

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING'S LEGACY TREASURE v. THE "FOE OF THE USA": NO-SHOW FORFEIT OR FEARLESS FACEOFF¹

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Optimism has returned to the country,² since last year's electoral victories have led to President Biden signing into law the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, families have received sorely needed money from the federal government, multiple vaccines have tamed the pandemic, and significant progressive legislation is on the horizon. But our faith and hope remain subdued. We're unsettled by the threats to our democracy: the disunity on matters of fact and science, partisan circling of the wagons,³ reactionary⁴ sedition, and perhaps most appalling, legislative assaults on the right to vote and nonpartisan election administration⁵—all of which wear away what ought to be a spirit of safety and confidence.

It's easy to see, when “. . . access [to the ballot] is thwarted by connivery, deception, intimidation, or fraud, the fabric of the nation begins to unravel.”⁶ Yet, despite the gravity of the threats,⁷ popular movement to defeat them has been wanting.⁸

Retreat from the breach that has divided the country has many twists and turns. Navigating our way to some semblance of national unity and well-being promises to demand far more than anything community organizing (CO) has ever achieved or even contemplated. This article describes our unsettled thinking about the tortuous path ahead for our profession.

INTERNAL ENEMIES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The United States has faced existential threats in its history—say, during the early months of World War II, when our forces were losing everywhere and thousands of our young men were dying. But in those fearful days we were all in it together on the home front. We were unified to save the country, to protect our families and ourselves from the aggression of Japan and Germany, to preserve our democratic way of life. Even Moshe's mother, who didn't have a political bone in her body, was saving newspapers and flattening cans for the 1940's war effort. But that unity, bolstered then by the

nation's shared moral-spiritual infrastructure,⁹ no longer exists.

Moral Corruption Erodes Unity

Our political and social fracturing follows from the decades-long moral corruption of the Republican party,¹⁰ led by its billionaire donors and patrons,¹¹ and most recently pumped up by its base of true believers deluded by Trump and his accomplices. Their mesmerized admirers, whom they have maneuvered¹² into applauding our transition from an electoral democracy to a fascist oligarchy,¹³ have solidified the disunity of the nation by their MAGA-plugging of a tissue of lies about the 2020 election.¹⁴ The successful strategy has created a populist constituency aligned with the ruling oligarchy,¹⁵ inspired by reactionary nationalism and ready to sacrifice all for its leader(s) and the nation, which, regardless history, facts, and logic, they revere as one. In this scenario, the oligarchy “. . . feeds [nationalist] populism to the people, delivers special privileges to the rich and well-connected, and rigs politics to sustain its regime.”¹⁶

Macbeth describes the rhetoric of the Republicans: “. . . full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.” The parsimonious explanation of their anomalous behavior is that their party has become a cabal of “cool alternators.”¹⁷ They have gradually morphed into actors not truly dedicated to the principles they espouse but using their party's credibility, such as it is, to achieve their covert objectives. With cool affect, they alternate between publicly posturing as patriots and privately devoting themselves to amassing institutional power, wealth, and social prestige. Although, lately, many have dropped even a pretense of patriotism.

Most Americans recognize the betrayal, the demise of money-corrupted representative government, and the dwindling national unity. They see the Republicans using Trump-hyped white grievance¹⁸ to divert their base from the party's economic rip-offs, which has been their slight-of-hand SOP for several decades.¹⁹

Most of our fellow citizens are not deaf, dumb, and blind to these shenanigans, only powerless. They also understand intuitively that the loss of democracy foreshadows the end of the historic struggle to overcome the country's legacy of poverty, oppression, and injustice.

But the present internal threats are only now beginning to be understood as far more insidious than any posed by a foreign power, because our adversaries live among us, posing as patriots, claiming the same rights and privileges they have openly dedicated themselves to cripple.²⁰

Legislative and Judicial Salvation

From what quarter should we expect a countervailing strategic response? Do we imagine that the rising tide of fascist oligarchy is going to be reversed by electoral politics, by the same political processes and personalities—left, right, and center—that thrive on sub rosa billionaire dollars,²¹ patronage and perks? According to Choi and Galbraith, economic inequality

. . . has had two main effects on American political life. One is the rise of oligarchs and their designated agents, especially in the Democratic Party. . . . Oligarchs have long dominated the Republican Party, so now American politics has become, to a large degree, a contest between billionaires of different stripes, mediated by other billionaires in control of the major media, both traditional and social.²²

The glitch in the illusion that Congress will reverse the effects of economic inequality is that it fails to see that billionaire economic power will not be challenged *structurally* by either party. Those who make such futile gestures rarely survive politically.²³ Moreover, regarding policy, despite leftist hopes that demographic shifts will lead to the demise of the Republican party on the national stage, the reliable commitments of billionaires²⁴ infuse confidence into right-wing assertions that “. . . the Democrats' hold on power is razor thin. Redistricting will narrow it further,²⁵ as will midterm losses for the party that holds the White House.”²⁶ There's evidence that rising diversity will neither be a magic bullet for the Democrats nor a poison pill for the Republicans.²⁷

Perhaps it makes sense to tamp down our optimism, to consider that what we're going through now may be like the unsustainable hope we had for structural reforms from the Clinton and Obama administrations, which were also dependent on billionaire support. And that what happens in rural-dominated, Republican-controlled state legislatures regarding voting restrictions and rights in coming years may be much more telling than national outcomes.²⁸

But Democrats remain hopeful, because the House has passed H.R.1, the For the People Act, which if signed into law would implement progressive election reforms to counter Republican voter-suppression initia-

tives and gerrymandering. It would also establish disclosure requirements for “dark money” political contributions, mandate paper ballots, create a code of ethics for SCOTUS justices, and much more.²⁹ Yet the Democrats do not have the votes to pass the companion Senate bill, S.1, nor the support of all their own members to eliminate the filibuster, to allow passage with a simple majority. Maybe they will manage to change the rule, carving out exceptions, like protection of voting rights, making it more onerous for the minority to throw up obstacles,³⁰ or even eliminating the filibuster altogether as unconstitutional.³¹ But maybe not.

We may also be overly optimistic to believe that the passage of S.1 in the Senate will lead to the implementation of its policies. We have come a long way down from the high ground of Justice Black's 1964 opinion in *Westberry v. Sanders*, which proclaimed: “No right is more precious in a free country than of having a voice in the election of those who make the laws under which, as good citizens we must live. Other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined.” Nowadays, if reactionary Republicans and their donors run true to form, we should expect judicial challenges,³² repeatedly appealed up to the SCOTUS, which will certainly be their *modus operandi* given their experience of the last decade:

In the same period, the Supreme Court dismantled much of America's campaign finance law; severely weakened the Voting Rights Act; permitted states to opt out of the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion; expanded new religious liberty rights permitting some businesses that object to a law on religious grounds to diminish the rights of third parties; weakened laws shielding workers from sexual and racial harassment; expanded the right of employers to shunt workers with legal grievances into a privatized arbitration system; undercut public sector unions' ability to raise funds; and halted Mr. Obama's Clean Power Plan.³³

The momentum of the SCOTUS and most state legislatures, based on fictive rationalizations³⁴ and legislative schemes to suppress the franchise, shows no sign of lessening.³⁵ Their advocates have a win-or-die commitment. (By March 2021, more than 361 bills with “restrictive provisions” to suppress liberal votes in 47 states had been introduced, most in response to H.R.1.³⁶ By July, 18 states had already passed 30 laws to make voting more difficult.³⁷ And the Republican domination of state legislatures shows no signs of weakening.) Given the 6-to-3 conservative bias of the Court and its recent decisions, why should we expect that progressive electoral reform will be sustained judicially?³⁸

The money-corruption of American electoral democracy is deeply motivated, now as a matter of Republican survival, in state and national representative government,³⁹ and likely to be upheld in the coming

decades by many state supreme courts, by influential appellate judges,⁴⁰ and by the SCOTUS.⁴¹

Precursors of Diminished Citizenship

Many in our profession may nonetheless believe that CO, considered as a movement, can help considerably to restrain the anti-democracy tide—stay dedicated, fighting and winning issue-campaigns. But no movement is static; it's either accelerating or decelerating, the historical effect of its momentum only known when considered in relation to the strength of its adversaries. In that regard, there is little doubt. The successes of CO over recent decades pale next to the growth of reactionary forces, powered up by ballooning economic inequality.⁴²

If our adversaries were limited to would-be authoritarian officeholders and their billionaire patrons, that alone would be an unnerving challenge. But they have indoctrinated a third of the electorate against their own economic self-interests. For several decades, unpublicized and unaccountable billionaires have subsidized a veritable army of servitors, including: hide-bound Republican politicians, so-called populist Republican associations of activists, right-wing media echo chambers, reactionary “scholarly” institutes, budget-starved conservative academic departments,⁴³ and, indirectly through the Internet,⁴⁴ white-supremacist mobilizations and anti-government militias. The most fertile seedbed of political perversion, enabled by the common-interest conspiracy of tech billionaires, may be the Internet's social networking sites (SNS). Our strategic indifference to how SNS foment reactionary politics and disunity on a large scale, while they simultaneously sabotage moral values, seems certain to handicap CO from achieving national impact.

One of the most devastating effects of social media is that ever fewer individuals follow religious moral teachings.⁴⁵ The upshot, humorously ridiculed, is that “Our new belief system is a blend of left-wing political orthodoxy, intersectional feminism, self-optimization, therapy, wellness, astrology, and Dolly Parton.”⁴⁶ Humor aside, pop-spirituality promotes the replacement of shared systems of morality with cultural obeisance to individual, self-regarding autonomy.⁴⁷

Peer-reviewed research demonstrates “. . . consistent support for . . . [the] prediction that social media reduce users' moral sensitivity.”⁴⁸ “The basic architecture of SNS and its users are such that they promote autonomy, control, and the fluidity of (religious) commitments. . . .”⁴⁹ Their moral and ethical shallowness shows in that current spiritual enlightenment often doubles as entertainment. For example, the women leading this trend on Instagram have been dubbed “Instavangelists,” the “neo-religious leaders of our era.” In effect, “The whole economy of Instagram is based on our thinking about ourselves, posting about ourselves, working on ourselves”—hardly a basis for moral and ethical citizenship.⁵⁰

When socialization venerates personal autonomy as if sanctified, regardless of the consequences of boundless self-entitlement, broad acquisition of moral compass is subverted.⁵¹ In the resulting do-as-you-like religiosity, one is neither tethered by any higher law nor challenged to consider more than personal comfort, convenience, and career.⁵² “Citizenship” is not encompassed in the vocabulary of the denominations of cyber-religion. Predictably, the moral-spiritual infrastructure, which normally reinforces both personal and civic goodness, based on criteria that go beyond benefits to individuals, has been dissolving.

Self-Entitlement Runs Amok

How far do the consequences of the amorality of self-entitlement extend? On the level of mundane personal experience, Khulda's stunning encounter with a dog-walker one morning was both physically threatening and enlightening. When the dog approached Khulda, growling and baring its teeth, she stopped in her tracks and asked the owner to rein in the animal. The owner's response: “You're giving off bad vibes and you have upset my dog!”

