



A Scathing Critique of Misguided and Misguiding American Leadership

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July 2017, with updates in May 2018

Please give these clear-eyed Big Picture understandings close consideration.

In a bona fide liberty-loving democratic republic, the people are protected from being ruled ruthlessly by wealthy dominion-demanding plutocrats or giant corporations, or by religious fanatics or repressive authoritarian regimes. In order to guarantee the people this optimal populist condition, with broader freedoms and truer social justice and fairer environmental justice and more socially benign peace reigning across the land, we must refocus our national priorities.

To really improve matters, we need more widely shared prosperity and honestly improved security for the populace, and we need adequate investments in reasonable environmental protections and the social safety net. And we need these things at the same time that we should mandate a more nearly balanced budget. To achieve these common good goals, we need real significant reforms, NOT merely a new salvo of rich people-imposed austerity measures and lower taxes on the highest levels of income.

Inequality today is more extreme than it has been at almost any time in the history of the USA. The gargantuan gap between the rich and the vast majority of everyone else is worse than it has been at any time since the Roaring Twenties, and this state of affairs will continue to become more seriously extreme for a variety of reasons, according to the French economist Thomas Piketty in his blockbuster tome on economics, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

Fairness is a founding principle in a democratic republic, so this spiking degree of inequality between the Few and the Many threatens our democracy and our collective well-being, and it also puts our personal freedoms and individual and national security at greater risk. Peaceful coexistence in American society will not be achieved through more unjust laws or more severe austerity measures, or by slashing government spending on healthcare, education, the social safety net, physical infrastructure or sensible protections of the environment.

Barack Obama said increasing inequality is a "defining challenge of our time" because of the daunting implications of the observation made by the brilliant Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis: "We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

If *We the People* are truly committed to pledging allegiance to an indivisible democratic republic that really stands for liberty and justice for all, then we need to remedy the extremity of the imbalance between rich and poor, and heed the cautionary words penned by the famous Greek essayist Plutarch some nineteen centuries ago, when he declared that such an imbalance "is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics."

In their fascinating book *The Lessons of History*, the great historians Will and Ariel Durant wrote that, when the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest becomes too extreme in a country, as has happened periodically throughout the centuries, such an "unstable equilibrium generates a critical situation" that results in either "legislation redistributing wealth or revolution distributing poverty." It seems obvious that the smartest choice for good leaders would be to champion plans that would reduce inequality through intelligent legislative actions

guided by fair-mindedness, honestly egalitarian national policies, precautionary principles, farsightedness and greater empathy for the suffering of those whose interests are under-represented in our societies.

The wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker Solon is credited for having saved his country from debilitating strife by forging sensible compromises between the rich and the poor at a juncture in history when inequalities of wealth and power had reached extremes in ancient Athens. Solon is regarded as "the father of democracy" for the fair-minded progressive reforms he instituted way back in the 6th century BCE. Historians say that Solon repealed almost all of earlier harshly draconian laws that had been enacted by a legislator named Draco.

Today, inequalities between the top 1% and the masses of poor people and those in the declining middle class are reaching historically unprecedented new extremes in the USA. This state of affairs is creating critical risks that require bold, honest, intelligent, farsighted, democratically fair and Solon-wise reforms to prevent our great nation from sliding into dire straits and violent strife. Unfortunately, "conservative" politicians have seized power in the federal government and in a majority of the states, and they are taking steps to impose draconian austerity on the populace to defend the status quo of excessive privileges for elites and low tax rates on the highest levels of income, capital gains and inheritances.

Nowhere is this neo-Draconian approach more pronounced than in healthcare reform efforts, where right-wing ideologues are striving to roll back progressive steps taken by President Obama, promoting insidiously draconian new tax and healthcare legislation that would slash federal spending on Medicare and Medicaid and allow increased discrimination against poor people and women and children and old people and anyone with "preexisting conditions" - in order to give huge tax breaks to rich people.

In a cynical modern twist, the Draconian Party is trying to spin their harsh policies as having "heart", giving lip service to populist concerns while brazenly imposing more regressive tax breaks. Their other top priorities are to ram through narrowly-focused corporate priorities, reduce protections of the health and well-being of people who work for a living and curtail their collective bargaining rights, expand opportunities for artificially inflating private profits by allowing pollution and climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emission costs to be "socialized" (i.e., rashly foisted onto society and people in future generations), and in general to myopically sacrifice public lands and the environmental commons to increase profits and achieve short term-oriented goals.

Senate Republicans have demonstrated a willingness to put tens of millions of American lives at risk by repealing the Affordable Care Act in order to give the ultra-wealthy a massive tax cut. This prompted former president Obama to make an observation that applies much more broadly: "After all, this debate has always been about something bigger than politics. It's about the character of our country -- who we are, and who we aspire to be. And that's always worth fighting for."

In a convincing book titled *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution - Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic*, legal scholar Ganesh Sitaraman expresses the conviction that extreme levels of inequality are existentially dangerous to the continued existence of our democratic republic. A strong middle class, he writes, "inspires a sense of shared purpose and shared fate, without which the system of government will fall apart." Since ancient times, when a small minority of the populace is allowed to become very rich while ignoring large segments of the population that are much worse off, it leads to two undesirable probabilities. The downtrodden may rise up and confiscate the wealth of the rich, or the masses, given little opportunity for social mobility or for improving their prospects, are susceptible to turning to a manipulative demagogue "who would overthrow the government - only to become a tyrant. Oligarchy or tyranny, economic inequality meant the end of the republic."

