

# Earth Manifesto



## Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power

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Our democracy is in crisis right now, and the number of democratic nations worldwide is diminishing as right-wing politicians exploiting anti-immigrant sentiments exert increasing control in many countries. In an honest and true democracy, leaders would compete for the presidency and positions in legislative bodies by fairly appealing to the best interests of all citizens. It is because our great American experiment in democratic governance has been so corrupted by moneyed interests that our democracy has been transformed into a new form of plutocratic oligarchy, a "repressive kleptocracy" in which we have government largely of the wealthy, by the wealthy and for the wealthy -- and the many are ruled ruthlessly by the few.

This essay sets forth a summary of the thirteen main schemes that established factions use to monopolize wealth and power in the United States. These ploys have been called an "ethical rot" that has been growing for many years like a cancer in the halls of power all across the land of the free.

Consequential ethics provide context and value assessments to these understandings. One reason it is so vitally important to see clearly how these 13 unprincipled principles are used to concentrate wealth and power is precisely because of the far-reaching consequences of these schemes being the top priority in our politics. Such a wrongheaded focus causes seriously harmful impacts against the common good.

Politicians engaging in virulent forms of egregious corruption grabbed power in the USA in the 2016 elections as a result of the success of emotion-manipulating demagoguery and deceitful dishonesty. A hostile takeover of all three branches of our federal government was rigidly cemented in place from 2017 to 2019, until voters gave control of the House of Representatives to Democrats. The apprentice Demagogue-in-Chief and his minions spent four years brazenly betraying workers and their supporters and all Americans -- and every human being to be born in the future. They did this by putting in place an elitist cabal of millionaires, billionaires and captains of industry, and resource exploiters and climate change deniers and worker-exploiting capitalists and greedy Wall Street bankers and irresponsible profiteers and shrewd speculators and authoritarian cult loyalists, all of them seemingly eager to abuse their ill-gotten power for the narrow benefit of the few.

The priorities of such leaders are terribly askew, shortsighted and grotesquely perverted by money and the pursuit of power into a despotic effort to achieve the main goal of increasing the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small minority of the people. This scam constitutes a consequentially harmful vicious cycle in which moneyed interests buy power that is then abused, contributing to a variety of insidious harms that undermine both the well-being and hopes and fortunes of a vast majority of the people.

The brilliant linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky spells out the top ten ways that elite groups shrewdly accomplish their goal of greedily increasing the narrow concentration of wealth, and I have taken the liberty of adding three more main methods used by rich people to achieve this goal. In Chomsky's insightful documentary film *Requiem for the American Dream*, he reveals how wealthy people sabotage the aspirations of common folks by selfishly sabotaging people's hopes of sharing in the prospects of achieving a fairer measure of prosperity, security and social mobility. Chomsky explains in this thought-provoking film how people in power pathologically abuse influence to get more money and power for themselves and their co-conspiring friends and cronies.

Michael Berkowitz explained why Noam Chomsky should to be respected: "Regarded by many as America's most

influential intellectual, Noam Chomsky is also a great story teller. Without overwhelming the viewer or the material, he marshals data, example and anecdote, cutting through 250 years of history to distill ten basic principles of wealth and power that have conspired against the American Dream. More than anything, the film is a well organized, thoughtful look at these forces and their consequences."

Chomsky's incisive understandings give attentive viewers a powerful reason to demand fairer national policies. They represent a warning to rich elites for why they should act to prevent people with proverbial pitchforks from coming for them by beginning to make more reasonable compromises with the people, accepting reforms that would make our economy fairer and social safety net programs better funded, and the U.S. tax system more equitably highly graduated, and our citizenry and society healthier, and opportunities improved for people to be able to live better lives.

Chomsky has provided bright illumination on the insidiously effective strategies that wealthy people use to increase the concentration of wealth by undermining fair representation, so that power can be more narrowly wielded. These tactics let them legislate to create an ever-increasing concentration of wealth, which then concentrates more power, perpetuating a cycle that is causing severe adversities and revolutionary strife.

In *Requiem for the American Dream*, Chomsky lists and elaborates on these ten cunning principles that are used to gain more wealth and power. Really wealthy conservatives have ruthlessly exploited these strategies in the USA, especially since 1981 when Ronald Reagan took office. But crucial differences exist between the days when Reagan first began slashing taxes in favor of the wealthy and the conditions that prevail today. First of all, inequality is much more extreme now: the top 1% of Americans have a share of the national wealth four times larger than they did in 1980. Also, the number of people living in poverty today is near an all-time high. And in the course of the contagious coronavirus pandemic, many millions are becoming more desperate.

In addition, the American people were much more financially secure in 1980 because they had just been through a period from 1945 to 1980 when the rewards for work and productivity were much more broadly shared. In glaring contrast, the average American worker today has been subjected to decades of stagnation in real wages and compensation. Even more importantly, the national debt was less than \$1 trillion in 1980 -- or 32% of annual economic activity -- while today it is approaching \$29 trillion. At this level of significantly more than 100% of the U.S. gross domestic product, risks are proliferating.