The societal consequences of Internet-endorsed self-entitlement include the spreading of deadly disease by tens of millions of anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers, who prioritize their “personal liberty” over preserving human life, including that of their own families and friends. In a 2021 Kaiser Family Foundation poll, 28 percent of Republicans declared they will “definitely not” submit to COVID-19 vaccination.⁵³ In a 2021 NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll, 47 percent of Trump 2020-voters said they would not get vaccinated.⁵⁴ They do not opt out quietly, but pose as patriots for the media, like the delinquents at the Idaho Capitol, the “. . . children [who] tossed surgical masks into a fire . . . to protest mask mandates as an affront to their civil liberties,”⁵⁵ while their parents applauded them. The Republican politicizing of mask mandates and vaccinations, popularized on SNS, shows a callous disregard for the suffering and death and the economic consequences for millions of families and thousands of small businesses.

But the potential for Internet-nurtured evil doesn't end there. SNS and other digital channels serve as thriving recruiting and training grounds that promote online racial and ethnic hatred, cyber-terrorism, violence-prone militias, white supremacists, and physical violence.⁵⁶ A March 2021 report from the Director of National Intelligence⁵⁷ confirms our worst fears about violent extremism. The report was prepared under the auspices of the AG, DHS, NCTC, FBI, CIA, and DIA. Some of the key points include:

The IC [intelligence community] assesses that DVEs [domestic violent extremists] exploit a variety of popular social media platforms, smaller websites with targeted audiences, and encrypted chat applications to recruit new adherents, plan and rally support for in-

person actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

Newer sociopolitical developments—such as narratives of fraud in the recent general election, the emboldening impact of the violent breach of the US Capitol, conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conspiracy theories promoting violence—will almost certainly spur some DVEs to try to engage in violence. . . .

Tristan Harris, a former “design ethicist” at Google and now president of the Center for Humane Technology, has described the effects of the Google social media model: “. . . to create a society that is addicted, outraged, polarized, performative and disinformed.”⁵⁸

Social Media Roots of Fascism

Optimists on the left may imagine that rewriting Section 230 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act will limit the worst abuses of the Internet and social media sites, but the likelihood of reform reaching beyond sex trafficking and child abuse seems doubtful.⁵⁹ Perhaps Democratic majorities in the Congress can limit blatant discrimination, harassment that has material consequences, cyberstalking, advocacy of insurrection and sedition, and wrongful death.⁶⁰ But opposition by Republicans and Big Tech to any regulation of political content⁶¹ seems likely to generate an all-out judicial challenge that inevitably will reach the SCOTUS,⁶² which is far more reactionary now⁶³ than in 2010 when the Court created the First Amendment rights of corporations in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*.

The Internet’s social media may be destined to remain a powerful, largely uncontrolled disunifying force in American political life unless, like its distant cousin, the anti-immigrant Know Nothing movement of the nineteenth century, it chokes politically and socially on its own nativist bile.⁶⁴ But it’s also possible that white grievance may evolve into nativism, perhaps even mainstreamed by Republicans in the next few years.⁶⁵ If so, it may continue to infect American culture for many decades, as it did in the past.⁶⁶

In any event, the poisonous role of social media in the promotion of disunity through mendacious reporting and commentary, magnified by TV and talk radio and reinforced by the growing private disinformation-for-hire industry,⁶⁷ will certainly continue to corrupt our public discourse. So it’s essential to recognize that the effect of Internet “Post-truth” is “pre-fascism.”⁶⁸ The history of national transitions from democracy to fascism reveals the decimation of truth to be the main harbinger of disunity, which weakens the national will to defend democracy.⁶⁹ That the U.S. is on a similar heading has been well-documented.⁷⁰

Perhaps the most significant take-away for CO is that, through continued cyber political exposure, largely

uncontradicted by face-to-face relationships in liberal and progressive settings, the political opinions and partisan commitments of much of the electorate will continue to be manipulated to serve a growing fascist oligarchy.

Potential for Mass Movement

Still, it’s plausible to believe that when conditions get bad enough, tens of millions of our citizens will rise in a unified popular movement—not a one-shot mass mobilization but an enduring movement led by seasoned leaders—to stop the corruption. Yet it’s equally likely that the human wherewithal needed to sustain such a movement may have already been enfeebled.

The far-reaching power of corporate consolidations⁷¹ that have created Big Food, Big Pharma, Big Chem, and Big Tech, make it impossible to avoid the devastating effects of their massive political influence, unscrupulous advertising, and addictive toxic products. Market domination of major sectors of the U.S. economy has been achieved by a handful of these global corporations. Through their masterful control of information-media, marketing, and manufacturing, they have become exceptionally profitable by selling products that induce toxic addiction: they reinforce usage by giving immediate pleasure, simultaneously building tolerance, so that greater amounts are required to achieve the same neural effects, thereby becoming toxic when overused.⁷²

The products, wildly popular for their pleasurable effects, include: sugar,⁷³ which has been a major contributor to premature sickness and death, while simultaneously creating disabling personal and institutional debt by driving metabolic syndrome diseases (e.g., diabetes and heart disease) to epidemic levels; alcohol and drugs,⁷⁴ which have been relentless contributors to the failure of family life and public education, especially for minorities and the poor; and electronic devices,⁷⁵ which offer irresistible social networking while they play a pernicious role in the loss of face-to-face socio-emotional bonding that now characterizes much of family and community life, which in the past were the most dependable venues to inculcate personal and civic morality, responsible citizenship, and resistance to corruption. Simultaneously, the consolidated corporations have created persistent compelling distractions⁷⁶ from the many long-term physical and psychological consequences of abandoning moral boundaries.

The upshot is that on virtually any measure of sickness and death, the U.S. is at the top of the list of industrialized nations,⁷⁷ which limits our potential for mass political activism.⁷⁸

No-Show Community Organizing

Despite widespread dispiritedness and demoralization from physical maladies, base-building CO as a movement has been remarkably unresponsive to the morbidity and mortality resulting from Big Food’s policies and

products. While CO projects have mounted countless campaigns against local gangs, illicit drugs, failing schools, inadequate housing, poverty wages, and every other kind of oppression and injustice, they have remained unmoved by the diet-driven epidemic of sickness and death in the communities in which they're organizing, as if it could be ignored without affecting citizen-participation in their own campaigns. Surely, if CO doesn't take on the battles that ensure the health of our citizens, allowing them to devote themselves to more than physical survival, why should we expect that they will fight to save democracy?

The CO movement, divided by proud, independent, competing federations, has little or no hope of winning a campaign to reform the worst abuses of Big Food. Yet the most pernicious effect of remaining unresponsive to the mass sickness and death is the commonplace view that CO doesn't address vulnerability to *integrated-institutional* oppression and injustice, when all the elements of a consolidated institutional sphere coordinate to fulfill a shared mission. For instance, we can see that the vertical and horizontal integration of Big Food—unified in lobbying, farming, processing, distribution, advertising, retail sales, and development of future product profit-centers—silently suffocates hope and faith in opposition social action for the commonweal.

It's no surprise, then, that the CO movement doesn't combat the epidemic of diabetes by fighting to remove the thousands of sugar-spiked products from supermarket shelves. Instead, despite winning countless local campaigns, the CO of our era has reinforced the belief that the circumstances of the "ordinary" citizen make it unthinkable that this kind of *institutional* powerlessness can be overcome. The lesson learned is that, while it's possible to reform a law, policy, or practice by the costly ad hoc organizing and mobilizing of a smattering of citizens, the citizenry at large has no meaningful influence in the gigantic public and private institutions that monopolize and abuse power.

Hope Springs Eternal or Infernal

Maybe, then, as some believe, our national salvation hinges on the likes of President Biden's New Deal-style initiative, which appears to be an historic force for the commonweal. Biden began with a one-of-a-kind \$1.9 trillion down payment, the American Rescue Plan, aimed at the coronavirus. He has followed up with a \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bill, and the \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan; and he supports other progressive proposals, such as the For the People Act, immigration reform, gun-control legislation, a minimum-wage increase, DC statehood, and the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act.

The elements of Biden's initiative add up to comprehensive infrastructural revivification. The proposals reflect awareness that the crisis of American culture and society calls for reviving not only our physical infrastructure, but our social and moral-spiritual infrastruc-

ture as well. On the social side, the size of proposed appropriations for research and training, home-based care for the elderly and disabled, Civilian Climate Corps, and the American Families Plan, demonstrates a commitment beyond simply remediating physical decay. Biden's commitment to moral-spiritual infrastructure began with uncommon rhetoric during his presidential campaign, which repeatedly emphasized our common interests and values as Americans, that we have much more that unifies us than divides us, and that we all have a stake in overcoming racial inequity, poverty, and voter suppression. The signature theme of his campaign was the restoration of American ideals in the face of renewed racism, nativism, and anti-Semitism. Biden didn't shrink from proclaiming that the soul of the nation hangs in the balance.⁷⁹

We can't calculate the effects of the opposition to Biden's proposals, or know how well the legislation, if passed, will spread timely benefits, or how many administrative hurdles will arise in newly created programs. We might reasonably suppose that the success of the Biden initiative may come down to the size and substance of the proposed legislation, the extent of popular and Congressional support, the timing of implementation, the competency of benefit-delivery, and the practical effects of the benefits in the lives of the people.

It's certainly possible that Biden's proposals will ultimately produce outcomes comparable to Roosevelt's New Deal.⁸⁰ In effect, that comprehensive infrastructure spending within a compelling timeframe, carefully targeted to create millions of new green jobs, to reduce unemployment to historic lows, to jump-start capitalist innovation and new markets, and to unify the citizenry in the belief that government can play a productive role in the well-being of the nation, stimulating an economic boom—that all this will derail for decades the reactionary nationalist populism that energizes the momentum toward fascist oligarchy. It may bury cultural Trumpism, reshape the Republican Party, and incentivize a strategic retreat of the billionaires. Whereas Roosevelt's success deflated the far-left of that era, Biden's success may deflate the far-right.

But it's also possible that in relation to the vulnerability of our democracy, Biden's initiative may be for naught. The denouement of the Big Lie, that the 2020 election was "stolen" from Trump, resembles the debunking of the Obama "birther" conspiracy: both claims have served as hooks on which to hang one's reactionary MAGA hat; yet delegitimizing them has not quenched one iota of vehement white grievance, which is driven by resentment and the fear of racial, cultural, economic, and political disempowerment.⁸¹ Professor Johanna Ray Vollhardt describes ". . . the psychology of grievance or imagined victimhood among dominant group members, who are driven by a sense of status loss and entitlement as well as resentment of minority groups that are viewed as a threat."⁸²

As Robert Jones, CEO and Founder of the Public Religion Research Institute, has observed, the “. . . sense of ownership of America just runs so deep in white evangelical circles [feeding the legitimacy and energy of white grievance and nativism],” to which Michelle Goldberg adds, “The feeling that it’s slipping away has created an atmosphere of rage, resentment and paranoia.”⁸³ Each day it grows more acute and receptive to conspiracy theories, as the makeup of America’s celebrated racial, ethnic, and cultural demography becomes more diverse and assertive.