Risks of revolution also rise when rich people impose their rule with little regard for poor people and those in the middle class, especially when they disenfranchise a majority of the populace and effectively enslave them with excessively opprobrious tight control over wage laborers. In a review of Ganesh Sitaraman's book, Angus Deaton observed in his article *It's Not Just Unfair: Inequality Is a Threat to Our Governance*: "Sitaraman reviews many possible correctives, including redistribution to reduce inequality; better enforcement of antitrust laws; campaign finance reform to break the dependence of legislators on deep pockets; compulsory voting; and restrictions on lobbying, including the possibility of 'public defender' lobbyists to act on behalf of the people." Let's seize the bull by the horns and address this crucial challenge by adopting these ideas!

Think about the 2014 article *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, which was written by a billionaire entrepreneur named Nick Hanauer. Addressed as a Memo to "My Fellow Zillionaires", Hanauer expressed this provocative understanding in his Memo:

"At the same time that people like you and me are thriving beyond the dreams of any plutocrats in history, the rest of the country -- the 99.99 percent -- is lagging far behind. The divide between the haves and have-nots is getting worse really, really fast. In 1980, the top 1 percent controlled about 8 percent of U.S. national income. The bottom 50 percent shared about 18 percent. Today the top 1 percent share about 20 percent; the bottom 50 percent, just 12 percent."

"But the problem isn't that we have inequality. Some inequality is intrinsic to any high-functioning capitalist economy. The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. Our country is rapidly becoming less a capitalist society and more a feudal society. Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution."

"And so I have a message for my fellow filthy rich, for all of us who live in our gated bubble worlds: Wake up, people. It won't last. If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

To achieve a more peaceable world, we need to create more just societies with more fairly shared prosperity and more broadly shared security and freedom. And our concept of freedom should be expansive and more inclusive, not merely the freedom to spend unlimited amounts of money on political influence, or the freedom to not buy medical insurance, or the unrestricted freedom to own guns. President Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated such an expansive vision of freedom in his 1941 State of the Union address, when he declared that there are four fundamental freedoms that people "everywhere in the world" ought to enjoy: the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear." Stand and Deliver, guys -- give the people expanded freedoms!

Excessively inegalitarian societies become unstable and are unsustainable. An adequately strong social safety net is needed to provide a social insurance policy against violent revolution, and it is risky and wrongheaded to promote ideological rationalizations that serve to make inequality in our society worse and worse and worse.

A Focus on the Common Good, Properly Understood

We should all laugh together at the perceptive insight in a wry cartoon that appeared in the New Yorker: "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." An existential Ha! Humor is good for the soul, but make no mistake about it, these are trying times for our souls, and the information and perspective in this essay could change the world, and do so in a Solon-wise way that could positively and providentially resolve our unfolding national nightmare and set our country onto a more star-spangled course than the direction in which it seems to be headed today. At this crucial juncture in history, American citizens cannot afford to shrink from engaging and participating in our democratic decision-making. So please read on for context, in advance of a radically good common sense proposal.

Rich people want to pay less taxes, and thus scrimp on the safeguards represented by social insurance policies that could save their own necks from revolutionary strife, so they are refusing to pay increased marginal tax rates on the highest levels of their earnings, even for some of the best investments they could make for society in greater well-being for everyone concerned.

The most egregious instance of this is found in the current Republican drive to slash spending on the social safety net and protections of public health and the environment, while at the same time ramping up military spending and cutting taxes to mainly benefit the highest income earners. This is dangerously misguided policy.

Think about the evocative words attributed to Martin Luther King Jr., "**Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane.**" Then recognize the deep-seated injustice involved in the plan

formulated in 2017 by Republicans in Congress that would have given everyone earning more than \$250,000 per year a big tax break on their investment income, which would amount to more than \$700 billion in the next 10 years. This generosity would have been financed by slashing Medicaid and medical insurance subsidies for low-income folks, and it would have resulted in an estimated 22 million people losing medical insurance coverage. This would have the egregious effect of severely exacerbating injustices in our society.

In the article by Angus Deaton *It's Not Just Unfair: Inequality Is a Threat to Our Governance*, the author observes, "I would add the creation of a single-payer health system, not because I am in favor of socialized medicine but because the artificially inflated costs of health care are powering up inequality by producing large fortunes for a few while holding down wages; the pharmaceutical industry alone had 1,400 lobbyists in Washington in 2014. American healthcare does a poor job of delivering health, but is exquisitely designed as an inequality machine, commanding an ever-larger share of G.D.P. and funneling resources to the top of the income distribution."

"There has never been a rollback of basic services to Americans like this ever in U.S. history," said Bruce Siegel, president of America's Essential Hospitals, a coalition of about 300 hospitals that treat a large share of low-income patients. "Let's not mince words. This bill will close hospitals. It will hammer rural hospitals, it will close nursing homes. It will lead to disabled children not getting services. ... People will die."