All Americans should see clearly what is going on here -- and brilliant illumination is at hand with the simple details provided in Chomsky's eye-opening exposé. Here is an elaboration of his sensational summary of the "10 Principles" that wealthy elites use in a vicious circle of concentrating wealth and concentrating power:

1. Reduce Democracy. "Right through American history, there's been an ongoing clash between pressure for more freedom and democracy coming from below and efforts at elite control and domination coming from above." Governments basically have a choice of reducing inequality or reducing democracy, and wealthy people in recent years have unconscionably decided that they prefer to reduce democracy, and used a variety of anti-democratic ploys like gerrymandering, disenfranchising millions of voters, and preventing campaign finance reforms.

2. Shape Ideology. Chomsky cites the infamous Powell Memo from the corporate right, along with a first-ever report by the non-governmental, non-partisan Trilateral Commission in 1975 titled *The Crisis of Democracy*, as roadmaps for rationalizing a backlash against democratic fairness. The Commission's report referred to an "excess of democracy" and too much engagement of young people with civic life, and the view that young people were just not receiving proper "indoctrination."

3. Redesign the Economy. Since the 1970s, banks and other financial institutions have grabbed an ever-larger role in the economy, rigging it further in favor of the few. By 2007 this sector "earned" 40% of all corporate profits. This redesign involved deregulation, which has produced an increasing concentration of wealth, but also periodic economic recessions followed by capitalist bailouts that lead to more wealth concentration. Also, many manufacturing jobs have been "offshored" abroad, reducing workers' pay and job security, which is mainly beneficial to economic elites, according to Alan Greenspan in testimony to Congress.

4. Shift the Burden. The American Dream in the 1950s and 60s was partly a real thing. Both the rich and the poor

got financially better off. Since those days, there has been increasing conflict between what Chomsky calls "the plutonomy", who are the wealthy few that run the show and get most of the new wealth, against "the precariat", the precarious proletariat. Back then, corporations paid a much larger proportion of the total federal tax burden, and taxes were higher on dividends, capital gains and inherited wealth. That has changed, due to unwarranted influence, shifting burdens to the people and causing the national debt to dangerously spike.

5. Attack Solidarity. Chomsky says that, for wealthy elites to succeed in reducing funding for things like public education and Social Security, the normal emotion of caring about others needs to be driven out of people's heads. The U.S. in the 1950s was able to make college essentially free for millions of Americans with the G.I. Bill and other public funding. Now a much wealthier USA is full of "serious" experts who claim that such a thing is impossible, and education has become too expensive, saddling millions with opprobrious levels of personal debt.

6. Run the Regulators. The 1970s saw enormous growth in lobbying. It is now routine for the interest groups being regulated to control the regulators, which makes things much easier on the regulated, and subverts the regulatory process.

7. Engineer Elections. Partisan politicians gerrymander congressional district and suppress the vote, skewing national priorities and facilitating public corruption. They assert that corporations have rights of personhood, so that they can get extra special privileges under the law. They equate money spent in elections with free speech, and promote ideological rationalizations for money being contributed in unlimited quantities and substantial secrecy by giant corporations and rich people. They have managed to get the Supreme Court to agree to the *Citizens United* ruling since January 2010 without conservative justices admitting that there is an obvious profound corrupting influence of money in our elections. How large does the writing on the wall need to be before conservative-biased, ideologically blinded Justices can see it, and admit it, and change their rulings to be fairer to the vast majority of the American people?

8. Keep the Rabble in Line. Here Chomsky focuses on attacks on organized labor, like that of the Taft Hartley Act. But criminalizing protest is another obvious way that authorities are trying to keep the people in line, especially as a strong resistance by "rabble-rousers" arises that is powerfully motivated by awareness and outrage at abuses of power -- and at the glaring nature of systemic racism against Blacks and other minorities.

9. The Manufacture of Consent. Compulsive consumers are not born, they are molded by advertising. Marketing and public relations have a goal of encouraging superficial consumption, partially as a means of keeping people in their place. In a market economy, Chomsky says, informative advertising would result in rational decisions. But ads tend to promote irrational choices and provide poor information. Here Chomsky is talking about public opinion being manipulated in election campaigns for political candidates, as well as by ads for automobiles, beer, prescription drugs, etc. Today, a flood of money is also being devoted to an emotion-hijacking proliferation of misinformation and disinformation.

10. Marginalize the Population. This strategy uses divisive tactics and demagoguery, and seems to be as much a result as a tactic, but it certainly has been achieved. The greater good and what the public wants generally do not determine what our representatives deliver.