Carefully considered in all its ramifications, including the potential for violence,⁸⁴ carried out in the desire to restore what is believed to be the rightful moral order, the potency and longevity of white grievance can hardly be exaggerated.⁸⁵ Many of the aggrieved still carry the flag of the secessionist Confederacy,⁸⁶ and they may yet take the country to a very dark place of disunity, one which few of us can imagine but which the National Security Council has contemplated with foreboding.⁸⁷

If the optimism regarding the restorative effects of Biden’s comprehensive initiative turns out to have been unjustified, we will continue to be confronted by the fact that the CO *movement* has been AWOL from the struggle to save our democracy.

FASCIST OLIGARCHS’ PLAYBOOK

The precondition that has allowed the transition of our democratic republic to a fascist oligarchic empire (FOE) has been the powerlessness of the demos, the political infirmity of the so-called common people of this democracy. It has happened with the acquiescence if not active cooperation of both Republican and Democratic administrations,⁸⁸ which oppose more direct forms of democracy as limitations on their partisan power.⁸⁹ At the partisan extremes, the radical left would prefer a state with only their one political party, to be rid of the right altogether; the reactionary right would prefer a state entirely without parties, to allow themselves completely unhindered authoritarian command of state power. Both malign dreams have the not-so-incidentally effect of entirely disempowering the demos.

During the transition to fascist oligarchy, the ideal of commonweal has disappeared from our national consciousness; it no longer defines the well-spring of our representative governments, since they have ceased to be *our* governments. Those of us committed to serve the commonweal have been steamrolled politically and economically by the bloated power of reactionary ideology and interests, the naked oligarchic fascism that now reigns at the expense of the commonweal in nearly half of the country. As Michael Gerson, a Republican evangelical no less, has reckoned, “The 45th president and a significant proportion of his supporters have embraced American fascism.”⁹⁰

It may nevertheless seem impossible that in the

next few years, perhaps in a decade or two at most, while we will secure progressive legislation, a reactionary institutional take-over will follow.⁹¹ But, given the trends noted above, even a cursory reading of history reveals the potential for that outcome. The primer on the subject is historian Timothy Snyder’s *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. We urge organizers to read his history of the road to tyranny and to recalibrate their estimates of the existential threat to our democracy. Those still in doubt should also read the recent five-alarm-fire statement of 200 scholars of democracy.⁹²

Fascist Oligarchic Takeover

While many may regard the threat we face as *sui generis*, the failure of modern democracies is so common as to be considered virtually inevitable. As Snyder notes, “The bad news is that the history of modern democracy is also one of decline and fall.”⁹³

It’s easy to see the parallels between the political developments in this country and the fascist-oligarchic takeovers of other democracies.⁹⁴ We should recognize the fascist playbook: the brazen appeals to nativism and white grievance that revel in the power of will over reason and the denial of objective truth in favor of preposterous lies,⁹⁵ repeated ad nauseum by elected officeholders⁹⁶ who fatuously claim to be patriotic champions of the people.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the Republican drive to pass history-denying “memory laws” in their authoritarian pursuit—pandering to white grievance by denying our racial history and the legitimacy of Critical Race Theory, in effect to “. . . protect the legacy of racism”⁹⁸ (which reinforces voter suppression)—has its antecedents in Russia and other totalitarian regimes.⁹⁹

We have reputable studies of would-be authoritarians openly declaring their intentions to use democratic institutions to gain the powers that enable them to destroy those institutions.¹⁰⁰ “The mistake is to assume that rulers who came to power through institutions cannot change or destroy those very institutions—even when they have announced their intention to do so.”¹⁰¹

The depth and breadth of the attack on the foundational institutions of American democracy cannot be fully grasped without knowing that it has been produced and directed by a brotherhood of billionaires.¹⁰² They have financially sponsored and ideologically inflamed a vast army of politicized and corporatized sycophants and hirelings, who have numerous triumphs to their discredit:

- They have destroyed the vision and path of public education as the backbone of informed and responsible citizenship.
- They have transformed the judiciary, so that it is extensively monetized, largely a tool of the wealthy; racialized, meting out blatantly biased verdicts against organized minorities;¹⁰³ and economized, routinely denying justice to the impoverished.

- As already noted, they have vandalized the universal franchise with every conceivable stratagem, most not even thinly disguised, to both suppress and override the votes of minorities, students, ex-convicts, and the poor.
- They have corrupted a significant proportion of state and federal legislators, both Democratic and Republican, with unaccountable financial contributions and the promise of future position, possessions, privileges, and power as their reward for supporting legislation, especially the economic variety, that betrays the commonweal.
- They have transformed the fourth estate into a cacophony of ideological fact-bashing that leaves the citizenry distrustful of the media¹⁰⁴ and highly polarized or disgusted to the point of chronic disinterest in public affairs, with much of the mainstream media barely recognizable, having become purveyors of this-one-said, that-one-said fake journalism and the worst neoliberal policies.¹⁰⁵

Their transformation of the SCOTUS to a 6-to-3 conservative majority will enable the Court to accelerate the transition to fascist oligarchy by upholding voter suppression and partisan electoral administration legislated by the states.¹⁰⁶ The rush by Republican state legislatures to enact such legislation, likely to be appealed soon, will demonstrate the extent to which the reactionary inclined justices show themselves willing to pervert the doctrine of states' rights in the guise of "electoral integrity." We have had a preview of the Court's coming decisions in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*,¹⁰⁷ in which the majority ruled that Arizona's ignoring some requirements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, specifically by imposing restrictive new voting rules that disproportionately impact nonwhite voters, ". . . was justified . . . to preserve the integrity of election results."¹⁰⁸

Cynicism of Fascist Oligarchs

As we assess the take-down of our democracy, do we imagine that Republicans, who have opposed almost every means to suppress the pandemic,¹⁰⁹ did not make the connection between the disproportionate COVID-19 deaths of African American and Latin American voters and the improvement of their own electoral prospects? The pandemic may have appeared ideal to them, because considered casually it may be thought to produce the same effect as their voter suppression tactics—more control of the "public powers"¹¹⁰ of all three branches of government. This would be consistent with the recent history in which Republicans have promoted policies that caused thousands of deaths¹¹¹ to enrich and empower themselves. Their callousness has been visible more times than we want to recall, so we may fairly suppose that privately they have been delighted in the belief the pandemic disproportionately kills liberal-voting minorities.¹¹²

Ironically, however, since Trump operatives initial-

ly thought the pandemic would mostly affect big cities, especially in states with Democratic-voting majorities, they positioned themselves as doubters of the vaccines and vaccinations.¹¹³ That political calculation became baked into the Trump loyalty test, still promoted by the former president. It was exemplified recently by the grotesque behavior of attendees at the July 10, 2021 CPAC get-together, when they cheered the news that fewer Americans are getting vaccinated than public health officials had projected. Captivated by Trump's lies and threats, they have become boosters of the right-wing anti-vaccination campaign that disproportionately increases coronavirus among their own Republican voters, who have refused vaccination in record numbers.¹¹⁴ Schadenfreude might be a temptation were it not for the predictable surge in needless suffering and death we expect in the coming weeks and months. This kind of Trump-modeled indifference to human pain and loss of life has been aptly described as "necropolitics."¹¹⁵

We may also suppose the Trump minions wax enthusiastic knowing that in the past year, the pandemic has been a \$360 billion bonanza for the richest nine of them.¹¹⁶ Yet, despite widespread publicizing of this eye-catching news, it's doubtful most Americans imagine that a ruling class of oligarchs regards the pandemic as their generation's opportunity to transform our electoral democracy into the *Fascist Oligarchic Empire of the United States of America* (FOE of the USA) with themselves as its leaders.

Like other moguls before them, they may not hesitate to bring on an era of darkness.¹¹⁷ They have reason to believe that as their wealth and power grow, so too will the quality of their health care, the luxury of their homes, automobiles, and yachts, the value of the education received by their children, the acumen and ethical indifference of their lawyers, and their favorable treatment by leaders, courts, and legislatures wherever they settle. They can choose to live on the Riviera or in Switzerland, Paris, London, Tokyo, or Hong Kong. To see the potential outcomes of their evil, we need only look to the Syrian and North Korean regimes, which have ordered the physical devastation of entire cities, unconscionable denial of human rights, secret detention without trial, and mass murder.

If it seems wildly improbable that Republicans would promote the disintegration of the nation's physical health and infrastructure, consider that *every* Republican in Congress opposed Biden's coronavirus legislation and they oppose his planned infrastructure spending to create green jobs, fix VA hospitals, and remove lead water pipes from schools.¹¹⁸

Magnifying these circumstances that threaten our democracy, the toxic addictions noted above entail vulnerability of the citizenry to political and economic tyranny. It's the modern version of Rome's appeasing the plebeians with "bread and circuses." But now alcohol, recreational drugs, prescription anti-depressants, pornography, food-obsession, big-league sports, and

endless cyber-based entertainment divert the attention of the people, not only from the enervation of their democratic institutions, but from their personal disempowerment, sickness and death.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, given the totality of these circumstances, the constituent organizations, alliances, and federations of the CO movement, as now divided, will *not* unite and respond as one to the FOE of the USA. It also seems likely that the organizing model of the last half-century, unreconstructed, will *not* meet the challenge but will instead fail tragically in the coming decades. If that's true, we may reasonably expect that CO, as we have known it, will continue to marginally improve the lives of all those it touches; but we should not be surprised if it has no discernible effect on the downfall of American democracy.

THE LEGACY TREASURE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Do organizers in our base-building tradition—community, faith-based, and labor—now have an unprecedented calling? Do we who have built grassroots organizations by recruiting members one-by-one, face-to-face, now have a previously unimagined mission? Is our potential contribution in the present crisis something more than what will ease the pain of the people as they encounter the coming catastrophic loss of democracy? If so, then surely our mission calls for more than our theoretical knowledge, methodological know-how, and power-building tactics. Because those characteristics are not our professional job requirements alone.

Restoring Faith and Hope

If we are called to do more, the priority must be to undo the people's loss of faith and hope, which they will need to respond to the historic threat.

What we profess to the people can puncture the cyber-reality, that the world in which they live is a maelstrom, that they can only briefly avoid its cruelty; that there is no effective remedy, because the political condition of life is to be unvalued and vulnerable; and that it's only sensible to "take care of number one" and "do unto others before they do unto you."

Our calling now ought to be obvious, because our one-to-ones with people in their neighborhoods, their faith communities, and their workplaces constitute the most powerful antidote to the alienation and anomie of the Internet culture that props up oligarchic fascism. The prospect of restored democracy can be achieved when each citizen comes to have faith and hope that the threat can be crushed. It begins with their individual faith and hope, because without it they lack the confidence to take on their obligations as citizens.

It takes faith and hope to accept that our rights as citizens come with the duty to defend them and to pass them on to the next generation. We take it as unassailable wisdom that there is no legitimate right without

duty. Faith and hope hearten us to fulfill our duties and thus meet our obligations as citizens: to support and defend the Constitution, to serve the country when our government calls, including taking up arms, performing non-combat military service, and carrying out "work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law"; to support causes and political campaigns; to obey federal, state, and local laws; to respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others; to participate in one's local community; to stay informed on issues that affect one's community and country; and to pay taxes honestly and on time.¹¹⁹ And certainly, our obligations as citizens must include active opposition to the fascist oligarchy threatening our democracy.