Healthcare policy decisions may be the most important and broadly affective of all decisions made by our leaders, so they should work together more fairly, more honorably and more honestly, and represent a broader range of constituencies than just rich people, CEOs and lobbyists for medical insurance companies, fossil fuel conglomerates, the pharmaceutical industry, the military-industrial complex, and Monsanto, Dow Chemical and many others. Instead, Republican members of Congress have rammed through legislation that gives huge tax breaks to the highest income earners at the expense of tens of millions of Americans. They have done this without holding a single public hearing, and crafted the bill in the Senate in secret, behind closed doors, with a committee of 13 men -- and no women. This is a form of power abuse by Strict Father Republicans today that is a pathological aspect of *The Fourteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power*.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office evaluated this ill-conceived Republican Trumpcare plan and found that 15 million people would likely lose medical insurance by the end of 2018, and a total of 22 million in the next 10 years, due to the provisions of the plan that slash federal spending on Medicaid and health insurance credits for low income people while giving huge tax breaks to wealthy people. So Majority Leader Mitch McConnell cooked up an almost equally pathetic plan and tried to ram it through the Senate soon in July 2017.

One of the criticisms Republicans have of the Affordable Care Act is that it requires individuals to have health insurance. They are taking this politically expedient stance to generate fervor in opposition to Obamacare, but it is as though they don't understand the concept of insurance itself. Will Republican politicians now turn their sights on those onerous requirements for all drivers to have vehicle insurance? Do they not understand the concept of spreading risk over a big pool, which is a central tenet of the insurance business? Allowing people to save money by not having vehicle insurance would drive up the cost of insurance for everyone else who is more responsible and does buy insurance. In health insurance matters, every person is also subject to having accidents, and in addition there are many other afflictions and calamities that can befall anyone at any time.

It would be a much better plan to create a fairer and more effective system by taking into account the needs and perspectives of all constituencies. A smarter single payer plan like a Medicare-for-all type system, for instance, would be vastly better because profiteering on insurance and prescription drugs would not be the main goal, and tens of millions of people would not be left behind without access to affordable medical care. Medical adversities are already the leading cause of bankruptcies in the U.S., and it is crazy to create an expanding necessity for tens of millions of uninsured people in desperate circumstances to get their care in emergency rooms, which provide just about the most expensive care possible. And who pays for this? Yep, everyone else that ever goes to a doctor or a hospital, in outrageously expensive medical bills and unnecessarily high insurance premiums. This sad aspect of our capitalist system resembles some sort of perverse socialist scam.

Meanwhile, Republicans were scheming to cut taxes, and finance this by cutting healthcare and borrowing more money, and they finally achieved this just before Christmas 2017, without a single vote of support by politicians

from the Democratic side of the aisle. This is both heartless and foolish. It is a national disgrace that the USA does not assure healthcare to all its citizens, as almost every other developed country on Earth does.

Former president Barack Obama offered a scathing critique of the Senate healthcare bill for its "fundamental meanness." He wrote in a Facebook post, "The Senate bill, unveiled today, is not a health care bill. It's a massive transfer of wealth from middle-class and poor families to the richest people in America." ... "Simply put, if there's a chance you might get sick, get old, or start a family -- this bill will do you harm," he wrote. "It would raise costs, reduce coverage, roll back protections, and ruin Medicaid as we know it, according to healthcare providers and non-partisan analysts." It would also dramatically reduce healthcare services for millions of low-income women who get their medical care from Planned Parenthood clinics.

"Those with private insurance would experience higher premiums and higher deductibles, with lower tax credits to help working families cover the costs, even as their plans might no longer cover pregnancy, mental health care, or expensive prescriptions," Obama wrote. "Discrimination based on pre-existing conditions could become the norm again. Millions of families will lose coverage entirely."

Mr. Obama stated simply that "We didn't fight for the Affordable Care Act for more than a year in the public square for any personal or political gain -- we fought for it because we knew it would save lives, prevent financial misery, and ultimately set this country we love on a better, healthier course."

The greater good and expanding well-being should be higher priorities in existentially important healthcare decisions that our leaders are making, because they concern all 325 million Americans and affect one-sixth of the entire economy. These decisions should not be made without public input, in secret, and they should not be allowed to emphasize the fortunes of the rich and powerful over the interests of poor people and those in the middle class and most women and children.

Republican politicians in Congress focused intensely in 2017 on trying to cook up a Trumpcare plan that would have severely exacerbated inequality in our society by cutting taxes on capital gains of high-income earners, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. They would have done this mainly by slashing federal spending on the Medicaid program, foisting the obligations onto already strapped state governments that cannot be relied upon to responsibly handle the increased burden. Sensationally, nearly 50% of children born each year and their mothers receive medical care through Medicaid, and the proposed plan would have seriously harmed them, as well as people with disabilities and tens of millions of people who would be offered insurance plans with more stingy benefits and higher deductibles.

To understand the magnitude of proposed Republican tax breaks in the first Senate plan, the 400 richest families in the nation would have received an estimated \$33 billion in reduced taxes in the coming decade. This is equivalent to the amount the federal government spends on the Medicaid expansion in Alaska, Arkansas, Nevada and West Virginia, which covers more than 700,000 people in total. It is scandalously sensational that the top Republican priority is to give more money to rich people, who have no conceivable need whatsoever for this politically generated, debt-financed windfall.

This was an awful, mean and cruel plan, for it would have resulted in millions of Americans being subjected to dire degrees of increased health insecurity and heightened risks of dying without medical insurance, and this would be done simply to give wealthy people lower tax rates on investment income. A review of the history of tax rates on capital gains would reveal that rich people are already getting a scandalously good deal as it is.

