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REMAKING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY VI: THERE IS HOPE, BUT THE PRICE IS DAUNTING

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The generation of Americans born after the second world war have no personal experience of how different we were as a nation, even as a civilization, for virtually all of our history before that war. In one respect, we were both all the good and all the bad of those centuries.

We survived several early insurrections[1] and a civil war, from which we still have not completely healed. We went through revolts and rebellions,[2] by slaves (we did not universally consider citizens until ratification of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868) and by indigenous peoples (we did not universally consider citizens until passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924). Among our ups and downs, before the war we suffered our worst economic depression, mostly the result of financial greed in the form of margin-buying of stocks by the wealthy[3] and weak regulation by the government.[4]

Despite our national difficulties, the nation had sufficient common values and consciousness to stay the course, without entirely losing sight of our commonweal,[5] raising it ever higher by advancements in every sector of the society. Not only did our governments, our universities, our agriculture, our industries, our public health care, and our care of the aged, afflicted, dependant and impoverished meet ever-higher standards, we endeavored to eliminate poverty, oppression, and injustice. The nation persisted—unevenly, to be sure—in a struggle to justify and live up to the Revolution and the Constitution. Before long, America became a beacon of freedom and opportunity to our forebears, who emigrated here by the millions from throughout the world.[6]

Explaining the Spectacular Rise

How do we account for that persistence? How do we understand and explain the unique accomplishments of the American people? They may appear unexceptional when we look at other advanced industrial societies, but America was created by "accepting" millions of disparate newcomers over its history, often as an exceptional gesture but occasionally as a mark of shame when they came as slaves or otherwise indentured.[7] Nevertheless, almost all became full-fledged citizens, one way or another, and there's only disgrace in denying their contributions. But how could the people who came here, whether as slaves or as free people—fleeing from poverty, starvation, political oppression, and religious pogroms, or as would-be entrepreneurs—have originated and sustained such a remarkably productive history?

We have often read that from it's earliest beginning, the nation was a *democratic* republic. That is, although it was a republic, governed almost entirely by upper-class, educated representatives, executives, and judges, it was also a democracy, one in which sovereignty was vested constitutionally in the *demos*,[8] the "ordinary people." It's a plausible explanation. But if it's essentially true, how did the newly established United States of America come to be such a democratic republic, at least in principle?

The Founding Fathers were concerned primarily with the establishment of a *republic*, not a democracy. They were leery of direct democracy, doubtful (seemingly with good reason) of the ability of a national government to be free of chaos and irreconcilable factions if its policies and practices were to be in the hands of the citizens directly. And, in point of historical fact, the institutional, and thus the cultural and intellectual substance of American democracy, did not originate with the Founding Fathers or the radical Enlightenment philosophers, such as John Locke, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[9] They came later, after the actual founders, who were the earliest Pilgrim settlers and Puritan colonists in New England. They innovated and morally reinforced *covenantal* practices of self-governance.[10]

We must look to the early settlers and colonists to understand our democratic roots, including the reasons and rules articulated by such founders, who were *not* necessarily land-owning gentry, highly educated, or recognized as outstanding men and women of their time. Most who came to settle the wilderness of the New World were more or less "ordinary" immigrants.

The small band of Pilgrim settlers in New England valued political freedom and individual liberty. They were the innovators of *covenantal* direct democracy. They believed that community life was to be structured by covenants with God and each other. They were enabled by their spiritual strength and religious discipline to devise a new form of government. The moral-spiritual foundation of that government demonstrated their understanding that guided by God's direction and regulation, the so-called ordinary people were capable of governing themselves, either directly or through representatives.

In that context the Pilgrims understood the obligations and benefits of citizenship and citizenhood.[11] As the creators of American democracy, they knew in the most practical ways what they owed to God, to one another, to their families, to their communities, and to their people.[12]

The thousands of Puritans who came 20 years after them added a powerful moral-spiritual foundation to covenantal self-governance.[13] They believed freedom and liberty should be circumscribed by rigorous moral and civil law. They wanted to ensure that those rights would not be destroyed by social disorder, which could threaten the unity required to agree on our *commonweal*. That unity continued to exist in much of American society from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, mostly unfazed by the equally long history of violent conflict.

Their reliance on the Torah values they adopted[14] was not the result of abstract religiosity but practical awareness of their *moral freedom*, the freedom to choose between righteousness and wickedness, between truth and lies, between justice and injustice, between civil rights and oppression, between peace-making and violence, and between compassion and cruelty.[15] They could see that in the failure of a community or people to exercise their moral freedom, goodness departs from individual and social life. In effect, to choose good over evil is the prior condition for all other worthwhile forms of freedom.