Community organizers can fortify the effects of those obligations by strengthening the faith and hope of the people, which happens when we connect them with others in reenergized citizenship and true fellowship. As base-building organizers, we have the means to counteract the cyber-dreck of the Internet and SNS. When we're present in response to the suffering and struggles of the people, we create an opening to revive their belief in the possibility of breaking free from poverty, oppression, and injustice.

When we look through the annals of dedicated organizers, we're inspired by the faith and hope that they, grinding away day after day, decade after decade, raised in thousands. Those who found their *raison d'être* in organizing, whatever the challenges and conditions of the job, refused to abandon their version of a moral vision of democracy, one that demands the unending pursuit of righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and compassion.

For those of us who cling to that vision, how do we understand our own faith and hope, what we want to pass on to others? Faith need not be of any religious variety, although of course it may be strengthened by religion. Our faith amounts to *an irrepressible belief in the possibility of creating ever greater goodness among humankind, for which we use up the days and decades of our lives*. When we allow our faith to enrich our lives, its realization in our action is the most important source of our hopefulness. Every act for the good that we experience through our own initiative gives us greater hope that more goodness will emerge in the world. When we engage others to act for the good, challenging those who are not, we reinforce their hopefulness and our own. All of this we pass on to those who have lost their faith and hope, which is the legacy treasure of our community organizing.

It's our privilege and honor to bring faith and hope to the powerless, many of whom languish in despair. We can help them to empower their citizenship, to truly believe in and trust their God, themselves, and one another. Perhaps that's why they have trusted us in the past, risked so much in reliance on our faith and hope in a universal moral vision of a far better world than the one we know now. This is our legacy to the communi-

ties that took us in although we were strangers, and our endowment to the organizers who come after us and possess that faith and hope. It's the distinction of our profession, which allows to us to share the sorrows and fears, the joys and laughter of the people; but it's a distinction that comes with unending demands, which ask much of us.

CO Faith and Hope in the Future

It now asks, what's to become of the CO treasure of faith and hope? Shall we leave it inert as an historical remembrance, that we passed this way in these times but were bereft of vision and valor at some of the very darkest moments in the history of our country? That we only knew how to do what we had always done, boxed in by boxes of our own making? That we were too proud or proprietary to join forces to fight for this democracy, deciding instead to forsake our faith and hope and all those who might yet rely on it?

Are we fated to remain myopically fixated on unjust and oppressive policies and practices while the fabric of our democratic institutions comes to be commandeered by fascist oligarchs, who will inevitably end any democratic policy or practice obstacle to their own enrichment and empowerment?

If instead, however, we choose a more promising future, how shall we begin to respond to the slow-motion collapse of the nation's democratic institutions?

We must first acknowledge the prevailing strategic situation: the fascist oligarchs play a long game. Unlike community organizing's two- to five-year campaign and funding cycles, they build on multi-generation objectives—how long they can continue extracting energy from the earth, how long they can dominate the appellate courts and the SCOTUS, how long they can hold majorities in state legislatures, how long they can delay environmental protections, etc. Over decades they make thousands of investments to achieve those ends, so they won't be defeated by our standard, poorly funded, conspicuously short game.

Surely, countervailing the oncoming menace demands a visionary strategy for the empowerment of the demos, one that enables the people to rise together, en masse against the betrayal of the nation by those who raise themselves up in that treachery. Surely, the threat requires that our citizens begin to exercise their power not only through representatives but directly, according to their collective wisdom, knowledge, and experience. Surely, they must hold accountable all other exercise of power by representatives who belittle their power and seek to make them pawns of a fascist oligarchy.

If we fail to ally ourselves to that cause, whatever treasure we leave to the people may eventually be reported like many ancient chronicles of defeat. Thankfully, it may only faintly convey to future generations that our response to the impending death of American democracy was measly.

NULLIFYING THE "FOE OF THE USA"

The alternative requires us to admit that it's existentially dangerous to delay the development of a unified, strategic CO response to the growth of the fascist oligarchy, because the window of opportunity to respond will not stay open indefinitely.

Any hope of future success demands recognition that we have entered the first century of the FOE of the USA. It's no longer a theoretical possibility. No untainted *institutional* force remains to counteract the billionaire brotherhood's continued strengthening of their fascist oligarchy. We should no longer expect the money-corrupted Congress¹²⁰ or the power-grasping Presidency¹²¹ to structurally undo the economic inequality that powers the evil.¹²² The best we have any reason to anticipate is progressive legislation from time to time.

The most demoralizing aspect of the transfiguration from electoral democracy to fascist oligarchy, chewing up the faith and hope of the nation as it goes, persists in the judicial endorsement and the bipartisan legislative and executive buy-in that has made it all possible if not inevitable.

Base-Building Strategic Vision

Even so, it's not naïve to take courage, because we have inherited the outline of a promising strategic vision. Our era is similar in kind and needed response to what labor organizing faced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Then the robber barons of industrialization were hell-bent on imposing their version of oligarchic empire on the citizenry. They, too, were adept in the use of electoral-manipulation, company and government spies, police violence, kangaroo courts, mental and physical torture, and blatant political corruption.¹²³

What was labor's response in that era, when the SCOTUS and every branch of government marched in reactionary lockstep? Labor's multi-generation strategic vision was to build a base of face-to-face member-organizations from the bottom up, which eventually were to wield institutional power nationally. The model was "union." The movement's power originated in countless "locals," established over a half-century, at the cost of face-to-face workplace organizing, which was not deterred by unrelenting oppression and physical violence.

They eventually unified nationally in an *institutionalized* structure that combined the might of the CIO industrial unions and the AFL craft unions, which was potentiated by the power-leverage of the strike. What they achieved after a half-century of intense struggle came to be called "social upliftment" by academics, because it empowered and uplifted tens of millions of lives throughout the society.¹²⁴

Although we support the labor movement, especially those of us who have been union members or organizers, it's more than a stretch to imagine a restoration of labor's heyday. We find it unimaginable that the

empowerment of the demos can be achieved by a revitalized union movement,¹²⁵ given the present corporate options to reposition their political influence, manufacturing assets, and labor force from one country to another;¹²⁶ especially when coupled with the anti-union bias of the growing number of authoritarian regimes overseas¹²⁷ and conservative courts in the U.S.¹²⁸ Union-based campaigns aimed to achieve accountability of global corporations and the federal government may be doomed before they're launched. They face the likelihood that the workers will be cut off at the knees with every conceivable tactic, legal and illegal,¹²⁹ if they threaten corporate power and the oligarchs of the advancing FOE.¹³⁰

Efforts to strengthen the union movement appear likely to improve *distribution of income*, but not to effect a *downward redistribution of wealth* and the political power it generates. Democratic efforts to bolster union power, through the PRO Act,¹³¹ will test the movement's ability to *hold* its ground.¹³² Solid Republican opposition to the bill in the Senate undoubtedly indicates corporate unanimity to defeat the bill at all costs. We won't be surprised if the bill dies in the Senate, killed by a Republican filibuster,¹³³ but we will celebrate if the Democrats end-run that obstacle.

Community Organizing's Banner

Although, evidently, unions will not be the means, we believe that the threat to our democracy will only end when our democratic institutions are redirected by the demos: when the people at-large, mindful of their citizenship, reclaim their inalienable rights, roles, and resources; when they come together in-person to discuss and decide how to use the public powers, which in a democracy derive from them, to reshape the governance of their neighborhoods, their cities, their states, and their nation.

Every one of our citizens has a part to play. No one can represent their individuality, because no one can stand in for their love of their God, family, community, and nation. And representatives can't take their place when they join with others, since the essential foundation of their unity is built on the equal worth and dignity of each individual's humanity and citizenship.

Thus the banner of base-building CO must necessarily proclaim the right of every citizen to exercise public powers directly. It's ironic that we can begin to secure those powers not through some mass mobilization or legislative victory, but in one-to-ones in neighborhoods, faith communities, and workplaces.

The public powers become accessible by way of a self-fulfilling prophecy, because we uphold the promise of a future in which all those we reach, uplifted by faith and hope, see that it's within their reach as aroused citizens. As extravagant as it may sound, faith and hope can raise the poor from despair, lift the oppressed from resignation, and inspire the disillusioned to reclaim their democracy.

It is possible to countervail the corruption of representative government, if our citizens acquire the confidence to take direct control of the most accessible public powers, which must be at the heart of their *institutionalized* empowerment. The political miasma will end when we nullify fascist oligarchic power with public power exercised by the demos—not by partisan parties, themselves in hock to the oligarchs, not by mass demonstrations that momentarily engage the populace like shooting stars, and not by the short-term, self-interest-dominated model of CO.¹³⁴ Democratic forces must join together in a long struggle for *institutionalized* directly democratic control of public powers, the as-yet untapped power-leverage of the demos that will benchmark long overdue *structural* change.

Directing Democracy from the Bottom Up

A corresponding strategic vision must define a path to remake the governance of the cities, to secure directly democratic institutional power in the government jurisdictions in which most of our citizens live and work, and which have an ever-greater, pivotal role in the global economy,¹³⁵ by the establishment of popular assemblies with public powers throughout our metropolitan areas.

The assemblies would not replace other urban governments, but operate as powerful institutions in their own right, able to use their powers to hold accountable and negotiate with municipal, state and federal officials on provision of services, regulation of economic enterprise, and political rule.¹³⁶ As Pitkin and Shumer note, "Face to face democracy [is] the foundation—not a substitute—for representative institutions, federalism, and national democracy."¹³⁷ By our combined efforts to build that foundation, CO can shape the *institutionalized* uprising, solidarity, and empowerment of the demos that will mark the beginning of the end of oligarchic fascism.

What we face may yet dwarf all our history of disunity and destructive outcomes, except for the Civil War. If it comes to pass, our choice may be to *exist* as consumer-ciphers of a fascist oligarchy or to *live* as activist-citizens of a vigorous democracy.

If we forego the struggle, the future of the United States may already be foretold in the histories of all the powerful nations that were defeated not by external forces but by their own internal corruption. Knowing as much, we might ask ourselves: In the modern histories of Argentina, Brazil, China, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Spain, Turkey, and other nations taken over or threatened now by fascist oligarchs, when, if at all, did the citizens recognize that, "If none of us is prepared to die [i.e., use up our lives in the cause] for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny"?¹³⁸ But the threat will begin to dissipate when we pledge our lives, our reputations, and our resources to the revitalization of the structure of our democracy by championing *public powers to the people*.

¹ This article has been updated since first published in *Social Policy* (Summer 2021).

² An ABC News/Ipsos Poll (April 30-May 1) showed that 64 percent of respondents were optimistic “. . . about the way things are going in this country.” See “Americans optimistic about the direction of the country over the next twelve months,” Ipsos (May 2, 2021) [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-05/Topline%20ABC_Ipsos%20Poll%20May%202%202021.pdf].

³ We are troubled because, “When politics becomes an identity-based struggle against depraved opponents—when ideals and policies matter less than dominating foes—government becomes dysfunctional.” See Eli J. Finkel et al., “Political sectarianism in America,” *Science*, 370(6516):533-536 (October 30, 2020), p. 536.