Crucial Ecological Issues

Make no mistake about it, there is an even worse aspect of the Republican agenda and the shrewd schemes that they are pushing to reward hyper-privileged partisans for their political support and campaign contributions. This is in the arena of protections of the environment. Republican politicians propose to slash spending on protections of clean water, clean air, food and drug safety, environmental science, the Environmental Protection Agency, and efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. By these actions, these *Conservatives without Conscience* are condemning countless numbers of people right now, and for all future years and decades and centuries, to radically increased risks of more calamitous hardships, resource shortages, deprivations and natural disasters.

The harshly negative impacts of these retrogressive initiatives on human health can be categorized into a broad array of effects that include climate change factors like extreme heat, severe weather, air pollution, diminished water quality, fresh water shortages, food supply disruptions, spiking risks of diseases, exposures to increasing amounts of allergens, and a worsening degradation of the environmental commons that serves as an underpinning for overall human and biotic well-being. It is folly to court such catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our Mother Earth.

Pope Francis issued an important ecological encyclical on climate change in June 2015. In it, he made a strong moral case for the need to mobilize people of faith and others into action to seriously address climate change. The Pope centered his environmental protection theology on the biblical creation story in the book of *Genesis*, in which God is said to have created the world and declared it "good" and charged humanity with its care. And Pope Francis tied the ongoing environmental crisis to economic concerns and the exploitation of the planet by a wealthy minority, emphasizing the social injustices that these trends cause to the detriment of the downtrodden and the poor and powerless. Jesus Christ!

Pope Francis has called for climate action as a moral imperative due to the fact that the perilous effects of global warming will be most devastating for poor people and folks in vulnerable developing countries, who happen to be contributing the least to factors that drive climate change. Smarter and fairer policies are needed to achieve truer environmental and social justice. All developed countries should make bigger contributions to the Green Climate Fund to mitigate the impacts of climate injustices. Most of all, the United States should contribute more, because it has been responsible more than any other country for the increasingly rapid build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in the past century.

The smartest path forward would be to implement Pigouvian incentives such as an egalitarian carbon fee-and-dividend plan that would serve to reduce the profligacy of wasteful usages of fossil fuels. Plans like this would have the effect of giving "extraordinary encouragements" and "extraordinary restraints" to all businesses and individuals. The basis of this idea was first advocated by the insightful British economist Arthur Cecil Pigou, who promoted the idea of implementing subsidy incentives and tax disincentives because such mechanisms in general have the salubrious effect of properly reflecting both social benefits and costs to society that are not accounted for in private transactions, and thereby influence activities and behaviors in sensible ways. A carbon fee-and-dividend plan, progressively designed, would have the additional benefit of helping reduce inequalities in our society by returning some of the carbon fees generated to all Americans on a highly egalitarian basis.

For more auspicious guidance, we should stop ignoring the largest constituency of all -- every person in future generations -- by making a courageous commitment to a truly fair-minded Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as specifically proposed in the Earth Manifesto.

It should be remembered that Donald Trump and Ivanka, Don Jr. and Eric were all signatories of a full-page ad placed in the *New York Times* in December 2009 that advocated the passage of national legislation to limit emissions of greenhouse gases. The letter succinctly stated: "We support your effort to ensure meaningful and effective measures to control climate change, an immediate challenge facing the United States and the world today. If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet."

Bizarrely, the Trump family has opportunistically flip-flopped on this position, apparently deciding that they prefer the power and money they gain by allowing short-term-oriented profiteers on fossil fuels to dictate our national environmental policies, even though they are aware that the consequences will be "catastrophic and irreversible." This is a Faustian bargain with the devil, and a reflection of naked greed unmasked.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ...

The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones; ...

O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts, And men have lost their reason.

--- William Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar*

"Conservative" leaders seem to want us all to stick our heads in the sand, and instead of making honest vulnerability assessments to the unfolding adverse impacts associated with juiced-up fossil fuel profit-making, they are

dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency, firing environmental scientists, and eliminating the best scientific understandings from government websites.

I implore all politicians to remember the meaning and value of public service, and to consequently keep from sacrificing the future well-being of humanity merely to pander to narrow goals of corporate executives, fossil fuel profiteers, opponents of collective bargaining, gun rights extremists, religious fundamentalists and far-right ideologues like the Mercers and Charles and David Koch. The Koch brother billionaires are exerting more influence over American democracy than almost any other individuals in history. They don't think the Republican healthcare bill is "conservative" enough, and they are "gearing up to target vulnerable Democrats on the ballot in 2018, pledging to spend upwards of \$400 million next year." Senator Kamala Harris indicates that Charles and David Koch "are specifically coming after some of the most effective voices in the fight to save the Affordable Care Act, like my colleagues Senators Chris Murphy and Bill Nelson." The gamesmanship of extremely partisan politics should not overlook human ethics and morality, and the common good should not be sacrificed in the pursuit of money and power.

There are extraordinarily good reasons to cultivate a miraculous healing for the Earth that "awaits this planet once we accept our new responsibility to collectively tend the Garden, rather than fight over the turf." So say Bruce Lipton and Swami Beyondananda in their insightful book *Spontaneous Evolution*.

Seven Theoretically Simple Steps to a Saner Society

This is a digression to recapitulate the most important things we need so as to honestly and fairly Make America Great Again.

(1) Defend the independence of the judiciary from excessively partisan and uncompromising ideological stances in legal decision-making.