Most thoughtful viewers of Chomsky's interviews in *Requiem for the American Dream* might have other things to add. Here are the three most significant ones that indubitably help the rich and powerful monopolize power and wealth at the expense of the many:

11. Dump Massive Funding into Militarism. Military spending is the biggest public program in the United States. It represents more than half of all federal discretionary spending. This budget category is a huge pot of funding that is inadequately controlled. Military spending allows cronies, investors and speculators to make big profits at the expense of taxpayers. It also generates excessive public support for fighting foreign wars, and is useful as a distraction from smarter plans like opposing shrewd operatives who are pulling the banking strings on Wall Street and the Military-Industrial budget strings in states all around the country. This is one of the worst aspects of political corruption that inflicts our country, because the nefarious impacts of this swindle are so wide-ranging, far reaching and danger engendering. This military spending, some cynically say in support, "does militarize the police

for free, however, just in case Wall Street generates any disgruntled customers."

Transparency International, a "global civil society organization leading the fight against corruption" in countries around the world, has published a *Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index* that measures corruption in the defense sector of 82 countries. It stresses the importance of more transparency and better control in the military sector. Though many countries do a worse job than the U.S. in controlling corruption in expenditures on the military, the sheer size of U.S. military spending makes it ripe to being ripped-off.

12. Stack the Courts. Trump Republicans dominated the Executive branch of government and the U.S. Senate for the four years from 2017 through 2021, and Republican partisans now have a 6-3 conservative advantage on the Supreme Court. They achieved this status illegitimately after forcing the seat occupied by Antonin Scalia to be given to an extreme conservative, Neil Gorsuch, and having replaced Justice Anthony Kennedy with the partisan Brett Kavanaugh, and then by ramming through the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett, who has joined the conservative majority in severely disadvantaging millions of Americans. This stacking of the high court has made *We the People* more vulnerable to the hard-right agenda. Gorsuch and Barrett are Constitutional "originalists", like the deceased Antonin Scalia, and they oppose the progressive evolution of the Constitution and rules of law, and believe in a strictly limited role for the federal government. This stance basically defends the right of what is, in effect, a moneyed aristocracy in the USA to be free from the desire of a "democratic mob" to have the government play a stronger role in protecting people from abuses of power and in creating a fairer society in which freedoms and security are more broadly shared.

13. Dominate the media. Reams have been written about how the mainstream media, controlled by a handful of giant corporations, has collaborated with the ruling elite in perpetuating inequalities, and in helping our leaders get us into wars, and in failing to inform and educate the people with accurate understandings on important issues. Right-wing media outlets have pushed skewed propaganda so effectively that millions of Americans have been brainwashed into believing in reactionary causes and "conservative" spin. Also, in the past decade, the Internet has become a much more powerful phenomenon, and social media has had profound effects on people, causing more extreme partisanship in echo chambers that tend to divide people and confuse them so that they do not see clearly. Fake news has also become a real problem in our elections and in preventing us from achieving more accurate understandings and fairer governance. So the media has been another in the many factors that have contributed to making the "political duopoly" establishment one dominated by the few, into whose hands wealth and power are excessively concentrated, to the disadvantage of the populace.

Trump has bamboozled his followers so thoroughly that this sentiment seems sensational:

HOW SAD IT MUST BE — BELIEVING THAT SCIENTISTS, SCHOLARS, HISTORIANS, ECONOMISTS, AND JOURNALISTS HAVE DEVOTED THEIR ENTIRE LIVES TO DECEIVING YOU, WHILE A REALITY TV STAR WITH DECADES OF FRAUD AND EXHAUSTIVELY DOCUMENTED LYING IS YOUR ONLY BEACON OF TRUTH AND HONESTY.

One of the demagogic Trumpian strategies has been to feed a chaos-fueled "infodemic", in which a massive amount of widely and rapidly circulating information is being propagated that consists of a confusing combination of accurate and inaccurate information, falsehoods, rumors, conspiracy theories and skewed opinion. Trump is the single worst driver of falsehoods about the pandemic, cynically contributing to this danger engendering misinformation "infodemic". And his 'big lies' about the 2020 election having been stolen from him are being used by devious Republicans to help them try to steal future elections.

As false or manipulated information continues to proliferate online during the Covid-19 epidemic, the Forum on Information and Democracy produced a report in November 2020 entitled *How to End Infodemics*. Based on more than 100 contributions from international experts, it offers 250 recommendations on how to rein in this phenomenon that threatens democracies, human rights and people's health and well-being.

"These times show more than ever that information is power, and when lies spread faster than facts, all human endeavor is threatened. It's an existential moment for democracy and journalism." ... "Democracy is under threat and the lack of trust or outright manipulation increasingly has an information component", explains Marietje

Schaake, also co-chair of the steering committee for the report. "Governance of our digital world must be wrestled back from private companies and authoritarian states alike if democracy is to survive. Democratic leaders must take their responsibility to preserve democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms now."

One of the twelve main recommendations of the working group was: "Conflicts of interests of platforms should be prohibited, in order to avoid the information and communication space being governed or influenced by commercial, political or any other interests." Our representatives should honorably heed these ideas!

### Revelations Contained in Budgets

Government budgets are moral documents. They are blueprints that reflect the values and priorities ascendant in a society. Budget plans pushed by Republicans reveal a lot about the imbalances between Republican priorities and American values. They are 'hard-power budgets' that give more money to the military while cutting spending on many programs that serve to make our society fairer, healthier, saner and culturally richer.