⁴ We define “reactionary” as a quest to return to a time of dominant, unquestioned cultural white supremacy and rule by economic and political white oligarchy.

⁵ See: States United Democracy Center, “A Democracy Crisis in the Making” (April 22, 2021) [<https://statesuniteddemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL-Democracy-Crisis-Report-April-21.pdf>] and “Democracy Crisis Report Update: New Data and Trends Show the Warning Signs Have Intensified in the Last Two Months” (June 10, 2021) [https://statesuniteddemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Democracy-Crisis-Part-II_June-10_Final_v7.pdf].

⁶ See Gilda R. Daniels, “Voter Deception,” *Indiana Law Review*, 43:343-387 (2010), p. 387.

⁷ See Larry Diamond, “Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope, methods, and causes,” *Democratization*, 28(1):22-42 (2021).

⁸ Moreover, remaining largely unchallenged and free of opprobrium, but equally dangerous as the perpetrators of Trumpism, are “. . . those who knew or suspected what was being done, but turned away.” See Colbert I. King, “Trump and his perpetrators and bystanders own a Republican party incompatible with democracy,” *Washington Post* (May 7, 2021).

⁹ See Moshe ben Asher, “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing,” *Social Policy*, 50(4):55-64 (Winter 2020).

¹⁰ See: Jackie Calmes, *Dissent: The Radicalization of the Republican Party and Its Capture of the Court* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2021); Larry M. Bartels, “Ethnic antagonism erodes Republicans’ commitment to democracy,” *PNAS, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117(37):22752-22759 (September 15, 2020); and Norm Ornstein, “I’ve Witnessed the Decline of the Republican Party,” *The Atlantic* (August 6, 2020).

¹¹ See Tom Dickenson, “How the GOP Became the Party of the Rich,” *Rolling Stone* (November 24, 2011).

¹² This phenomenon becomes somewhat more comprehensible when explained by mimetic theory. See Nidesh Lawtoo, (*New*) *Fascism* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2019).

¹³ “Revived today in conditions of inequality as a politics of eternity, fascism serves oligarchs as a catalyst for transitions away from public discussion and towards political fiction; away from meaningful voting and towards fake democracy; away from the rule of law and towards personalist regimes.” See Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, Penguin Random House—Kindle edition, 2018), loc. 267.

¹⁴ See Pippa Norris, “Electoral Integrity in the 2020 U.S. Elections,” The Electoral Integrity Project at Harvard University (December 2020) [<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/electoral-integrity-2020-us-elections>].

¹⁵ For research based on multivariate-analysis that corroborates “Economic-Elite Domination” of U.S. government policy (based on a national survey of opinion regarding proposed changes in government policy), see Martin Gillens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3):564-581 (September 2014).

¹⁶ See Ganesh Sitaraman, “Countering Nationalist Oligarchy,” *Democracy*, 51 (Winter 2019) [<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/51/countering-nationalist-oligarchy/>].

¹⁷ See Michael Silver [NKA: Moshe ben Asher], *The ISA Model of Community Organization and the Leadership Crisis of La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood-ISA* (University of California at Los Angeles: MSW thesis, June 1974), pp. 39-40 [http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/MbA_MSW_THESIS.pdf].

¹⁸ See: Lilliana Mason et al., “Activating Animus: The Unique Social Roots of Trump Support,” *American Political Science Review*, published online (June 30, 2021) [<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/activating-animus-the-uniquely-social-roots-of-trump-support/D96C71C353D065F62A3F19B504FA75777>]; and Diana C. Mutz, “Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote,” *PNAS, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 115(19):E4330-E4339 (May 8, 2018). Trump uses the political power inherent in stoking nativism and white grievance by agitating on immigration issues, a widely successful method. See Ian Shapiro, “Lecture 1: Introduction to Power and Politics in Today’s World,” Yale Courses (August 29, 2019) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDqvzFY72mg/>].

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- ¹⁹ See Jennifer Rubin, “The MAGA phenomenon has never been about economics,” *Washington Post* (March 5, 2021).
- ²⁰ Recent GOP initiatives include state legislative takeovers of voting administration to declare winners in elections they lost. See Anthony Izaguirre, “GOP seeks control in local elections,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 29, 2021).
- ²¹ See Michael Beckel, “Outsized Influence,” Issue One (n.d., April 2021) [<https://www.issueone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Issue-One-Outsized-Influence-Report-final.pdf>]. As the subheading of the report makes clear, “12 [“overwhelmingly white”] political megadonors are responsible for \$1 of every \$13 in federal elections since *Citizens United* and 24% of all giving from the top 100 ZIP codes—a total of \$3.4 billion.”
- ²² Jaehee Choi and James K. Galbraith, “The Politics of American Inequality,” *Intereconomics*, 55(1):63-64 (2020).
- ²³ Some of the dynamics are explored in Adam Bonica et al., “Why Hasn’t Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(3):103-124 (Summer 2013), pp. 111-113.
- ²⁴ See: Darrell M. West, “Why Politically Active Billionaires Threaten the Health of Democracy,” Scholars Strategy Network (June 24, 2014) [<https://scholars.org/contribution/why-politically-active-billionaires-threaten-health-democracy>]; and Kristin A. Goss, “Policy Plutocrats: How America’s Wealthy Seek to Influence Governance,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 49(3):442-448 (July 2016).
- ²⁵ On both Republican and Democratic prospects in the coming redistricting in the South, see Nicholas Riccardi, “South emerges as a flashpoint of brewing redistricting battles,” AP News (March 15, 2021) [<https://apnews.com/article/redistricting-voting-rights-texas-537f74c17884059881cb6e4076bfb504>].
- ²⁶ Claimed by Hugh Hewitt, “The Republican Party isn’t in trouble,” *Washington Post* (March 7, 2021).
- ²⁷ See: Nate Cohn, “Why Rising Diversity Might Not Help Democrats as Much as They Hope,” *New York Times* (May 4, 2021); James Hohmann, “Republicans are winning Latinos in Florida. Can they do it nationwide?” *Washington Post* (June 2, 2021); and David Byler, “Demographics were expected to push Florida left. Instead, they nudged it to the right,” *Washington Post* (June 2, 2021).
- ²⁸ See: Nick Corasaniti and Reid J. Epstein, “Georgia Law Kicks Off Partisan Battle Over Voting Rights,” *New York Times* (March 26, 2021); and Amy Gardner, “After Trump tried to intervene in the 2020 vote, state Republicans are moving to take more control of elections,” *Washington Post* (March 26, 2021).
- ²⁹ See Mike DeBonis, “House Democrats pass sweeping elections bill as GOP legislatures push to restrict voting,” *Washington Post* (March 5, 2021); and Nicholas Fandos, “Targeting State Restrictions, House Passes Landmark Voting Rights Expansion,” *New York Times* (March 3, 2021).
- ³⁰ See Norman Ornstein, “Democrats can’t kill the filibuster. But they can gut it,” *Washington Post* (March 2, 2021).
- ³¹ See Edwin Chemerinsky and Burt Neuborne, “The filibuster is unconstitutional. Here’s how Vice President Harris can take it on,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 22, 2021).
- ³² See Adam Liptak, “Constitutional Challenges Loom Over Proposed Voting Bill [H.R. 1],” *New York Times* (May 5, 2021).
- ³³ See Ian Millhiser, “Republicans Have an Ambitious Agenda for the Supreme Court,” *New York Times* (March 30, 2021).
- ³⁴ See Brennan Center for Justice, “Responses on Voter Fraud Claims” (June 26, 2017) [<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/resources-voter-fraud-claims>].
- ³⁵ For voter suppression motives, see Keith Gunnar Bentele and Erin E. O’Brien, “Jim Crow 2.0?: Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies,” Sociology Faculty Publication Series, Paper 11 (University of Massachusetts Boston, 2013). The researchers found that “. . . the Republican Party has engaged in strategic demobilization efforts in response to changing demographics, shifting electoral fortunes, and an inward rightward ideological drift among the party faithful.”
- ³⁶ See Brennan Center for Justice, “Voting Laws Roundup: March 2021” [<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-march-2021>].
- ³⁷ See Brennan Center for Justice, “Voting Laws Roundup: July 2021” [<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-july-2021>].
- ³⁸ It has been reported that Stanford Law professor Nathaniel Persily “. . . would be surprised if newly enacted voting restrictions are struck down,” since “The Supreme Court has not sent a signal they will protect the right to vote.” See David G. Savage, “How the Supreme Court tilted election law to favor GOP,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 5, 2021).
- ³⁹ See Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House—Kindle edition., 2017), loc. 176: “The odd American idea that giving money to political campaigns is free speech means that the very rich have far more speech, and so in effect far more voting power, than other citizens. We believe that we have checks and balances but have rarely faced a situation like the present: when the less popular of the two parties suppresses voting, claims fraud when it loses elections, and controls most statehouses.”

⁴⁰ On the influence posed by conservative appellate court judges, see: Ruth Marcus, “Trump’s attacks on the press were bad. What this federal judge did was worse,” *Washington Post* (March 21, 2021); and Rachel Weiner, “Appeals court upholds constitutionality of FBI terror watch list,” *Washington Post* (March 30, 2021).

⁴¹ We do not have a basis to speculate on the possible outcomes of the Biden Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States, which is scheduled to deliver its report later this year.

⁴² See Chuck Collins et al., “Billionaire Bonanza 2020—Wealth Windfalls, Tumbling Taxes, and Pandemic Profiteers,” Institute for Policy Studies (2020) [<https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Billionaire-Bonanza-2020.pdf>].

⁴³ See Jane Mayer, *Dark Money* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2016).

⁴⁴ See Soufan Center, “Financing the Radical Right in Plain Sight” (September 9, 2020) [<https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-financing-the-radical-right-in-plain-sight/>].

⁴⁵ “In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down from . . . 70% in 1999.” See Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup (March 29, 2021) [<https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>]. According to Ryan P. Burge, “Mainline Protestants Are Still Declining, But That’s Not Good News for Evangelicals,” *Christianity Today* (July 13, 2021) [<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/mainline-protestant-evangelical-decline-survey-US-nones.html>], “. . . fewer people identify with an established religious tradition every year. The ranks of the religiously unaffiliated . . . have grown from about 5 percent in the early 1970s to at least 30 percent in 2020.” During the last decade the mainline denominations have had drops of 15 to 40 percent. Nearly half of those who left were religiously unaffiliated. Only half of the young people raised in the largest Protestant denomination remain as adults.

⁴⁶ The opinion of feminist and Internet commentator, Leigh Stein, “The Empty Religious Instagram,” *New York Times* (March 5, 2021).

⁴⁷ For the darker side of this phenomenon, see Marisa Meltzer, “QAnon’s Unexpected Roots in New Age Spirituality,” *Washington Post* (March 29, 2021).

⁴⁸ See Xiaoyu Ge, “Social media reduces users’ moral sensitivity: Online shaming as a possible consequence,” *Aggressive Behavior*, 46(5):359-369 (June 2020).

⁴⁹ See Paul K. McClure, “Faith and Facebook in a Pluralistic Age: The Effects of Social Networking Sites on the Religious Beliefs of Emerging Adults,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 59(4):818-834 (2016), p. 831.

⁵⁰ Stein op. cit.