(2) Defend the independence of the media from manipulation and suppression. Make sure we live in a world that accepts evidence and facts, not fake news, conspiracy theories, disingenuous misinformation and deeply biased reporting. We cannot let our world become a "post-truth" society fragmented by social media platforms that propagate lies, facilitate emotional hijacking and exploit people's fears and insecurities in election campaigns. Independent investigative reporting is crucially important in our democracy, especially with secretive leaders who play loose with the truth and make extremely partisan and excessively corporate-friendly decisions behind closed doors and in ways that are distinctly contrary to the common good.

(3) Implement a much more egalitarian national tax plan that intelligently features Solon-wise taxation rates that are more progressively structured by being more steeply graduated, with lower rates for everyone on the first \$75,000 in income and higher rates on all income over \$250,000.

(4) Prevent the trend of accumulated wealth becoming dynastic and selfishly aristocratic, like it did for many oppressive centuries in kingdoms of yesteryear. Keep inheritance taxes in place at rates like those in effect before the December 2017 Tax Cuts bill for reasons articulated in Postscript Two of this essay.

(5) End the practice of extreme partisan gerrymandering by creating non-partisan commissions of political independents in every state to re-determine Congressional district boundaries. Take this responsibility away from partisan state legislatures, like some states have done, including New Jersey, Iowa and California. When the responsibility for redistricting lies with partisan state legislatures, the outcomes are generally contrary to the public interest, and often produce congressional districts in which politicians choose their constituents, rather than the other way around. This redistricting action would make running for office more competitive, so more people's interests will be taken into account and respected. Our representatives would thus strive to appeal to broader constituencies, and necessarily become more responsible to all the citizens they represent. This would be one way to honestly and effectively make America greater! See Postscript One for fuller understanding of this issue.

(6) Get Big Money out of the driver's seat in determining who will represent us in our elections and governance. Do this by instituting Clean Elections methods and making sensible reforms of campaign financing laws. Take the step advocated by the organization Move to Amend to accomplish this goal. This would be a good way to achieve the

greater good, properly understood. Republicans tend to all but claim that God regards corporations as being people. Back in 2011, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney smugly declared, "Corporations are people, my friend". I thought, "Oh, is that so?" Well, let's call in the political economists, and the sociologists and historians, and the psychologists and psychiatrists, and let's analyze exactly what kind of person the preponderance of giant corporations resemble in their actions. Conveniently, the insightful professor Joel Bakan has already done clear-eyed research for us on this topic, and he had a *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* handy by his side. Due to their behavior and inherent tendencies, he incisively concluded, corporations would be pathological psychopaths, if thought of as people, because they often act in ways that are manipulative, socially irresponsible, unempathetic, and practically incapable of guilt, remorse, moral rectitude or genuine responsibility for the greater good.

Joel Bakan observed that big corporations are basically designed to externalize costs onto the public. He declared that corporations are "deliberately programmed, indeed legally compelled, to externalize costs without regard for the harm it may cause to people and communities and the natural environment. Every cost it can unload onto someone else is a benefit to itself, a direct route to profit."

Corporations should not be given the full rights in courts of law that are constitutionally assured to real people, for too many abuses of power have been made using rationalizations like the one that says the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights of Due Process and Equal Protection as individuals.

(7) Enact true lobbying reform. There are currently more than 12,000 registered lobbyists in Washington, D.C. who frequent corridors in the halls of power, all of them intent on influencing one of the 535 members of Congress to support some special deal for themselves, often in ways contrary to the common good. And these lobbyists are highly compensated for their amazing success in turning hundreds of millions of dollars of corporate money and Koch billionaire's money and other rich people's money into *hundreds of billions of dollars* of tax cuts and special deals just-for-them, always at the opportunity cost of a fairer modern New Deal for *We the People*. WHAT A GREAT RETURN FOR THEM ON THEIR MONEY! But this is a tragedy for the people! All American citizens are affected by *The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Unfairly Rigged*, so it is high time we all better understood these corrupt aspects of the status quo. Also, check out Earth Manifesto insights contained in *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Concentrate Wealth and Power*, and in *The Fourteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power*.

We need sensible rules and regulations, adequate enforced. We need greater protections of human rights. We need greater freedom from adversities caused by polluters, corrupt dealings, financial fraud, Casino Capitalist ruses and Shock Doctrine Disaster Capitalist outcomes. We cannot afford to "deregulate" by reversing established protections of public health and safety and the environment, nor should we support ruthless efforts that will predictably create a tragedy-of-the-commons capitalistic free-for-all in which humankind treats planet Earth like an enterprise going-out-of-business and in liquidation, rather than a going concern. For better long-term guidance, we need to ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

Understanding Movement Conservatism

The Democratic Party is a coalition of interest groups that share some views and also have many differences of opinions, and Democratic politicians tend to get ahead by succeeding in making compromises and finding acceptable solutions to the problems and challenges experienced by the citizens they represent. Republican politicians, by contrast, are part of a more monolithic structure called "movement conservatism" that has a rigid ideology advocating tax cuts for the rich above all other priorities. Other aspects of this monolithic structure include a captive media like Fox News that parrots the party line almost all the time and promotes alternate facts, deceptive talking points and alternate realities that are at odds with truth, balanced perspective and fair-minded understandings.

This monolithic structure is lavishly supported by a small number of very wealthy people who reward loyalty by politicians who promote their causes. Nearly all Republicans in Congress today are "apparatchiks", or politicians with no principle higher than party loyalty. And such loyalty to chaos-generating Trump may prove to be disastrous for the American people, and even for them, as dissatisfaction grows with their power-abusing ways.