The scheming and uncompromising Republican objectives tend to be to cut spending in almost every arena except the military. This goal is transparently pursued to justify giving big tax breaks to rich people and giant corporations, and to create an overbearing military that could be used to defend the status quo if and when revolutionary opposition to this perfidious scheme inevitably erupts.

Trump budgets also slashed funding for the State Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, both by nearly one-third, eliminating thousands of staff positions. Those budgets would even have done crazy things like eviscerating Meals on Wheels and defunding Superfund site cleanups, and leave little money for things like air quality programs and clean energy research. These are insane priorities!

### Executive Summary

While policies of debt-financed low tax rates for the top 1% of American taxpayers help concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few, they also wreak many unnecessary hardships on people today and in the future. The primary reasons Republicans attack affordable health care and underfund things like Medicaid and food stamps is to help pay for the increasing amount of money dedicated to filling the coffers of the already wealthy. Revealingly, they push to cut spending on protections of the environment and public lands, and on providing funding for regulatory agencies and the IRS. This is insane! Rich people are no happier, and ultimately less safe, as inequality gets worse due to such spending cuts coupled with regressive changes in taxation.

The deeply disturbing dimensions and far-reaching implications of this liberty-threatening affliction call out for all patriotic Americans to rise up and oppose Republican efforts to make our society more and more unfair. We must resist, and protect our country and Constitution and rules of law from these 21st century "barbarians at the gates", who tried to put a final nail in the coffin of our democratic republic with their outrageous voter suppression tactics, US Post Office sabotage, and refusals to yield power after losing the "free and fair" 2020 election. We must reject trickle-down Big Lies, dastardly deceptions, aggressive efforts to undermine good governance and various ruses aimed at reducing the power of working people. These schemes unfortunately are effective in undermining the well-being of most Americans by imposing austerity measures on the masses, and they serve to subvert fairness and people's hopes for more inclusive and broadly shared prosperity.

Our Founders were deeply concerned, with good reason, about despotism. They emphasized the overarching need for eternal vigilance to prevent tyranny and protect the people from abuses of power. Now today, tens of millions of Americans have been bamboozled into trusting and supporting a Master Deceiver and his co-conspirators, and this misplaced trust is ending badly. We must come together to ensure that our democracy survives the Trumpian assaults.

The excessive concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is being ratcheted up to such a dangerous extreme of inequalities and injustices that two outcomes are becoming almost certain: continuing chaotic turmoil and intensifying protests that will be used to justify repressive measures in reaction. We cannot afford to be complacent in the face of this onslaught. We must elect new representatives who will act to restore integrity and moderation, and be willing to honorably protect small businesses and families and communities from the rude predations of ruthless violators of the public trust.

The smart and commonsensical billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer concluded in *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, "The most ironic thing about rising inequality is how completely unnecessary and self-defeating it is. If we do something about it, if we adjust our policies in the way that, say, Franklin D. Roosevelt did during the Great Depression -- so that we help the 99 percent and preempt the revolutionaries and crazies, the ones with the pitchforks -- that will be the best thing possible for us rich folks, too. It's not just that we'll escape with our lives; it's that we'll most certainly get even richer."

It turns out that "Build Back Better" is not just a catchy alliterative slogan from Joe Biden's election campaign, but a wise plan to guide us in the recovery from the pandemic, helping us deal with the critical challenges we face, especially including climate change, extreme inequality and social and environmental injustices.

"We are standing on the precipice of a really dark time", a representative of women's rights groups once declared. This feeling is also being experienced by people in civil rights groups, environmentalists, deficit hawks and those who responsibly care about our descendants in future generations.

Consider the vital issue of healthcare in the USA. The two top priorities of the Trump administration were to cut taxes on the wealthy and repeal the Affordable Care Act, President Obama's signature accomplishment. Michael Hiltzil explained why a repeal of Obamacare is a top goal in his article *The real reason the GOP is gung-ho on repealing Obamacare: It would give the rich a huge tax cut*. Hiltzil makes this cogent observation:

People wondering why Republicans are so hell-bent on repealing Obamacare even though that would cost 20 million Americans their health insurance haven't been heeding the old investigator's maxim to "follow the money." The path leads to the Affordable Care Act's tax provisions, and the discovery that repeal would provide the wealthiest taxpayers with an immediate tax cut totaling \$346 billion over 10 years. Every cent of that would go to taxpayers earning more than \$200,000 a year (\$250,000 for couples). ... And, Obamacare repeal would reduce the average incomes of Americans in the lowest 60% of income earners, mostly because of the loss of tax subsidies for insurance premiums.

It is a dangerous time to make onerous and regressive tax cuts like this. Tinderbox conditions at the time these words were first written in 2017 made it a time that more equitable reforms were clearly needed, and during the pandemic it is a terrible time to implement changes that make inequities in healthcare and economic security much worse. The American people were deceived and betrayed by Trump and his Cabinet of millionaire and billionaire cronies, and it was proving disastrous as he treacherously refused to change course.