⁵¹ On this narcissistic trend, see: Konrad Bocian et al., “Moral tribalism: Moral judgments of actions supporting in-group interests depend on collective narcissism,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 93 (March 2021) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346971198_Moral_Tribalism_Moral_Judgments_of_Actions_Supporting_Ingroup_Interests_Depend_on_Collective_Narcissism]; Silvia Casale and Vanessa Banchi, “Narcissism and problematic social media use: A systematic literature review,” *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 11 (June 2020); and Jean M. Twenge and Joshua D. Foster, “Mapping the scale of the narcissism epidemic: Increases in narcissism 2002-2007 within ethnic groups,” *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42(6):1619-1622 (December 2008).

⁵² For a definitive Christian treatment of the historical formation of the [self-centered] “psychological self,” see Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁵³ Kaiser Family Foundation, “KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: February 2021” [<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-february-2021>].

⁵⁴ Marist Poll, “Americans Weigh In on COVID-19 Relief Package” (March 11, 2021) [http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NPR_PBS-NewsHour_Marist-Poll_USA_Written-Summary-of-Findings_202103091618-1.pdf]. See also, Washington Post-ABC News Poll (July 3, 2021) [<https://context-cdn.washingtonpost.com/notes/prod/default/documents/014a7c64-062f-494b-ba30-0b894625ffae/note/2cf0babc-25d2-4781-bb5f-2c7753d4ed3e.#page=1>].

⁵⁵ See Kim Bellware, “Kids burn masks in anti-masker demonstration on Idaho Capitol steps,” *Washington Post* (March 8, 2021).

⁵⁶ See: Seth G. Jones et al., “The Military, Police, and the Rise of Terrorism in the United States,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (April 2021) [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210412_Jones_Military_Police_Rise_of_Terrorism_United_States_1.pdf?_7p2zEfdFSVV5Vsva6bM1yp6I5MeXVL7]; Innes von Behr et al., *Radicalisation in the Digital Era* (Cambridge, UK: RAND Europe, 2013) [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf]; Matthew L. Williams et al., “Hate in the Machine: Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Social Media Posts As Predictors of Offline Racially and Religiously Aggravated Crime,” *British Journal of Criminology*, 60:93-117 (July 23, 2019); Jessie Daniels, “the algorithmic rise of the ‘alt-right,’” *Contexts*, 17(1):60-65 (Winter 2018); Hannah Gais and Megan Squire, “How an Encrypted Messaging Platform is Changing Extremist Movements,” Southern Poverty Law Center (February 16, 2021) [<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/16/how-encrypted-messaging-platform-changing->

extremist-movements]; and Anti-Defamation League, “White Supremacist Propaganda Spikes in 2020” (n.d., 2021) [<https://www.adl.org/white-supremacist-propaganda-spikes-2020>].

⁵⁷ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021” (March 1, 2021) [<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/docements/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>].

⁵⁸ See Anna Edgerton and Ilya Banares, “Social media algorithms get Senate scrutiny,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 28, 2021).

⁵⁹ Evidently, only inciting or threatening violence is likely to be criminalized. See: Grace Udoh-Oshin, “Hate Speech on the Internet: Crime or Free Speech?” Long Island University, Undergraduate Honors College Theses (2017) [https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=post_honors_theses]; and Valerie C. Brannon, “Free Speech and the Regulation of Social Media Content,” Congressional Research Service (March 27, 2019) [<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45650.pdf>]. For a review of related philosophical considerations, see Jeffrey W. Howard, “Free Speech and Hate Speech,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22:93-109 (May 2019).

⁶⁰ But see David McCabe, “How a Stabbing in Israel Echoes Through the Fight Over Online Speech,” *New York Times* (March 24, 2021).

⁶¹ On the free-speech issues, see Victoria L. Killion, “Terrorism, Violent Extremism, and the Internet: Free Speech Considerations,” Congressional Research Service (May 6, 2019) [<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R45713.pdf>].

⁶² It has already begun, as reported by Anthony Izaguirre, “GOP pushing to allow social media ‘censorship’ suits,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 8, 2021), which highlights the Republican initiative to allow costly lawsuits against media giants that attempt to police content on their websites.

⁶³ In addition to its more reactionary rulings, the Court has adopted the devious approach of “shadow docket rulings” to further its partisan bias. See Stephen I. Vladeck, “The Supreme Court Is Making New Law in the Shadows,” *New York Times* (April 15, 2021).

⁶⁴ The Know Nothing movement of the mid-1800s was “rabidly xenophobic,” especially regarding Catholic immigrants. The political party it founded was semi-secret regarding basic beliefs. When members were asked about the organization, they answered, “I know nothing.” They instigated violent confrontations with Catholics, which led to multiple deaths. Historians regard the KKK as part of their nativist legacy. Our other significant flirtation with nativism was the German American Bund, which proudly marched in public parades and saluted the Nazi persecution of so-called sub-humans. See Leland V. Bell, *The German American Bund, 1936-1941* (New York, NY: Academy of Political Science, 1970). For a fascinating photographic portrayal of the Bund’s activities, see Alan Taylor, “American Nazis in the 1930s—The German American Bund,” *Washington Post* (June 5, 2017).

⁶⁵ See: Paul Stocker, “The great replacement theory: a historical perspective,” CARR—Center for the Analysis of the Radical Right (September 19, 2019) [<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/great-replacement-theory-historical-perspective>]; ADL—Anti-Defamation League, “The Great Replacement: An Explainer” (n.d.) [<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-great-replacement-an-explainer>]; Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, *The Great Replacement: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism* (London, UK: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019) [<https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf>]; Charles M. Blow, “Tucker Carlson and White Replacement,” *New York Times* (April 11, 2021); and Michael Kranish, “How Tucker Carlson became the voice of White grievance,” *Washington Post* (July 14, 2021).

⁶⁶ See: George J. Sánchez, “Face the Nation: Race, Immigration, and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America,” *International Migration Review*, 31(4):1009-1030 (Winter 1997); and Tyler Anbinder, “Nativism and Prejudice Against Immigrants,” in Reed Ueda, ed., *A Companion to American Immigration* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 177-201.

⁶⁷ See: Hannah Murphy and Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan, “Boom in private companies offering disinformation-for-hire,” *Financial Times* (January 12, 2021); Josh A. Goldstein and Shelby Grossman, “How disinformation evolved in 2020,” *Tech Stream* (January 4, 2021) [<https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-disinformation-evolved-in-2020>]; and Max Fisher, “Disinformation for Hire, a Shadow Industry, Is Quietly Booming,” *New York Times* (July 25, 2021).

⁶⁸ Snyder op. cit., loc. 458

⁶⁹ When fragmentation destroys any possibility of national political unity, we enter the territory that brought the downfall of democracy in post-World War I Germany. The right-wing claim at that time, that Germany did not actually lose the war but was betrayed by “traitors, leftists, and Jews above all,” set the stage for fragmenting German society and Hitler’s rise. See Jochen Bittner, “1918 Germany Has a Warning for America,” *New York Times* (November 30, 2020). An example of the morbidity and mortality linked to disunity is reflected in different COVID-19 infection and death rates between countries where the leadership and culture have promoted a unified response or not. The fragmented U.S. approach has produced an infection rate at 9.10 percent, while the rate for unified New Zealand (N.Z.) is .05 percent. See Joe Burns, “The double-edged sword of Oregon’s COVID-19 success,” *Oregon*

Public Broadcasting (March 19, 2021) [<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/03/07/Oregon-covid-19-year-2-data-science>]. The N.Z. death rate per million population is 5.29, while the U.S. rate is 16.37. See Statista, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths worldwide per million population as of March 19, 2021, by country” [<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104709/coronavirus-deaths-worldwide-per-million-inhabitants>].

⁷⁰ For a comprehensive legal and constitutional analysis of this incremental process, see the treatment of “constitutional retrogression” by Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsburg, “How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy,” 65 *UCLA Law Review* (2018), in which the authors describe in extraordinary detail what “. . . occurs more slowly through an accumulation of piecemeal changes, each perhaps innocuous or even justified in isolation” (pp. 83-84). See also Timothy Snyder, “The American Abyss,” *New York Times* (January 9, 2021); and Brian Klaas, “Why Republicans won’t learn anything from their defeat in Georgia,” *Washington Post* (January 7, 2021).

⁷¹ See: “Too much of a good thing,” *The Economist* (March 26, 2016); Tim Wu, *The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age* (New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports, 2018); Stacy Mitchell, “The Rise and Fall of the Word ‘Monopoly’ in American Life,” *The Atlantic* (June 20, 2017); Erik Sherman, “Business Consolidation Is Crushing the Economy and People,” *Forbes* (August 29, 2019) [<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbes-personal-shopper/2021/04/23/samsung-galaxy-unpacked-deal/?sh=17e8986d5176>]; and “Monopoly Power and the Decline of Small Business,” Institute for Local Self-Reliance (August 2016) [<https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/08/MonopolyPower-SmallBusiness.pdf>].

⁷² See Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, “‘A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down,’ But Not As We Might Imagine!” Gather the People (2018) [www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/SUGAR_SPOONFUL.pdf].

⁷³ See: Nicole M. Avena, Pedro Rada, and Bartley G. Hoebel, “Evidence for sugar addiction: Behavioral and neurochemical effects of intermittent excessive sugar intake,” *Neuroscience & Behavioral Reviews*, 32(1), 20-39 (2008); and David A. Wiss, Nicole Avena, and Pedro Rada, “Sugar Addiction: From Evolution to Revolution,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9, 545 (2018) [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6234835/>].

⁷⁴ See: Sarah DeWeerd, “Tracing the US opioid crisis to its roots,” *Nature*, 573, S10-S12 (2019) [<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02686-2/>]; Art Van Zee, “The Promotion and Marketing of OxyContin: Commercial Triumph, Public Health Tragedy,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(2), 221-227 (2009); and Jesse C. Baumgartner and David C. Radley, “The Spike in Drug Overdose Deaths During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Options to Move Forward,” To the Point (blog), Commonwealth Fund (March 25, 2021) [<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2021/spike-drug-overdose-deaths-during-covid-19-pandemic-and-policy-options-move-forward>].

⁷⁵ See: Sehar Shoukat, “Cell phone addiction and psychological and physiological health in adolescents,” *EXCLI Journal*, 18, 47-50 (2019) [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6449671/>]; and Yubo Hou et al., “Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention,” *Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 13(1) (2019) [<https://cyberpsychology.en/article/view/11562/10369/>].

⁷⁶ See Marnik G. Dekimpe and Dominique Hanssens, “The Persistence of Marketing Effects on Sales,” *Marketing Science*, 14(1), 1-21 (1995).

⁷⁷ See Steven H. Woolf and Laudan Aron, Eds., *U.S. Health in International Perspective—Shorter Lives, Poorer Health* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2013).

⁷⁸ See Lilly Shanahan and William E. Copeland, “Psychiatry and Deaths of Despair,” *JAMA Psychiatry* (March 31, 2021).

⁷⁹ See Steve Denning, “Joe Biden And The Rhetoric of Restoration,” *Forbes* (April 28, 2019) [<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2019/04/28/joe-biden-and-the-rhetoric-of-restoration/?sh=1ace48ee5b44>].