Movement Conservatism has been surprisingly successful in gaining excessively domineering power and control in American society by its unrelenting focus on this overarching goal of giving dominating insider influence to the highest income earners and the wealthiest people, who invest hundreds of millions of dollars in political contributions to scheming politicians to gain billions in tax breaks. This success has been realized by using a veritable litany of corrupt, ideologically uncompromising, power abusing and anti-democratic methods, the most significant of which has been by pushing propaganda that purportedly proves that lower taxes on rich people and giant corporations are the best way to achieve economic growth and the greater good.

This trickle down ideology basically claims that everyone will do better when the rich pay lower taxes. The tautological truth, however, is that everyone will do better when everyone actually does better and the benefits of economic activities and resource exploitation and worker productivity are much more widely shared, rather than when they are excessively monopolized by capitalist elites.

Movement Conservatives disingenuously claim to care mainly about the best interests of the constituents they represent, but in reality they betray them by making unwavering commitments to a far-right agenda of regressively structured tax cuts that heavily favor the well-to-do while imposing austerity measures on the masses. This betrayal contributes to creating a society that has growing inequality of opportunity and wealth, and increasingly widespread economic insecurity.

Movement Conservatism drives a divisive wedge between American citizens by promoting an ideological framework that includes a whole constellation of Strict Father values while undermining opposing Nurturing Parent values of demonstrating empathetic concern for people and protecting them from abuses of power by corporations and governments. Understand this perspective by thinking about this idea, as conveyed in the Original Earth Manifesto in 2004 (Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto):

The extraordinarily far-reaching and increasingly extensive and harmful impacts that humanity is having on the ecosystems of Planet Earth make it critical for us to better understand the moral and pragmatic impulses that drive human beings. All ethical, political and social philosophies and beliefs can be understood in terms of competing family morality worldviews. These are deeply seated archetypes that are correlated in a fascinating way with parenting and child development theories.

Conservatism is characterized by a moral conception that respects strength, strict discipline, male authority, orthodox views, tradition, self-righteousness, and an impulse to dominate and control. It embraces the Strict Father ethic, which involves beliefs that are ironically held by women as well as men. The Strict Father ethic is one of self-reliance, self-responsibility, self-discipline and self-denial, and is associated with a whole constellation of values that revolves around strength and puritanism as right and proper. For instance, those who espouse conservatism champion a very strong military and harsh punishment for wrong-doing; they support the Death Penalty; they advocate laissez-faire doctrines and minimal regulation of business; they demand what is essentially regressive tax reform and tax breaks for the wealthy; they dogmatically espouse a moral rectitude that tries to provide a superior moral justification for authoritarianism; they advocate gun ownership with minimal restrictions; they tend to be puritanical in their sexual views, intolerantly opposing pre-marital sex and homosexuality; fundamentalists among them oppose sex education, contraception, freedom of choice, legalized abortion, and dignity in dying; and they effectively believe in a rigidity of roles for men and women in which men have greater prerogative, privileges, power and control than women.

In contrast, Progressivism is characterized by a moral conception that respects fairness and empathy. It embraces the Nurturing Parent ethic, which highly values helping others, having compassion, supporting programs for social justice, and advocating freethinking, good communication and the empowerment and equality of women. It is associated with a whole constellation of values that revolves around basic human rights. Those who espouse progressive ideas strive to protect people and the environment from inequities, harmful exploitation and unscrupulous business activities; they advocate actions consistent with the common good, like fair progressive taxation, peaceful conflict resolution, tightly controlled military spending, cooperative statesmanship, good neighbor policies, intelligent environmental regulations, a safety net of humanitarian social programs, true justice rather than harsh retributive punishment, the freedom of reproductive choice, increased

safety of firearms that features a ban on public ownership of assault weapons and armor-piercing ammunition, and equal rights for women and men.

These family morality worldviews cannot be judged definitively "right" or "wrong", according to linguist George Lakoff. The main difference is that conservatism is much more committed to achieving and then perpetuating its own ends, regardless of whether the means are fair. Therefore, it is much more willing *to have people suffer harm* so they can be in control and have their greed-driven and power-abusing way.

Now, in the age of immoral, deceitful and emotion manipulating Trumpism, a shrewd demagogue has seized power and is threatening an escalating chaos that could lead to dictatorial abuses of power. *It Can't Happen Here?* "Like hell it can't!"

Conclusion

Survival is the ultimate moral good for our species, and Big Picture perspectives are needed to help ensure our human survival and flourishing. Such perspectives should be comprehensive and should take into account the best understandings of spiritual leaders and deep ecologists and scientists in every discipline. They should not deny the most ethically aware worldviews, or the latest and most accurate scientific understandings.

Survival involves indefinitely sustained biological existence. The human race needs to clearly recognize and respect the fact that we cannot continue to consume much more than can be supplied by natural resources and regeneration and healthy ecosystems. The carrying capacity of damaged ecosystems is less than that of healthy ones, so it is an overarching necessity for us to act to prevent harms to habitats that will upset the providential balance in nature that serves as an indispensable foundation of our flourishing and survival.

"Après moi, le deluge" attitudes did not work out well for the power-abusing nobility in France whose cavalier treatment of the masses provoked the French Revolution in 1789, or for King Louis XVI who was guillotined in January 1793, or for "Let them eat cake" Marie Antoinette, who met the same fate in October of that year. Republican efforts to roll back environmental protections today, and to reject global responsibilities under the Paris Agreement on climate change, are essentially a dead end "Après nous, le deluge" attitude.