Republicans did an insidiously effective job of being the reactionary opposition party from 2009 to 2016, voting on more than 60 occasions to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. Once they grabbed the power of the presidency, they wanted to demonstrate how committed they are to this goal of getting rid of an entitlement that has provided health insurance to more than 20 million people, so they doubled down on efforts to "repeal and replace" the law, without ever coming up with any clear and comprehensive replacement alternative. And they have been sabotaging the Affordable Care Act for political expediency despite the cruel implications this has on the health and well-being of tens of millions of Americans.

The bottom line of the "repeal and replace" Trumpcare plan was so nakedly corrupt as to make it stunning that so extremely unfair a plan could possibly have seen the light of day before the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office showed exactly what the main purpose of this "reform" actually is -- to give Americans with the highest earnings a whopping total of hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks in the next decade while cutting healthcare insurance for tens of millions of Americans.

Remember the reasons why the famous words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are true when he said "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." The action of cutting spending on healthcare for millions of Americans will make the populace less healthy, and more people will die prematurely because they will not be able to afford medical care.

Why are conservative Republicans so unwilling to reform national healthcare to honestly improve the system? What really should be done is to replace the entire patchwork of employer-based health insurance, and Medicare for old people, and Medicaid for the poor, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, and last-resort medical

care in emergency rooms for millions of people -- with something much better? Let's try a comprehensive single-payer plan that covers every American and does so at lower costs, with better coverage.

In *The Lessons of History*, Will and Ariel Durant observe that revolutionary change generally destroys wealth rather than redistributing it. So the more sensible national priority for all concerned would be to negotiate a reasonable peace between competing parties by requiring the highest income earners to pay more steeply graduated tax rates on the highest levels of income, and to use the revenues generated to invest in moderately better social insurance policies. Such a course of action would help preserve a good part of the great privileges of the well-to-do. The best social insurance policy would be one that features a universal system of cost-effective healthcare and a truly more secure social safety net.

Ronald Reagan famously "criticized Social Security for *supplanting* private savings and warned that subsidized medicine would curtail Americans' freedom". He then expressed the bizarre conviction that, if we enacted the proposed Medicare program, "pretty soon your son won't decide when he's in school, where he will go or what he will do for a living. He will wait for the government to tell him." Republicans ever since then have warned that social safety net programs would curtail people's freedoms, though in truth they help reduce desperate circumstances for countless numbers of Americans.

Paul Ryan, Republican Speaker of the House from October 2015 to January 2019, seemed to have had one overriding principle -- to "liberate the affluent from the burdens of progressive taxation." One of the main goals of one tentative Trumpcare proposal was to help concentrate wealth ever more extremely in the hands of the richest 1%. Really! When the Congressional Budget Office evaluated the plan, it found that it would have an alarming cost of the loss of health insurance for millions of Americans. This should have cast deep suspicion on why Republicans were hurrying up to ram it through Congress. When this bizarre Republican plan to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act was nakedly revealed to be a plan to reduce spending on social insurance policies by and give huge tax breaks to high income earners, more Americans should have realized that this plan was designed to create increasingly severe inequities, injustices and hardships for millions of Americans. This outcome would give even stronger impetus to revolutionary strife and increasingly passionate and desperate discord, and the rich would spin their propaganda ever more incessantly to rationalize repressive reactions to defend their abused privileges. This would not be good.

### A Big Picture Aside on the Industrial Revolution

To gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the historical context of the struggle between wealthy people trying to increase the concentration of wealth and power in their hands and the opposing goals of the vast majority of others, consider the following ideas.

A brief history of the Industrial Revolution provides revealing context of where we stand today in this eventful and often internecine struggle between Capital and Labor. This story is one of a Goliath and a David that features turbulent episodes of conflict between capitalists, who tend to be overly obsessed with money, power and control, and workers who are striving to earn a living and make ends meet.

Our lives, and world history, have been profoundly affected by this Industrial Revolution that began some 250 years ago with the invention of the steam engine in Great Britain. This technological advance launched a long and eventful transformation of human civilizations from being primarily agricultural and rural to being primarily oriented toward manufacturing, consumerism and urban living. The population of human beings grew ten-fold during this period, from 750 million in 1750 to almost 8 billion today, and the population of the USA increased even more drastically from about 2 million to more than 330 million.

The growing pains have been wrenching, and have featured a strife-torn history of conflict between Goliath Capital and David Labor. This story of the exploitation of working people "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire," as the sociopolitical economist Karl Marx put it.

Capitalists transformed commerce from feudal days into mass production in increasingly urbanized factory towns, and abused their power so much that Karl Marx published a Manifesto in 1848 urging, "Workers of the World, Unite", so that, by opposing, they might overthrow the hegemony of capitalists and gain a better living.