⁸⁰ For an historical review based on a social welfare perspective, see Jerry D. Marx, “Great Depression: America’s Social Policy,” VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University] Libraries Social Welfare History Project (2011) [<http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/American-social-policy-in-the-great-depression-and-wwi>].

⁸¹ See: Robert A. Pape, “What an analysis of 377 Americans arrested or charged in the Capitol insurrection tells us,” *Washington Post* (April 6, 2021); and Maureen A. Craig and Jennifer A. Richeson, “Majority No More? The Influence of Neighborhood Racial Diversity and Salient National Population Changes on Whites’ Perception of Racial Discrimination,” *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 4(5):141-157 (2018).

⁸² Quoted by Thomas B. Edsall, “Why Trump Is Still Their Guy,” *New York Times* (April 21, 2021).

⁸³ See Michelle Goldberg, “The Christian Right Is in Decline, and It’s Taking America With It,” *New York Times* (July 9, 2021). Those identifying as white evangelicals went from 23 percent in 2006 to 14 percent in 2020, becoming the oldest religious denomination, losing members to death and a youth-exodus. See Robert P. Jones et al., *The 2020 Census of American Religion* (Washington, DC: PRRI—Public Religion Research Institute, n.d.).

⁸⁴ See PRRI Staff, “Understanding QAnon’s Connection to American Politics, Religion, and Media Consumption,” Public Religion Research Institute (May 27, 2021) [<https://www.prrri.org/research/qanon-comspiracy-american-politics-report/>]. As the PRRI report indicates, the threat of violence is not trivial: “. . . one in five Americans (20%) agree with the statement ‘There is a storm coming soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the

rightful leaders,' while a majority (77%) disagree. Nearly three in ten Republicans (28%) compared to 18% of independents and 14% of Democrats agree with this secondary QAnon conspiracy theory. . . . Republicans (28%) are twice as likely as independents (13%) and four times as likely as Democrats (7%) to agree that because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence." See also: Linda So, "Trump-inspired death threats are terrorizing election workers," Reuters (June 11, 2021)

[<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-trump-georgia-threats/>]; and Michael Gerson, "The threat of violence now infuses GOP politics. We should all be afraid," *Washington Post* (May 20, 2021).

⁸⁵ Ed McBroom, the Republican dairy farmer and state senator who chairs the Michigan Senate's Oversight Committee, whose widely publicized report found that the charges of a "stolen" 2020 election were all a "bunch of nonsense," fears the consequences. McBroom described folks he encountered while preparing the report, who were saying: "'Maybe it's time to rise up'—you know, 'refreshing the tree of liberty with the blood of patriots'." He added: "These are good people, and they're being lied to, and they're believing the lies. And it's really dangerous." See Tim Alberta, "The Senator Who Decided to Tell the Truth," *The Atlantic* (June 30, 2021).

⁸⁶ For an insightful essay on "A toxic class resentment [that] has been festering for decades among rural and small-town Americans," see William A. Galston, "The Bitter Heartland," *American Purpose* (March 31, 2021) [<https://www.americanpurpose.com/articles/the-bitter-heartland>].

⁸⁷ See National Security Council, *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* (June 2021) [<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/biden-s-strategy-for-combating-domestic-extremism/22ddf1f2f328e688/full.pdf>], which calls out ". . . violent self-proclaimed 'militias' who, despite legal prohibitions in all fifty states against certain private militia activity, assert a baseless right to take the law into their own hands. Across violent ideologies, individuals and small groups—both formal and informal—have been galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States to carry out violent attacks. Among that wide range of animating ideologies, racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (principally those who promote the superiority of the white race) and militia violent extremists are assessed as presenting the most persistent and lethal threats" (p. 6). See also Amanda Taub and Katrin Bennhold, "From Doomsday Preppers to Doomsday Plotters," *New York Times* (June 7, 2021).

⁸⁸ See: Thomas Frank, *Listen, Liberal: What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2017); Bill Curry, "My party has lost its soul: Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and the victory of Wall Street Democrats," Salon (July 27, 2014) [https://www.salon.com/2014/07/27/my_party_has_lost_its_soul_bill_clinton_barack_obama_and_the_victory_of_wall_street_democrats/]; Frank Rich, "Obama's Original Sin," *New York* (July 3, 2011); Rodger D. Hodge, *The Mendacity of Hope: Barack Obama and the Betrayal of American Liberalism* (New York, NY: Harper, 2010); and E.J. Dionne Jr., "Clinton Swipes the GOP's Lyrics," *Washington Post* (July 21, 1996).

⁸⁹ See Justin H. Phillips, "Does the Citizen Initiative Weaken Party Government in the U.S. States?" *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 8(2):127-149 (Summer 2008).

⁹⁰ See Michael Gerson, "Trumpism is American fascism," *Washington Post* (February 1, 2021).

⁹¹ The object lesson in this possibility is the Weimer Republic. See: Meilan Solly, "What the Weimer Republic Can Teach Us About Modern Democracy," *Smithsonian Magazine* (April 11, 2019); Alan E. Steinweis, "Weimar Culture and the Rise of National Socialism: *The Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*," *Central European History*, 24(4):402-423 (1991); and Jochen Hung, "'Bad' Politics and 'Good' Culture: New Approaches to the History of the Weimer Republic," *Central European History*, 49(3-4):441-453 (2016).

⁹² The number of signatories was current as of June 15, 2021. See New America, "Statement of Concern, The Threats to American Democracy and the Need for National Voting and Election Administration Standards" (June 1, 2021) [<https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/statements/statement-of-concern/>].

⁹³ Snyder op. cit., loc. 62

⁹⁴ For an American diplomat's on-the-job account of this process, see Ben Rhodes, *After the Fall, Being American in the World We've Made* (New York, NY: Random House—Kindle edition, 2021), especially Part I: The Authoritarian Playbook (locs. 180-247).

⁹⁵ As Paul Krugman, "What Underlies the G.O.P. Commitment to Ignorance," *New York Times* (June 28, 2021), points out: ". . . refusing to acknowledge reality serves special interests. Climate denial caters to the fossil fuel industry; evolution denial caters to religious fundamentalists; tax-cut mysticism caters to billionaire donors." See also Andrew Sullivan, "Donald Trump and the Art of the Lie," *New York Times* (June 14, 2019).

⁹⁶ See Kali Holloway, "Trump Is an Eerily Perfect Match With a Famous 14-Point Guide to Identify Fascist Leaders," AlterNet (December 6, 2016) [<https://www.alternet.org/2016/12/trump-eerily-perfect-match-famous-14-point-guide-identify-fascist-leaders/>].

⁹⁷ Ibid., loc. 74.

⁹⁸ On this trend without a focus on the pros or cons of the theory but on the criminalizing of pedagogy, see Kmele Foster et al., "Anti-Critical Race Theory Laws Are Un-American," *New York Times* (July 5, 2021).

⁹⁹ Russian implementation of memory laws, “. . . government actions designed to guide public interpretation of the past,” have the effect of criminalizing any teaching of history that might undermine the moral legitimacy of the current regime or dominant class. See Timothy Snyder, “The War on History Is a War on Democracy,” *New York Times Magazine* (June 29, 2021). See also, George Soroka and Félix Krawatzek, “Nationalism, Democracy, and Memory Laws,” *Journal of Democracy*, 30(2): 157-171 (April 2019).

¹⁰⁰ See: Amanda Taub, “The rise of American authoritarianism,” *Vox* (March 1, 2016)

[<https://www.vox.com/2016/3/1/11127424/trump-authoritarianism>]; Dawn Brancati, “Democratic Authoritarianism: Origins and Effects,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17:313-326 (May 2014); and Erica Frantz, “Authoritarian Politics: Trends and Debates,” *Politics and Governance*, 6(2):87-89 (June 2018).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, loc. 140.

¹⁰² “Brotherhood” is meant to convey that U.S. billionaires have common interests about which they communicate with one another, and a common purpose, plan, and operation, with roots reaching back more than 150 years. They oppose “. . . any group or government meddling with the market,” manipulating law and policy to insulate themselves and their wealth from government regulation. See: Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains, the Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2017—Kindle edition), loc. 36; and Kurt Andersen, *Evil Geniuses—The Unmaking of America: A Recent History* (New York, NY: Random House, 2020—Kindle edition). See also Chuck Collins and Omar Ocampo, “Trump and His Many Billionaire Enablers,” Institute for Policy Studies (January 11, 2021) [<https://ips-dc.org/trump-and-his-many-billionaire-enablers>]. On the billionaire-brotherhood control of government, see: Vicky Ward, “The Blow-It-All-Up Billionaires,” *Huffington Post* (March 17, 2017) [<http://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/mercurs/>]; Jane Mayer, *Dark Money, The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2016); and Mateo Gold and Robert Barnes, “Growing array of pro-Trump groups train cross-hairs on GOP lawmakers,” *Washington Post* (April 2, 2017) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/growing-array-of-pro-trump-groups-could-be-trained-on-gop-lawmakers/2017/04/02/358deaa2-1755-11e7-833c-503e1f6394c9_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-more-top-stories_trumpgroups-855%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.006dd2548a57]. For an example of the billionaire-brotherhood role in the Tea Party, frequently described by the media and its own members as “populist” and “grass-roots,” see: Amanda Fallin et al., “To quarterback behind the scenes, third-party efforts: the tobacco industry and the Tea Party,” *Tobacco Control*, 23:322-331 (2014); Jess Nesbit, “The Secret Origins of the Tea Party, How Big Oil and Big Tobacco Partnered with the Koch Brothers to Take Over the GOP,” *Time* (April 5, 2016) [<http://time.com/secret-origins-of-the-tea-party/>]; and Jane Mayer, “Trump’s Money Man: The Reclusive Hedge-Fund Tycoon Behind the Trump Presidency,” *The New Yorker* (March 27, 2017). On plutocrats boosting white supremacy, see Clay Risen, “William H. Regnery II, 80, Dies; Bankrolled the Rise of the Alt-Right,” *New York Times* (July 16, 2021). See also: Benjamin I. Page, Jason Seawright, and Matthew J. Lacombe, “Stealth Politics by U.S. Billionaires,” Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, September 2-6, 2015

[https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/imce/ForbesStealthPoliticsAPSA2015August27FINAL_Updates.pdf] and *Billionaires and Stealth Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); and Adanjesus Marin and Michael Kink, “It’s not the ‘Freedom Caucus.’ It’s the Billionaires’ Caucus,” *The Hill* (June 8, 2017)

[<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/336963-its-not-the-freedom-caucus-its-the-billionaires-caucus>].

¹⁰³ These verdicts are increasingly enabled by state laws that delegitimize and criminally sanction constitutionally protected protests and demonstrations. See Reid J. Epstein and Patricia Mazzei, “How the G.O.P. Is Creating Harsher Penalties for Protesters,” *New York Times* (April 21, 2021).

¹⁰⁴ See Rick Edmonds, “US ranks last among 46 countries in trust in media, Reuters Institute report finds,” *Poynter* (June 24, 2021) [<https://www.poynter.org/ethics-trust/2021/us-ranks-last-among-46-countries-in-trust-in-media-reuters-institute-report-finds/>]. For report detail, see Nic Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021* (Oxford, UK: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021)

[https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf].

¹⁰⁵ Particularly problematic have been deregulation of trade, deregulation of internal economic activity, and privatization of formerly public assets. Regarding “how market values became the template for governing all of social life,” see Henry Giroux, “Neoliberalism’s War Against the Radical Imagination,” *Tikkun* (February 11, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ See Linda Greenhouse, “We Still Have to Worry About the Supreme Court and Elections,” *New York Times* (February 25, 2021).

¹⁰⁷ See Linda Greenhouse, “On Voting Rights, Justice Alito Is Stuck in the 1980s,” *New York Times* (July 15, 2021).

¹⁰⁸ See Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Upholds Arizona Voting Restrictions,” *New York Times* (July 1, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Republicans in state legislatures are now moving to limit public health authorities from requiring masks, ordering business closures, and other steps to mitigate the spread of disease. See: Frances Stead Sellers and Isaac Stanley-Becker, “As coronavirus surges, GOP lawmakers are moving to limit public health powers,” *Washington Post* (July 25, 2021); and Network for Public Health Law and National Association of County & City Health Officials, *Pro-*

posed Limits on Public Health Authority: Dangerous for Public Health (May 2021)

[<https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Proposed-Limits-on-Public>].

¹¹⁰ “Public powers” include the power to legislate civil and criminal laws and regulatory policies, to tax, to spend public monies, to police [i.e., take rights and property without compensation for the public’s health, welfare, and morals], to take property by eminent domain, and to market tax-free bonds.”

¹¹¹ For examples, see: Tasleem J. Padamsee, “Fighting an Epidemic in Political Context: Thirty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS Policy Making in the United States,” *Social History of Medicine*, 33(3):1001-1028 (2020); and Javier M. Rodriguez, “The politics hypothesis and racial disparities in infants’ deaths in the United States,” *SSM—Population Health*, 8:100440 (July 2019).

¹¹² Which now includes the elderly to some extent, because the Republican bias of older voters has shifted substantially. See: Sharon Bernstein and Chris Kahn, “As elections near, many older, educated, white voters shift away from Trump’s party,” Reuters (August 9, 2018) [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-healthcare-poll/exclusive-as-elections-near-many-older-educated-white-voters-shift-away-from-trumps-party-idUSKBN1HG1I6>]; and Evan Siegfried, “Trump’s biggest risk in 2020 isn’t losing young people. It’s losing their grandparents,” NBC News (June 17, 2019) [<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-s-biggest-risk-2020-isn-t-losing-young-people-ncna1018216>].

¹¹³ The latest news, however, is that top Republicans have begun to see the light of their own self-interest, notwithstanding the ex-president’s fever-dream of “reinstatement.” See Marianna Sotomayor et al., “Growing number of Republicans urge vaccinations amid delta surge,” *Washington Post* (July 20, 2021).

¹¹⁴ See Ariel Fridman et al., “COVID-19 and vaccine hesitancy: A longitudinal study,” *PLoS ONE*, 16(4):e0250123 (April 16, 2021).

¹¹⁵ See Karen Attiah, “Living in Texas right now feels like an exercise in survival,” *Washington Post* (March 5, 2021).

¹¹⁶ For more on this from a more conservative source, see Jack Kelley, “Billionaires Are Getting Richer During The COVID-19 Pandemic While Most Americans Suffer,” *Forbes* (April 27, 2020).

¹¹⁷ How can we understand the billionaires’ indifference to the well-being of their own country? The global economy has made them *internationalists*, dedicated only to profit-centers, superseding any U.S. loyalty. Perhaps they imagine that for the long haul, as they drain this country of its assets, they can increasingly rely on the sugar plums which have captivated them for the past four decades: China’s gigantic consumer market and low-wage, skilled workforce, cowed by a totalitarian government. But that fantasy seems likely to be shattered before long by the absolute national power and domestic priorities of the Communist Party of China, which may yet leave the billionaires stripped of their market access, their manufacturing assets, and their American-authored intellectual property.

¹¹⁸ See: Deirdre Walsh, “At Biden’s 100-Day Mark, Republicans Attempt to Paint His Policies As Far Left,” NPR (April 28, 2021) [<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/28/991286542/at-bidens-100-day-mark-republicans-attempt-to-paint-his-policies-as-far-left>]; Jacob Pramuk and Kevin Breuninger, “McConnell says GOP won’t support Biden’s infrastructure plan, vows to fight democratic agenda,” CNBC (April 1, 2021) [<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/01/mcconnell-says-gop-will-oppose-biden-infrastructure-plan.html>]; and Alan Smith, “McConnell says he’s ‘100 percent’ focused on ‘stopping’ Biden’s administration,” NBC News (May 5, 2021) [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/joe-biden/mcconnell-says-he-s-100-percent-focused-stopping-biden-s-n1266443>].

¹¹⁹ These are obligations spelled out for individuals becoming naturalized citizens. See Jennifer McFadyen, “Your Rights and Responsibilities as a New US Citizen,” ThoughtCo (February 16, 2021) [<https://www.thoughtco.com/responsibilities-as-a-new-us-citizen-1951903>].

¹²⁰ See Jacob S. Hacker and Nathan Loewentheil, “How Big Money Corrupts the Economy,” *Democracy*, 27 (Winter 2013) [<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/27/how-big-money-corrupts-the-economy/>]. More generally, see Lawrence Lessig, *Republic, Lost: Version 2.0* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2015).

¹²¹ For example, as summarized in John A. Dearborn et al., “How to Tame the Presidency After Trump,” *New York Times* (March 16, 2021). See also Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

¹²² See Thomas Piketty, “America’s Frightening Oligarchy: Thomas Piketty on our widening inequality and the right-wing billionaires who profit from it,” Salon (April 23, 2016) [https://www.salon.com/2016/04/23/americas_frightening_oligarchy_thomas_piketty_on_our_widening_inequality_and_the_right_wing_billionaires_who_profit_from_it/].

¹²³ For more on anti-union tactics, see: Robert Michael Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003) and Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹²⁴ For a succinct, scholarly history of the U.S. labor movement, see Hany H. Makhoul, “The Labor Movements in the United States and the United Kingdom,” *Review of Social Sciences*, 1(4):21-26 (February 2016).

¹²⁵ Our view partly reflects recent union losses, most notably: the 2021 RWDSU loss at the Bessemer, Alabama Amazon warehouse; the 2019 UAW loss at the Chattanooga, Tennessee VW plant; the 2017 UAW loss at the Canton, Mississippi Nissan plant; and the 2015 IAMAW loss at the Middletown, Delaware Amazon warehouse.

¹²⁶ But even within the U.S., labor’s daunting challenge is how to organize the likes of Amazon’s nearly one million employees in this country, because “Part of the strategy will have to be shop-by-shop organizing, but no one knows how best to unionize a 5,000-person warehouse with extreme turnover and ‘union avoidance’ consultants. Or how to prevent Amazon from simply closing a unionized fulfillment center or transferring its workers to another, non-union facility.” See E. Tammy Kim, “Amazon Transformed Seattle. Now, Its Workers Are Poised to Take It Back,” *New York Times* (July 5, 2021).

¹²⁷ See Wonik Kim and Jennifer Gandhi, “Coopting Workers under Dictatorship,” *Journal of Politics*, 72(3):646-658 (July 2010). See also Nate Schenkkan and Isabel Linzer, *Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2021).

¹²⁸ The 2018 SCOTUS case of *Janus v. AFSCME, Council 31* suggests the direction of the Court. See Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Ruling Delivers a Sharp Blow to Labor Unions,” *New York Times* (June 27, 2018). The case of *Cedar Point v. Hassid*, which “[pitted] union rights against property rights,” was decided in favor of the property rights of California farm owners. See Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Rules Against Union Recruiting on California Farms,” *New York Times* (June 23, 2021).

¹²⁹ Amazon’s intimidation and retaliation tactics are reinforced by multiple legal advantages. See Noam Scheiber, “Union Loss May Bring New Phase of Campaign Against Amazon,” *New York Times* (April 9, 2021). Despite these circumstances, the unions are largely without legal remedies, thus relying mostly on their own organizing muscle. See David Streitfeld, “How Amazon Crushes Unions,” *New York Times* (March 16, 2021). See also: Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Rachel Adams, “Fired in a Pandemic ‘Because We Tried to Start a Union,’ Workers Say,” *New York Times* (April 28, 2020); and Jonathan Rosenberg, “Unions in the Trump Era,” *Tikkun* (January 2, 2017).

¹³⁰ For a well-documented survey of what unions face from company opposition to their organizing, see Kate Bronfenbrenner, “No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing,” Briefing Paper No. 235 (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, May 20, 2009).

¹³¹ Congress.gov, “H.R. 2474—Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2019” (in the Senate of the United States, February 10, 2020) [<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2474/text>].

¹³² On the labor’s tenuous prospects despite strong support from the Biden administration, see Noah Bierman and David Lauter, “Biden’s bid to bolster unions,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 2, 2021). The authors reckon that even with strong support from the White House, “. . . many of organized labor’s top priorities face long odds. . . .”

¹³³ See Nicholas Fandos, “As House Pushes Labor Rights Expansion, Senate Chances Are Slim,” *New York Times* (March 9, 2021).

¹³⁴ We do not see any evidence of long-extended participation in movement-building based on immediate self-interest—that is, motivating commitment with expectations of regular rewarding outcomes, shared or otherwise—when, realistically, there is little or no prospect of short-term material returns on participants’ investments of time, energy, and resources. Successful social movements dedicated to the commonweal, although they ultimately satisfy self-interests, survive for many decades of unrewarded sacrifice because deeply held faith supports their long struggle. This has been true even for movements not explicitly faith-based, such as the labor movement and the American Revolution. For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Moshe ben Asher, “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing,” *Social Policy*, 50(4): 55-64 (Winter 2020).

¹³⁵ See: Sarah Colenbrander, “Cities as engines of economic growth,” International Institute for Environment and Development (October 2016) [<https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/10801IIED.pdf>]; Josefina V. Cabigon, “Cities in Globalization,” *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 6(2):73-102 (2006); and Saskia Sassen, “The Global City: Introducing a Concept,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 11(2):27-43 (Winter/Spring 2005).

¹³⁶ See: Moshe ben Asher and Khulda Bat Sarah, “Directly Democratic Metropolitan Government: Envisioning Beyond Oppression, Rebellion, and Reform,” *Social Policy*, 46(1):6-19 (Spring 2016); Moshe ben Asher, “New England Town Government: A Model for Popular Assembly in Two-Tier Metropolitan Government,” *Gather the People* (1980, 2020) [www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/TOWN_GOVT.pdf]; and Moshe ben Asher, “Vill Economics,” *Gather the People* (1978, 2018) [www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/VILL_ECONOMICS.pdf].

¹³⁷ See Hannah Fenichel Pitkin and Sara M. Shumer, “On Participation,” *Democracy*, 2(4):43-54 (Fall 1982).

¹³⁸ Snyder op. cit., loc. 749. For detailed analyses, see: Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege*, [<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>]; Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, “A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?” *Democratization*, 26(7):1095-1113 (2019); and Bright Line Watch, “Democracy in the COVID-19 era” (August 2020) [<http://brightlinewatch.org/bright-line-watch-august-2020-expert-survey/>].

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