Big Picture perspectives should be better informed by a Buddha-like triumvirate of Right Mindfulness and Right Understanding and Right Action, and they should be guided by foresight and respect for the long-term greater good, like that imbued in a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. Greater concern should be given to social justice and environmental justice and the proper stewardship of Creation. Greater respect should be accorded to the compassionate caring of spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama and prophets like Jesus Christ.

The Biblical Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil went extinct, but before doing so, I imagine it having generated a successor species in a majestic Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong. Only by gaining a clearer and more ethical understanding of true right and wrong can we find better ways to create fairer, safer and more sustainable societies. The marvelous Tree of Life itself is facing calamitous threats as humanity obtusely prunes away at twigs, branches and even ungodly portions of the trunk itself, and timber barons are practically salivating at the prospects of prospective profits as they sharpen their saws with the benediction of "conservative" opponents of environmental protections.

At this crucial juncture in human history, it would be wise to honestly review the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report, in which more than a thousand experts in 95 countries had spent four years assessing ecological conditions on Earth. They concluded that human activities were having harmful impacts by unsustainably consuming natural resources, while simultaneously significantly degrading ecosystems upon which we depend. The experts warned that humankind needs to develop new methods of governance and economic activities so that in the course of living our lives we will at the same time better protect the vitality of our environment and future prospects of life on Earth. Let's come together to accomplish such farsighted goals!

Pliny the Elder was a scholar, naturalist and philosopher in ancient Rome who regarded the noblest life in an interesting way. "True glory," he said "consists in doing what deserves to be written; in writing what deserves to be read; and in so living as to make the world happier for our living in it."

I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, am a relative nobody, and I regard the seeking of "glory" as a curiously odd purpose, either in gods or in mortals. This is especially true when perceived glory comes at the expense of others, or to their distinct detriment. I feel strongly that all people should try to pay forward some good deeds to our heirs in future generations to help create better and safer prospects for overall well-being for all.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Hannibal, MO

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Tiffany Twain imagines herself as the philosophic soul mate of Mark Twain and "the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the highly esteemed and irreverent writer, lecturer, humorist and philosopher." She has published *Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto*, a save-the-world treatise that contains wide-ranging and far-sighted observations dealing with all the biggest issues facing humanity here in the second decade of the 21st century. Check it out!

Frankly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a *nom de plume*, just like Mark Twain was a sly pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens. How this whole project came about is a long and evolving story, and one that is better left a mystery than being disclosed in the full scope of more prosaic actual circumstance. See the autobiographical assertions made in *Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future* for some interesting images.

"Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the important thing is the IDEAS THEMSELVES, and not the author. Yet it is necessary to say that she is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, other than the influence of reason and principle."

-- Thomas Paine (gender revised)

The twelve books of the *Earth Manifesto*, each 212 pages in length, are available right now for a generously discounted \$10.22 each from the print-on-demand publisher Lulu Publishing.

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Postscript One - Gerrymandering

Republicans have more than doubled their control of state legislatures in the U.S. since 2010, and with gains from the November 2016 national elections, they now control both legislative chambers in a record 32 states. Using this influence, they have gerrymandered congressional districts in such contorted manner as to give decidedly unfair over-representation to conservative partisans who control the redistricting process. This has resulted in a serious under-representation of the interests of progressives and liberals. Such exercises of extreme partisanship in

drawing gerrymandered congressional districts in order to disenfranchise the majority of Americans constitute an egregious abuse of power.

The House of Representatives and the federal government have been severely corrupted by this practice of partisan gerrymandering of Congressional districts to give an overwhelming preference to the agenda of "conservatives". The evidence of this is convincing. In Wisconsin, after Republicans redrew electoral maps of the state in 2011 using "the most precise technology available to dissect new Census Bureau data and convert it into reliably Republican districts", Republicans captured a 60-to-39 seat advantage in the State Assembly even though they got less than 49% of the statewide vote.

Justices of the Supreme Court agreed in June 2017 to hear a legal action concerning this extremely partisan gerrymandering in Wisconsin, and unless conservatives on the Court violate their oath of office, they are bound to rule that it is constitutionally unfair for state legislatures to engage in extreme partisanship when they draw contorted congressional districts for narrow political advantage. Such a ruling would strengthen voting rights and make our democracy fairer by forcing politicians to compete more honestly for votes, rather than illegitimately winning elections and ruling in a gerrymandered Congress. Justices should decide this soon!

Gerrymandering allows Republican politicians to impose their extremist ideological policies on the American people, skewing tax policy radically in favor of the increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, undermining the social safety net and sacrificing protections of the environment to natural resource exploiters. This trend is seriously exacerbating inequalities, inequities and injustices in American society, making "the land of the free" into a place that is antithetical to actually being a nation "with liberty and justice for all."