Vast wealth was generated as mass production processes evolved, and this wealth was monopolized by the few, creating a tawdry Gilded Age of rich robber barons in the last half of the nineteenth century who indulged in conspicuous consumption. In stark contrast, many working people were subjected to poor working conditions in factories, and squalor in growing cities. This state of affairs generated violent conflicts with unions that began organizing to bargain collectively with the ruthless taskmasters.

A powerful progressive movement arose with the goals of altering the status quo and protecting workers from low pay, long working hours, few benefits, dangerous working conditions, extreme insecurity, harsh discrimination, exploitive child labor and other oppressive circumstances. The World War from 1914 to 1918 roiled the water, providing big opportunities for profiteering, and this led to the Roaring Twenties and an episode of excesses, extreme inequalities, increasingly concentrated wealth, rampant speculation, widespread malfeasance and then a bursting bubble that led to the most severe global economic depression in history. This economic cataclysm forced capitalists to make a New Deal with workers to create a fairer bargain, and from the 1930s to 1980, the wealth generated through the efforts of working people and their increases in productivity was more fairly shared, and the world enjoyed an era of somewhat broadly shared prosperity.

Then the B-movie actor Ronald Reagan came along with his folksy good-old-boy charm, and he launched a revolution against working people by rolling back the collective bargaining rights of workers and giving huge tax breaks to the rich, and hyping-up military spending to stoke opportunities for profiteering, and acting to reduce regulations that had served as safeguards to keep banks and giant corporate entities from engaging in money-prepossessed predatory behaviors. This salvo of crony capitalist scams was financed by foisting the costs onto future taxpayers by means of borrowing gigantic amounts of money, dramatically driving up the national debt.

Economist Paul Krugman observed that it doesn't matter to Republican politicians "whether slashing taxes on billionaires while giving scammers and polluters the freedom to scam and pollute is good for the economy as a whole; it's clearly good for billionaires, scammers, and polluters."

Fast forward four decades, and inequalities have reached new extremes, due in no small part to Ronald Reagan having slashed top tax rates to 28% from the 70% (or more) that had been in effect from 1936 to 1980. This new extreme of inequality was accompanied by a variety of injustices associated with the continued domination of our national decision-making by wealthy elites and giant multinational corporate entities, and these developments ratcheted up pressures for another era of progressive reforms. But NO! An unhinged and pathologically egomaniacal narcissist came along, mentored in the tactics of demagoguery, bullying, frivolous lawsuits and the politics of division. He had a sordid personal history of engaging in ruthless exploitation of working people and contractors and investors, and communities and females, and he has abused real estate laws and bankruptcy laws and used many shrewd lawyers to game the judicial system to make more money.

And this master manipulator engineered a cunning coup to grab power for himself, with the clear intention of abusing power to concentrate wealth even more narrowly. He fooled just enough citizens into supporting him by using a variety of treacherous tactics, and cult authority suasion, and he lied to the electorate to gain support. He brought along enough amoral and unscrupulous Republican politicians to give them almost unchecked power in Washington D.C. and in the majority of the States, and they indulged in a grotesquely unfair crusade against the rights of workers and women, and against protections of consumers and the environment. And they did a terrible job of controlling the pandemic, worse than any other country in the world. And they seemed hell-bent on dismantling the social safety net in order to save money that would make it easier for them to give even more tax breaks to the wealthy, who are generous in providing big bucks, often in secret, to the campaign war chests of these ambitious, coldly calculating, co-conspiring, servile and obedient politicians.

The transparent goal of these shrewd operators and their trickle down Big Lie and other deceitful ideologies is to give rich people a more dominating monopoly on wealth and power. In doing so, they are sacrificing fairness and social justice and workers' rights, along with voting rights, women's reproductive rights and prerogatives, family planning programs, clean air and water, the atmosphere, the oceans, coral reefs, and the prospects for safeguarded individual liberties and peaceful coexistence and the hopes for flourishing of all people in future generations. They even sacrifice the potential well-being and survival of the preponderance of all species of life on Earth to achieve



their greedily shortsighted goals.

Why do these scheming politicians do these things, which subordinate principle to ambition and promote personal gain over the common good? The answer seems clear: they put Party over Country to achieve their ruthless drive to get more campaign contributions and gain domineering power. In the process, they are irresponsibly wreaking havoc on natural habitats and assaulting endangered species and biological diversity. The rogue's gallery included Mitch McConnell as the worst, and all-but-traitors like Lindsey Graham, Ted Cruz, Kevin McCarthy, Jim Jordan, Devin Nunes, et al in lockstep.

The main goal of these manipulative partisans has been to get an increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth and to gain and abuse power and privilege for a tiny fraction of the people at the expense of all others. As a result, politicians are doing a lousy job of representing the best interests of the American people. They are betraying the people by being so preoccupied with pandering to those who finance their political campaigns and careers.

### Onward Understandings

The remainder of this essay is dedicated to the proposition that intelligent and fair-minded planning for a healthier future is a vastly better approach to managing our affairs than pushing deceitful propaganda to confuse and distract people from understanding what is really the matter with America and the world.