Moreover, they understood, that if they allowed their lives to become *dominated* by materialism and sensuality, unrestrained by moral boundaries (which they had witnessed in the Old World), they would forfeit their moral freedom.

These early settlers recognized that, unlike all other living creatures, their moral free will made it possible for them to overcome otherwise unyielding physical obstacles. They believed it was possible, with God's help, to rise above nature and accomplish things most others in their time would say were too fantastic to be achieved, short of a miracle. The first was traveling to the New World and settling the wilderness. They came to believe that, as members of largely undeveloped agrarian *Gemeinschaft* communities,[16] they could defeat the strongest army in the world and overthrow the rule of a powerful king. Since then they have been credited with the creation of the morally based bedrock of democratic self-governance that led to the movement for American independence from Great Britain.

Their moral-spiritual beliefs were thus linked not only to their immediate practical arrangements for self-governance but also to their political aspirations for the future. What followed became the history of their use of covenant as a model, based on the *brit* described in the Torah, which in turn became the participatory democratic foundation of the later New England towns, the American colonies, the United States federal (i.e., ostensibly covenantal) government. and all the state and local governments that followed.

That moral-spiritual ethos, tested for several centuries since our nation's beginnings, has had a rocky history, mostly because elites and would-be oligarchs have never ceased their efforts to divide and conquer it with ever-increasing accumulations of economic wealth and political power.[17] But the persistent although occasionally shaky belief by the people has been that, by submitting themselves to God's direction and regulation for the sake of their commonweal, they could continue to govern themselves and build a great nation.[18] That ethos would characterize the *demos* throughout our history—that is, until the decades following World War II.[19]

Rising Corporations Portend A Dark Era

When the second world war ended, the major U.S corporations and their workers were celebrated for their accomplishments, which were far greater than what anyone might have previously imagined. The corporations' research and development, design innovations, precision engineering, factory construction, human resources management, and mass production—all achieved with spectacular speed—earned them accolades and a mostly respected place in the nation, which was then viewed as the Arsenal of Democracy. But mostly unknown to the public, they were negotiating war contracts with the government that rewarded them with unprecedented profits.

During the war, the federal government spent mind-boggling sums on defense and wartime production. In the U.S. war years (1941-45), military spending ballooned, from about $1.5 billion to over $80 billion yearly.[20] The money went mostly to private corporations for ships, planes, tanks, ammunition, and other wartime goods. Fewer than three dozen major corporations received nearly three-quarters of all "prime" war contracts. The biggest ones were General Motors, Ford, Boeing, Lockheed, DuPont, U.S. Steel, and Standard Oil. From the beginning of the war (1939) to its end (1945), their *after-tax corporate profits nearly tripled*.[21] For the aircraft manufacturers, the profits were even greater. "War profiteering" was a concern,[22] but one that seemingly had no legs in the excitement of news of the great battles and casualties, and the preoccupation with the demands of meeting critical production quotas.

With the outsized profits, the best-placed and politically favored corporations had the newly acquired ability to expand, invest in research and development, modernize their factories, and adopt new, more flexible manufacturing techniques which allowed far-easier transitioning to new peacetime products. The

extraordinary profits gave the top company executives and major stockholders far more influence in the marketplace. The profits and capital accumulation during the war allowed these large corporations and their major stockholders to consolidate their dominance in the postwar economy. Many corporate leaders took on unofficial, sub-rosa roles in shaping U.S. Cold War policies, infrastructure projects, and global economic strategies.

At the same time, their political interests and ideologies, which (in a familiar echo) favored removing government regulations that in any way restricted their operations and lowering government taxes that limited their profits, were foisted off on the public through lobbying, traditional advertising, and sponsorship of newly emerging TV programing. Thus the largest corporations positioned themselves to take the leadership in fulfilling Cold War "defense" contracts. The military-industrial complex—a term popularized by President Eisenhower—arose as a permanent feature of American economic and political life.

Returning soldiers entered the workforce with the help of the G.I. Bill, which gave them education and housing assistance and access to low-interest loans. As companies shifted from military to consumer products, they hired en masse, employing millions at decent wages. The new well-paying job opportunities fueled a tidal wave of consumption, especially big-ticket items, such as homes, cars, and major appliances. The demand drove consumer-goods production to new heights, which in turn pumped up profitability and more well-paying jobs.[23]

The corporations' wealthy shareholders saw large capital gains. Some firms (especially defense contractors) built lasting empires. This dynamic reinforced the earlier groundwork of the American oligarchy[24] to achieve a remarkable escalation in postwar economic inequality. It eventually financed the billionaire-proprietorship of the U.S. corporate-political power structure. The upshot was that the corporations were in a cat-bird's seat to retool their industries and multiply their profits by producing consumer goods for which the population was starved after the war years. The intersection of wartime profits, industrial expansion, and pent-up consumer demand created a perfect storm of explosive corporate growth and profit.[25]

In retrospect, the second world war turned out to be a watershed moment for American capitalism. The war effort supercharged industrial output, centralized corporate power, embedded economic inequality, and laid the foundation for global U.S. political, economic, and military supremacy in the second half of the twentieth century.[26]

Corporate Re-engineering of Humankind

Corporations, by activating their political forces (pliant politicians at every level of government), dedicated themselves to the ideal of postwar prosperity based on mass consumption. Both Republicans and Democrats in Congress promoted this corporate vision.

Republicans concentrated on private enterprise, downplaying government activity. Democrats were congenial to corporate capitalism but also worked to broaden access to the benefits of rising national wealth through social programs. Despite differences in their political rhetoric, both parties embraced consumer abundance as vital to American interests and Cold War strength.[27] Very little attention and action was considered by these protagonists to the inequalities and suffering entailed in the vision of cornucopia-consumerism. The ideology of the "consumer citizen" helped to mask both racial and cultural inequalities and concentrated wealth.[28]

Corporations emerged not just as economic powerhouses, but as cultural and political influencers —defining lifestyles, tastes, and even national identity. By the 1950s, corporations had become committed sponsors of methods promoted on their behalf by Madison Avenue hacks. Advertising didn't just plug products, it engineered desire. Covert psychological techniques were adopted to manipulate mass attitudes and behavior. The goal was not merely to satisfy needs but to manufacture the desire for unattainable cravings.[29]

The manipulation was aimed not only to co-opt the commonweal values of an earlier era but to do so by humorously ridiculing into oblivion those who still upheld them. They were mercilessly characterized in the mass media as "well-meaning but hopelessly out of date." Madison Avenue would not openly carry on a campaign to delegitimize faith-based values, since they were in the business of selling products that generated business. But they redefined the traditional values: *conserving* was redefined to mean being a smart shopper, *duty* was reinterpreted to mean buying the best you could afford for your family, and *piety* was reimagined to mean ensuring the purity and wholesomeness of one's purchases.[30]

The increasingly powerful media ecosystem, owned then as now by elite capital interests and enriched by the Madison Avenue advertising they sponsored, aimed to *marginalize traditional familial, communal, and religious values*. This worked as a shared-interest partnership of mass media and advertising which thrived on portraying traditionalists as out of date, since that provided an implicit cultural endorsement of the up-to-date consumer lifestyle.[31] Given their overall objectives, which have approached maturity only now,[32] we may fairly conclude the that long-term goal was to replace "social morality"[33] with the objectives and behavior of a purely monetized and commercialized, transactional social order.

They invented new cultural-language icons, which they have promoted relentlessly ever since: "Grab life by the horns" (Dodge); "Not playing is not an option" (Tylenol); "Never follow" (Audi); "Pass the pleasure around" (Durex); "Everyone wants to find six-pack abs, but they're so hard to get" (John Basedow); "If it feels good, do it!" (Burger King); "Freedom of expression—it's what it's all about" (Botox Cosmetics); "Eat Freely" (Hot Pockets); "The pause that refreshes," "It's the real thing," "Do what feels good," and

"CocaCola Freestyle" (Coke); "You can never have too much fun" (Apple); "When you have passion, you have everything" (Don Julio tequila); "Flavor that goes all the way on the first date" (Bai Brands); "You've come a long way, baby" (Virginia Slims); and "Because You're Worth It" (L'Oréal)

When we examine the progressive increases in corporate advertising budgets from the 1970s until the present, from $26 billion to $259 billion,[34] the numbers tell a story not only of massive corporate influence on the values and behavior of the entire citizenry but the corresponding growth in profits that financed the advertising, which in turn have produced a ballooning billionaire class, now exercising their political and economic oligarchic power.

The billionaire and super-millionaire owners of postwar corporate America have fostered by myriad means the dogmatic belief in the *amoral autonomy of the individual*, responsible and answerable to no one—not to God, family, community, or government. Their motivation is not subtle. They act not for ideology or valued beliefs (their performative religiosity notwithstanding) but pure self-interest in their own empowerment and enrichment,[35] even at the untold costs of pain, suffering, and death for millions.[36]

This values-inversion has unfeelingly and covertly promoted the "good life," which has achieved *sacrosanct* status, the absolute self-infatuated right of personal accumulation, gratification, and comfort. The new ideal bore no resemblance whatever to the responsible citizen or community member of the past. The satisfied consumer became the ideal, someone whose highest civic virtue was following the corporate mantra of consumership: "*Ask not what what your country can do for you—ask what you can buy next.*"

It's not incidental that when we lose our moral freedom we also lose our political freedom, because the same forces are driving both outcomes to serve their kleptocratic-oligarchic interests. As the sage of Modern Orthodoxy has reminded us, "A generation that is degenerating morally has also no social future."[37]

The undisguised objective was to jettison every remnant of citizenship and citizenhood, which historically entailed commitment to the commonweal derived from religious traditions and their inherent moral compass. The ideal replacement was to redefine humankind not as *children of God* committed to social morality and their commonweal but as *input resources to wealth accumulation* in which "the good" would be the acquisition of more and more material goods in an endlessly unfulfilling search for sensual and material gratification.

Immiseration of the *Demos*

As we reported in our first paper on remaking American democracy, Adrian Vermeule has described some of the effects of the abandonment of social morality and the commonweal:

> In the past few decades, Americans have discovered that individuals and families cannot flourish if the whole community is fundamentally unhealthy, torn apart by conflict, lawlessness, poverty, pollution, sickness, and despair. Gated residences, private schools and Uber have not sufficed to immunize even the affluent against the consequences of living in a decaying, fractured and embittered polity. No family or civic association is an island, and the health of civic society and culture are themselves dependent upon the health of the constitutional order.[38]

Compounding this dystopian scenario, reactionary politics have markedly increased morbidity and mortality generally,[39] and specifically during the pandemic;[40] lessened worker and public safety by attacking unions;[41] and doubled down on environmental plundering.[42] Yet all that may not be the worst of their betrayal of the commonweal. Callously, every possible tactic has been used to deny sorely needed resources to families, such as health insurance, dental insurance, pregnancy-education programs, affordable prescription drugs, paid maternal/parental leave, affordable housing, affordable childcare, adequate public education, and a living wage.

The continuing unrelieved pressures[43] on families have overwhelmed millions of them, with far-reaching effects on the children,[44] producing outcomes which are unimagined by most Americans but now revealed in all their ravages by peer-reviewed studies. Pressured families produce more childhood trauma, typically beginning with insecure *attachment*[45] between parents and their newborn infants,[46] which is suffered by about *40 percent of infants*.[47] It impairs the development of empathy, emotional bonding, and moral sensibility, which then become lifelong disabilities.

Insecure attachment often becomes followed by childhood[48] *developmental trauma disorder* (DTD)[49] from chronic neglect and abuse. Insecure attachment, intensified by DTD, validated in the ACE study,[50] has been correlated with statistically significant increased risk of debilitating physical and psychological illnesses and problematic behavior in adulthood, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, anxiety, depression, mental illness, troubled relationships, smoking, substance abuse, academic failure, employment difficulties, violence, incarceration, and suicide.

The ACE study affords a painful insight into why so much goes wrong when profit-driven monetization and commercialization of every dimension of social life dominate our cultural and institutional life. As a prime example, the consequences for young people in every aspect of their development, from the loss of meaningful family and community support, has led to a quadrupling of teen suicides from 1960 until the present.[51]

Sovereignty of the People Recedes

As the immiseration of *demos* proceeded over the past several decades, their ability to fulfill their constitutional obligation as sovereign supervisors of the government, the *use* of their "political freedom," was eradicated, de facto and de jure. This development was the

unsurprising result of our federal government institutions—the Congress, Supreme Court, and Presidency—becoming transformed from control by enlightened forces to reactionary ones. In recent decades, we have experienced a major shift in ideology and interest by American political leadership, a reactionary return to formerly discredited top-down ideology that justifies laws, policies, and cultural practices skewed to favor the top owners of the nation's wealth.

The enlightened *social contract* philosophy, that governments are formed and exist by consent of the governed, has been incrementally replaced by the ancient tradition of *divine right* in which certain individuals and classes rule based on special attributes. The experience of *community* (and home) where face-to-face relationships are best for understanding, preventing, and treating the pathologies of modern social life, has been delegitimized by *mass organizations*, rationalized as singularly qualified to manage complex industrial societies. The conviction that *politics*, the discussing and decision-making of the *demos* as the best means to solve the problems of social life has given way to specialist-dominated *technology* as the most effective and efficient means to alleviate the society's problems. The bottom-up belief in *direct action*, that the public good requires large numbers of citizens to act directly in self-governance, has been superseded by the top-down dogma of *social control*, that citizen participation must be "guided" to ensure continued (private) capital accumulation. In this ideological tension, *self-help*, local initiative and cooperation, regarded by communities as best to determine and satisfy programmatic needs, has been overrun by the *service* ideology, that mass organizations must provide programs and services under professional management. From the bottom up, the popular belief is that public resources should be allocated according to citizen *demand*, while the bureaucratic practice is to distribute public resources by expert definitions of *need*. In the same vein, *redistribution* calls for mostly redistributing resources to permanently alter the imbalance in relations of power, while top-down ideology holds that resources should mostly be *distributed* to relieve extreme human suffering and to buffer citizen discontent.

Finally, by way of accounting for the entire tension between bottom-up and top-down ideological conflicts: the *demos* expect as a matter of course, *democratization of surplus*, that surplus accumulation from labor productivity should benefit the general public, while elites invariably favor *externalization of costs*, where the public subsidizes the accumulation of private wealth by allowing the externalization of their costs.[52]

While the ideological erosion had earlier roots, particularly with the history of American elites and budding oligarchs, and in the 1920s the rise of mass culture and corporate consolidation, the 1940s and 1950s sealed the deal, reshaping the American social contract from one centered on *social morality*, *civic virtue, citizenhood and commonweal* to one dominated by corporate-managed *consumer cipherhood,* socially unaccountable profitability, unequaled economic inequality, and morally unhinged political power. This shift had profound political and moral consequences. Citizens were encouraged to retreat from public life into private comfort. Political discourse thinned to consumer preferences. By the 1970s, popular activism by the at-large citizenry was mostly redirected into lifestyle.

Shaped by a culture rooted in privatization and profitability, many Americans now claim, as their most valuable heritage, their right to unlimited "freedom," by which they mean their personal liberty to do whatever they please. As a result, tens of millions claimed the freedom to go maskless in a pandemic, resulting in the needless loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.[53]

Few Americans now make the connection between unchecked personal liberty, the decline of covenantal democracy, and their loss of *political* freedom. If pressed to give examples of their "freedom," they may cite the currently threatened First Amendment's free speech guarantee or trial by a jury of one's peers. But they have relegated to history books, participatory democracy, the citizenry's *sovereign* right, role, and resources to access government decision-making and hold it accountable.

Restoring the Sovereignty of the *Demos*

Nowadays we see the *demos*, the mass of "ordinary" citizens, transformed in many respects into corporate accounting ciphers. They have unwittingly become the primary enablers of the kleptocratic oligarchy and its authoritarian "administration" of the government and economy.

When the majority of a nation's people become morally vacant in the face of massive concentrations of lawless economic and political power, even enlightened top-down politics and policy fail to stop the corruption. Any solution in that scenario that relies primarily on science and technology to overcome "social problems," including well-intentioned public policies, is doomed. Such tools fail to generate large-scale, persistent moral commitment to them. Thus, history demonstrates they will be manipulated for malign purposes when a morally inert *demos* is ripe for political and economic exploitation. Ipso facto, effective resistance requires a morally and institutionally empowered *demos*.

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge the moral character of the exploitation. Totalitarian leaders—consider Hitler, Putin, Kim Jong Un, and their would-be admirers—are not remarkable for their political theories or innovative policies and administrative practices, but their willingness to do unbounded evil, impoverishing, starving, torturing, and killing millions.[54]

Replacing murderous regimes with incorruptible democratic institutions and commitment to the commonweal demands even greater unbounded *moral* conviction by the *demos.* It is indispensable to sustain for however long is necessary, whatever the sacrifice in blood and treasure is required to restore the moral rule of justice and compassion. There is no believable hope without that sacrifice.

We see now the effects of its absence, which reach into every corner of the society, not just the government. We are at present witnessing the masterminding of those effects in the historic rise of autocratic political rule and kleptocratic economic administration, while the consumption-addicted public, ignorant of civics or the meaning of traditionally based citizenship, blithely carries on. That under these conditions the United States has become an anocracy, much less than a full-fledged democracy but not yet an irreversible autocracy, no longer remains in doubt.[55] The country is now usually ranked about *25th* on the scale of democratic nations.

The first and last rule of remaking American democracy has no wiggle room: *It will not and cannot be done from the top down*. The sovereignty of the people, realized through a strategic moral vision, must serve as both the ends and the means, because *our history tells us that social morality and democracy are existentially coupled—historically, each begins to fail without the other—and the failure of either marks the beginning of the end of commitment to commonweal.* It is the *demos*, by definition, that have an inalienable moral stake in their own commonweal. When corruption is institutionally endemic, rebuilding from the top town invariably becomes guided by the hidden, immoral hand of the oligarchs.

Even popular political opposition, manifested in unfavorable poll numbers and mass demonstrations, rarely brings down autocratic rule.[56] This is typically true when it obtained office by election with an unacknowledged mandate to protect the reactionary economic, political, cultural, and social power of a white, libertarian, Christian majority.

Devotion to the commonweal always originates in face-to-face relationships of trust from the bottom up, much as the directly democratic New England towns laid the foundation for the Revolution to overthrow British rule. It means, we must, each of us, *personally* disempower the billionaire, kleptocratic oligarchs.

Public Powers for the People

The greatest challenge we face is to reawaken and redeem the *demos* as a strategic moral force, one that is singularly dedicated, as they were to defeat fascism in the last world war, to restoring their own sovereignty. Only the exercise of the constitutional sovereign right of *all the people* offers any believable hope for the reestablishment of American covenantal democracy and enlightened culture and institutions, based on justice and compassion. If there exists any plausible alternative other than the people themselves to eliminate the kleptocratic-oligarchy, we should have seen the positive results by now. But neither the courts, nor Congress, nor the universities, nor the media, nor the church-synagogue-mosque forces, have had even a restraining effect.[57]

We cannot achieve an enlightened society, one that serves the highest life-affirming moral and ethical character and physical requirements of humankind when the exercise of public power is disconnected from the covenantal participation of the *demos*. Thus the call to *citizenhood* will be the cultural challenge of a public powers movement to restore the sovereignty of the people. It will require that we begin to see ourselves acting together as responsible citizens of a community, committed to moderating the inevitable conflict between our own will and the will of others, and prepared to negotiate and live at least civilly if not graciously with compromise. It will require that we talk with one another, not for the sake of achieving unity or a voting-majority but to uncover mutuality in common action.

Citizenhood leads us to empathize with one another despite our conflicts, to come together in pursuit of our commonweal. It signifies that citizenship is "... the moral identity par excellence. For it is as citizen that the individual confronts the Other and adjusts his [or her] own life plans to the dictates of a shared world."[58] It is a civics morality lesson that should be repeated regularly to ensure that it becomes understood as a political verity.

We are left with the people themselves. Only an *empowered demos*, exercising their sovereignty, can overcome the inimical forces that seek power and wealth in their private self-interest, indifferent if not contemptuous of the commonweal. The *demos* remain the only plausible force to compel government and corporations to serve the commonweal first, above private interests, as the only legitimate basis for their continued license to exist. The moral demands of the *demos* to exercise their sovereignty directly and in their own name is the only absolutely legitimate claim to power in an enlightened nation.

Why are we confident that such an extraordinary transformation is possible? We have many decades of organizing experience during which disillusioned members of alienated groups, who lost faith and hope, became responsive to the morals and values promulgated by the three Abrahamitic faith traditions when they saw the possibility of themselves empowered. Then they talked, decided, and acted together to define and secure their commonweal.

Though the task is daunting, the methodology is well-developed in the extensive knowledge bank of base-building organizing.[59] We have three-quarters of a century of building face-to-face, grassroots associations with nonpartisan, non-ideological culture, dedicated to a moral vision of power-building for the sake of the commonweal. The results of this work may be disappointing insofar as consolidated power-building, but the commonweal culture and practical accomplishments of these organizations have been be a source of pride to their members, leaders, and organizers.

We and many others have written about the experience of community and faith-based organizers bringing together thousands of politically, religiously, and economically disparate individuals, teaching them to speak out about their shared hopes and fears, especially for their children, the anger and frustration they feel about the injuries and injustices they face every day, and the corrupt politicians who are dedicated mostly to their own careers and wallets. This

process inevitably produces two results: they come to know and care about each other as neighbors and they discover their *commonweal*.

Permanent Empowerment of the *Demos*

The realization of such an ambitious moral vision requires overcoming two daunting obstacles: First, because we have already made the case that the *demos* as a social moral force for good has suffered historic damage, on a scale far beyond anything like it in our history. