was given 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."

But since the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court by Republican partisans in the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections, and of Amy Coney Barrett to replace the honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg during early voting in the 2020 elections, anti-choice zealots in states with Republican-dominated legislatures have been passing a slew of unconstitutional bans in states including Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio

and Missouri. These states are unsurprisingly ones that have the extreme structural unfairness of having among the fewest numbers of women in positions of power and political influence. This is wrong.

Notably, an outrageously misogynistic abortion ban was passed in Alabama that threatened doctors who perform abortions with 99 years in prison. The law was passed by 24 white males in the state legislature. Having men dominate politics in the Deep South is extremely unfair and unrepresentative of the people, being that more than half of the population in Alabama are women, and more than a quarter are black. The Alabama legislature is a terribly poor representative of the best interests of women and black people. This shines a glaring light on deep structural corruption in Alabama politics, which has foundations in patriarchal sexism and slavery-era racism.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez succinctly stated her feelings about these things while Trump was in power: "What angers me about the GOP's attempts to turn the United States into a far-right Christian theocracy is how dishonest they are about it. At least be forthright about your desire to subvert and dismantle our democracy into a creepy theological order led by a mad king." I encourage readers to watch the inspiring documentary about progressive impulses revealed by the 2018 Democratic primary contests in *Knock Down the House*.

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 becoming 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.

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." It is unfortunate that opposition to contraception is affiliated with male-domineering, women-demeaning, manipulative and control-obsessed ideas about females and sexuality.

Sexual drives are basic to 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.

When 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 restriction was at odds with basic philosophies 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 by the Hyde Amendment, a similar law that applied domestically. 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 executive order prohibited foreign NGOs 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. He stubbornly opposed legislating racial integration in the Civil Rights Act and enforcing suffrage through the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He was an obstructionist who relished his nickname, "Senator No." He fought in the Senate from 1973 to 2003 against what he considered to be liberalism, opposing feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, disability rights, access to abortion, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and even 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 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 far-right Republicans who wield excessive power in Congress 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. Unsafe abortions are those performed by an individual without necessary skills, or in an environment that doesn't conform to minimum medical standards, or both. The World Health Organization identifies the availability of safe abortion options as one of seven necessary ways to provide quality reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health care.

In Brazil, many pregnancies are unplanned because politicians there have made access to contraception services severely limited. Many Brazilian women would have chosen to terminate a pregnancy during the Zika virus health epidemic because they do not want to have a child afflicted with the associated horrible birth defect known as microcephaly, but they were 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.

### The Need to Defend People's Rights

Consider this question: Shouldn't every woman have a right to protect herself by using contraceptives to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies? Religious fundamentalists, along with 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, the termination of any pregnancy, and other prerogatives. 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 rights to decide for themselves in matters that consequentially affect their lives. And because economic fundamentalists oppose fairer and more progressive national tax plans, strong pressure is heartlessly put on cutting social programs that help women and children. Republicans are turning out to be worse villains in this regard than any previous American 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 "pro-life" and committed to saving human beings, we would start with ones who have already been born and are living challenging existences, rather than stubbornly defending the right of an embryo to survive just as soon as a woman's egg is fertilized by a sperm.

"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 in 2010, they and their bastard offspring the deceitfully named Freedom Caucus have acted as driving forces 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 Title X Family Planning 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 can't afford the services available to women who have more money. Title X 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 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 have traditionally tried to slash funding from the Children's Health Insurance program that promotes good nutrition and health for children. 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, with social conservatives having launched a veritable cluster bomb of restrictions against abortions, their priorities seem forebodingly clear: they care much more about a fusion of eggs and sperm and their own power and 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 "conservative" 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 Constitution was established, as stated in its Preamble: to promote the general welfare!

### 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 Planned Parenthood provides are for abortions. When challenged, his office stated, "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 advantageous in 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.

We should give higher priority to saving human beings who have already been born, rather than defending the right of a clump of cells to survive as soon as an ovum is fertilized. It is a damning indictment of ideologues who defend absolute protections for clumps of pre-conscious cells when these partisans show uncompromising 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 on-going 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, wetlands, 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 people stoking culture-war conflicts to undermine sensible approaches to dealing with them.

#### A Digression on Words and Language

The Muslim world is outraged about having any image 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 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 critical issues like committing ourselves and our societies to religious tolerance, 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". Paine's benevolent goal in all his writings was to improve the condition of common people and deliver them from ignorance, oppression, poverty and hardship. He tried to do this by advocating the blessings of fair and good governance. Like the famous Voltaire, he 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 fictitious and ridiculous. 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, word-oriented, warrior-culture focused, male-championing, materialistic and wantonly exploitive of 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, religious beliefs, philosophies, abstract concepts 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, contain deep perceptual predispositions, inherent presuppositions and a subjectivity of notions. These are what John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts referred to as personal "warps". Reality might not, in fact, be what it seems, and its dimensions are beyond our full comprehension. This is true in terms of every thing 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, propaganda and even outright falsehoods also influence our comprehension. Words and languages themselves affect our perspectives, subtly distorting our perceptions of reality and our experiences and circumstances.

### Lightning Illuminates the Dark

Mark Twain was a master of telling stories and tall tales. In an article in *Newsweek* titled "Our Hippest Literary Lion", 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 and 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 the people to go along with the sordid, tragic and excessively costly circumstances that contribute to causing violent conflicts.

As Sun Tzu proclaimed in *The Art of War*, "All warfare is based on deception." 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 since the Second World War. 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 main 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 revealed 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 deceive 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 came to light at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These pictures revealed that such activities were *Standard Operating Procedure*, as was revealed in Errol Morris' documentary film by that name. Other forms of "perception management" have been used as propaganda tools, including the demonizing of foreign leaders, exaggerating threats from abroad, manipulating the media, and using phony "false flag attacks". During the George W. Bush administration, public viewing and photographing of military caskets 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 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 countries 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 we should show greater restraint in our unending drone bombing campaigns.

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, deceit, 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.

Donald Trump's use of foreign policy intrigues to promote his own personal political interests threw geopolitics into dangerous territory. He should have been convicted in his first impeachment trial and removed from office. And he should now be disqualified from future runs for office due to his violation of our national security interests and his arrogant insolence in breaking rules of law and fundamental tenets of our Constitution. Once he began pushing the Big Lie about widespread election fraud and the election being stolen from him, and engaged in a seditious conspiracy to stay in power, he and his Republican supporters deserved to be sidelined.

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 2015 about the future of nuclear programs in Iran. This agreement was hammered out after years of diplomacy between Iran and the U.S., Russia, China, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Revealingly, hard-liners in the U.S. vituperatively opposed this agreement, and this embrace of far-right stances jarringly exposed the extreme positions and contrary attitudes promulgated in the echo chambers of the rabid Republican base. Thank God a solid majority of the people rightly chose to elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the November 2020 elections. This increased hopes for more moderate stances and a greater willingness to help create a mutually secure world. The chaotic Trump administration took us in a high-risk wrong direction in this regard, and tensions are dangerously ratcheting up around the world.

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. An 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.

I stumble to an organizational conclusion to this collection of thoughts right here, pending the next round of revisions. I try to imagine anyone having read this book in its entirety. Whatever!

Truly,

Tiffany Twain

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