To help ensure the general welfare, let us look in history to find examples of success stories. Many nations abroad have created successful economies without generating extreme levels of inequality and injustice, like Scandinavian countries. But let's look nearer to home. The United States itself provides clear evidence that smarter national policies can contribute to the greater good. During the period from 1945 to 1980, national policies were implemented that helped create a vibrant middle class, including the G.I. Bill, large public investments in higher education, and the construction of an extensive interstate highway system. To pay for these initiatives while having record levels of debt incurred in fighting World War II, marginal tax rates on the highest levels of income were 70% or higher every year. We basically invested in opportunities for working people to earn good wages instead of allowing politicians and conservative front groups to rig our economic and political systems ever more extremely in favor of the wealthy few.

The famous economist John Kenneth Galbraith once provocatively declared that "The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness." It is becoming clear today that inferior and immoral rationalizations for greedily selfish indulgences are causing terrible hardships in the world and contributing to dangerous existentially threatening trends. Clearly, we must find ways to reduce the overwhelming influence of rich conservatives and socially irresponsible giant corporate entities so that fairer, safer and more sustainable behaviors come to fruition. The Move-to-Amend coalition provides a good plan to help accomplish this.

Honoring these words and understandings, let's all join together to launch a farsighted Humanitarian Revolution. This epic change would have some primary tenets. For starters, Ecological Sanity. This Humanitarian Revolution must, of necessity, evolve quickly in tandem with a revolution of changes in attitude toward protections of biotic habitats and other life on Earth. Humankind is in effect rashly chopping off the branches of the tree of life, and enterprising capitalist schemers are chipping away at the trunk itself by doing a hard sell to get people to agree to let them plunder natural resources at the fastest possible rate while stoking consumerism and polluting the commons and spewing unlimited amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

This is, in reality, an exceedingly bad course of action. One sad consequence of these activities is that the relative acidity of the oceans is increasing, and this, together with warming waters, is causing most of the beautiful corals in extraordinarily rich underwater reef communities to be driven toward eternal extinction. This is a sad harbinger of biological calamity that we simply must take steps to alleviate. The Bible may have urged humankind to be fruitful and multiply, but religious and secular authorities tell us that we have a transcendent moral duty to protect Creation and be responsible for the sensible stewardship of planet Earth's ecosystems, so that we help ensure that the prospects for our planet to remain livable for future generations are not severely compromised.

This Humanitarian Revolution must also feature Electoral Sanity. With Big Money having so severely corrupted our

politics, we must immediately enact stronger voting rights campaign finance and lobbying reforms.

The five conservatives on the Supreme Court in January 2010 claimed that they could see no corrupting influence of allowing rich people and giant corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money, in secrecy, to influence our elections. But their narrow *Citizens United* ruling has given such a big assist to corrupt schemes that more than 90% of the winners in the November 2016 national elections were those who outspent their opponents. Political influence has clearly been auctioned off to the highest bidders, and pandering politicians are now marching to the orders of the people who bought them. They are doubling down on propaganda that asserts they care about the middle class and poor people, but make no mistake about it, their top priority is to push policies brazenly designed to give rich people more of the spoils of our economy.

Consider this closely. A rationalizing refrain echoes eerily from every Republican plan: "Jobs, jobs, jobs." Why do they say we must build another pipeline to carry extremely dirty oil sands across Native American lands and under beautiful rivers? "Jobs, jobs, jobs." Why do they deny scientific understandings about the calamitous consequences of unlimited greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere? "Jobs, jobs, jobs." Why do they say we must unleash corporate power to use up nonrenewable resources at the fastest possible rate, and allow many costs of production to be externalized onto society? "Jobs, jobs, jobs." Why do they say we should implement stringent requirements for poor women to work in order to qualify for Medicaid to cover their healthcare needs, and force them to start working again soon after giving birth to another child? An abstruse connection can be made to the twisted logic and sinister deceit contained in the three German words spelled out in infamous iron scrollwork over the entrance gate to the Auschwitz concentration camp in southern Poland. It reads, "Arbeit Macht Frei." Aha! "Work Makes You Free." Sell us some more of that spiffy spin!

A "curse of knowledge" afflicts efforts to express complex ideas in simple ways that are memorable, engaging, credible, and effectively motivating. We are now seeing the reality that a contrasting "curse of ignorance" can afflict millions of people when emotionally manipulative messages are used deviously and disingenuously to get the people in our democracy riled up and susceptible to going along with the dastardly schemes of a demagogue who ruthlessly misled our great nation into being a House Divided, with rich against poor, men against women, whites against blacks and Latinos, straights against gays, police against the people, citizens against immigrants, people in red states against those in blue states, and the richest folks against the best interests of all.

We should not go along with these exploitive engineers of hyper-partisanship and hot button-division who have rendered our country a House Divided. On the issue that has been our top national priority since the beginning of the Reagan revolution, the people should reject the trickle down Big Lie that rationalizes giving huge tax breaks to people on all incomes in excess of \$250,000. The vote should be 99 to 1 for a more steeply graduated progressive tax plan that would be more favorable to the many.