Postscript Two - Inheritance Taxes

A century ago, we were living a Gilded Age of ostentatious wealth and dizzying inequality. It was "wealth against commonwealth", as muckraker Henry Demarest Lloyd described it. It was in this context that Republican President Theodore Roosevelt recommended an estate tax as a means to keep wealth from being concentrated in dynastic fortunes. Roosevelt was a patrician who honorably used his inheritance to lead a life of public service rather than a life of leisure, and he always believed that the transmission of enormous wealth to heirs "does not do them any real service and is of great and genuine detriment to the community at large." What really mattered, he felt, was to have a national community based on citizens' political equality, relative economic equality and fair-minded interdependence. Inheritance taxes were thus for Roosevelt a moral issue as well as an economic issue. Hear his words in his New Nationalism Speech in 1910:

"The really big fortune, the swollen fortune, by the mere fact of its size, acquires qualities which differentiate it in kind, as well as in degree, from what is possessed by men of relatively small means. Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more effective: that is, a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate."

The impetus for the estate tax was the grave threat that concentrated wealth and political power posed to our nation's fragile experiment in self-governing democracy. The voices calling for taxes on inherited wealth ranged from rural populist farmers and urban reformers to enlightened industrialists. On estate taxation, the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie wrote in his essay *Wealth*, "Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest."

In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt took up the same crusade, striking out at great fortunes for both moral and economic reasons. "The transmission from generation to generation of vast fortunes by will, inheritance or gift is not consistent with the ideals and sentiments of the American people," he stated. "Inherited economic power is as inconsistent with the ideals of this generation as inherited political power was inconsistent with the ideals of the generation which established our Government."

Only two-tenths of one percent of Americans have a net worth large enough to owe any estate tax at all upon their deaths, under current tax law. Only two out of every one thousand people! This makes it abundantly clear that tax laws are among *the most politically determined laws of all*, given the lavishly generous treatment of rich people after they die and of the money their children inherit.

Since 1980, regressive changes in taxation in the U.S. have given wealthy people huge sums of money, and financed this unaffordable largess by borrowing the money from people in all future years. The top tax rate each and every year from 1936 to 1980 was 70% or higher. Then Ronald Reagan began a radical experiment of regressive changes in taxation in 1981, cutting the marginal tax rate from 70% to 28% by 1988. This political abuse of influence has been one of the main mechanisms by which wealth has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest 1%. Some of the worst and most socially undesirable consequences of this undemocratic concentration of wealth have been in a dangerous increase in inequality in American society, a risk-laden piling up of national debt, and unnecessary financing pressures and austerity measures that constrain investments in things like public education, physical infrastructure, the social safety net, and protections of public lands, National Parks and a healthy environment.

The basic ways that our economic and political systems are corrupted to favor the wealthy are examined in *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Unfairly Rigged*. And the consequential impacts of this corruption are examined in my essay *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Concentrate Wealth and Power*.

Republicans in Congress today want to not only abolish the inheritance tax but also to weaken the progressive income tax. The American people should be hearing meaningful debate on taxing vast fortunes, voices of moral outrage, and "passionate reminders of the American ideal of equality."

The 100th anniversary of the estate tax took place in September 2016, and it is time for us to assess our present inequalities and pledge to reverse them. The Forbes 400 list of the wealthiest Americans today has as much wealth as more than 60% of U.S. households. And in the first half of the 2016 presidential election, half of all campaign contributions came from 158 wealthy families. Given this corruption of our politics by Big Money, former President Jimmy Carter observed that we are becoming an oligarchy, and studies of social mobility reveal how the excessive concentration of wealth undermines equality of opportunity.

The estate tax has been under intense siege since 1997, when a number of dynastically wealthy families began to invest millions of dollars to save themselves billions. They financed anti-tax lobbying groups, including a communications campaign to rebrand the estate tax as the "death tax."

The estate tax has historically raised substantial revenue from those with the greatest capacity to pay. Even in its weakened condition today, it will raise over \$270 billion in the next decade entirely from households in the top one tenth of one percent. But revenue has always been a secondary consideration with the estate tax. Its primary purpose historically has been to put a brake on the build-up of concentrated wealth and the threat that poses to our democratic institutions.

The estate tax remains a piñata for anti-tax GOP politicians and almost all of them want to repeal it. "But we should move in the opposite direction by closing loopholes and instituting a more progressive rate structure."

Postscript Three - Let's Reinvigorate Our Democracy!

When you see Republicans striving to win elections by tortuously gerrymandering congressional districts and passing state laws to restrict voting rights, it would be reasonable to conclude that one reason they do this because they cannot win based on the force of their ideas and national plans.

The most important thing we could do to improve the prospects of democracy in the world "is to fix our democracy at home." So says Professor Larry Diamond, a democracy specialist who was named "Teacher of the Year" by the Associated Students of Stanford University for his excellence in teaching, which was judged to admirably transcend political and ideological barriers. Diamond has been honored for his "passion for democratization, peaceful transitions, and the idea that each of us can contribute to making the world a better place." Hallelujah for that passion!

The "Great Divide" of growing inequality is having a pathetic impact on the length of people's lives. An article in the New York Times by Annie Lowrey explored this issue by comparing the life expectancies in prosperous Fairfax County, Virginia and much poorer McDowell County, West Virginia. Men in the county of "haves" live an average of 18 years longer than men in the depressed coal area of the "have nots", and even women in the richer county have an average life span 12 years longer than in the poorer county. "Poverty is a thief," concludes a professor of social

justice ... Poorer people smoke more, have less access to health care, eat worse and so suffer higher rates of obesity, and suffer the "debilitating effects of more intense and more constant stress."

There is a simple implication for the fact that socioeconomic status is becoming an increasingly distinct factor in determining longevity. The only fair course of action would be to providentially change our national policies so that they do not facilitate an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. This would be the right thing to do!