It is crazy to allow millionaires and billionaires to pay taxes on the highest levels of their earnings at rates so low that they are near the lowest since the Depression of the 1930s. Worse yet, it is fiscal folly to finance this colossally misguided generosity by shoveling mountains of debt onto the already dangerously high national debt.

This understanding is not only about the way things are in America, but in countries worldwide. Increasing inequalities will lead to extreme social unrest, and this will strengthen both terrorist groups and fear-oriented and insecurity-exploiting appeals of authoritarian rule.

One of the most important priorities of our elected representatives should be to defend the Constitution, our democracy and the American people from despotic rule. Eternal vigilance is required of Americans to make sure our representatives honestly support this effort. But today, with dangerous demagogues having showed us that scurrilous means can be used to gain positions of power and abuse authority, we must now unite to patriotically defend our great experiment in representative democracy in order to strengthen our freedoms and security.

What we need is a peaceful "political revolution" that favors the 99% of Americans. What we have gotten is a reactionary political revolution that exacerbated inequalities and made injustices worse. Shrewd politicians have foisted this revolting state of affairs on our country -- the ones often reciting a mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs" -- but they use a range of deceitful schemes to gain power and abuse it by preying on the fears, insecurities and

resentments of a large swath of the people without offering truly beneficial policies and plans.

The top priority of conservatives has been to gain power and control using any means possible, no matter how unethical or dishonest or anti-American. Extreme conservatives are trying to regain power through a wide range of often immoral schemes, especially the claim that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump. Here are the ways they have gained support by rigging our national elections to their unscrupulous advantage:

- 1) They created cynicism and citizen distrust of the government by spreading a lot of propaganda and acting to undermine the well-being of the 99%. Their purpose in this has been to help the wealthiest 1% get an increasing portion of the wealth generated by the exploitation of natural resources and the labors of working people. Foreign intrigue by Russian operatives during the 2016 elections contributed to this malaise.
- 2) They have championed international trade agreements that contain corporate-friendly provisions that make it more profitable for manufacturing jobs to be sent abroad to cheap labor countries that do not have as many laws protecting working people and the environment.
- 3) They alleged that rules were rigged against them, and played the outraged victims, while simultaneously making concerted efforts to create contorted gerrymandered congressional districts that favor Republicans, and they discouraged millions of voters from voting who are poor or members of racial minorities by using intimidation and voter suppression tactics.
- 4) They intentionally and inadvertently helped propagate fake news stories and manipulative misinformation.
- 5) They used demagogic strategies to scare people and divide them, and they used emotion-hijacking techniques to gain support, and they exploited the frustrations many people feel and their racial prejudices, hostilities and fears of immigrants and terrorists in this effort to gain unchecked power.

Conservatives blame liberals and try to scapegoat them for all that ails us in the land of the free, but it is clear that fairer and more progressive ideas and plans are now needed to make our nation a better place. The proposals contained in the Bill of Rights for Future Generations and other recommendations in *See Clearly*, and in *Common Sense Revival*, could change the world and our collective prospects in dramatically positive ways.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

January 12, 2022

#### Appendix -- How to Prevent Despotic Abuses of Power!

Just before Donald Trump assumed the office of the presidency in January 2017, Professor Robert Reich published an article setting forth *The 15 Warning Signs of Tyranny*. Since Trump has made many statements that sound more like the diatribes of a tyrant than the reasoned discourse of a champion of democracy, it is important for *We the People* to give close consideration to these warning signs. We must be vigilant against tyranny by recognizing how tyrants take control of democracies. Here is what they typically do:

1. Exaggerate their mandate to govern -- claiming, as Trump has done, for example, that he won an election by a landslide even after losing the popular vote in 2016 by almost 3 million votes.
2. Repeatedly claim massive voter fraud in the absence of any corroborating evidence in order to discourage people from voting in elections.
3. Call anyone who opposes them "enemies."
4. Turn the public against journalists or media outlets that criticize them, calling them "deceitful" and "scum" and fake news outlets and "enemies of the people."
5. Hold few news conferences, preferring to communicate with the public directly through mass rallies and unfiltered statements -- like on Twitter!
6. Tell the public big lies, causing them to doubt the truth and to believe fictions that support the goals of the tyrants.

7. Blame economic stresses on immigrants or racial or religious minorities, and foment public bias and even violence against people in such groups.
8. Attribute acts of domestic violence to "enemies within," and use such events as excuses to beef up police forces and internal security, and impose limits on civil liberties.
9. Threaten mass deportations, registries of a religious minority, and the banning of refugees who belong to particular religious groups.
10. Seek to eliminate or reduce the influence of competing sources of power, such as labor unions and opposition parties.
11. Appoint family members to high positions of authority and power.
12. Surround themselves with their own personal security force rather than security accountable to the public.
13. Put military generals into top civilian posts.
14. Make personal alliances with foreign autocrats and dictators.
15. Draw no distinction between personal property and public property, and try to profit from public office.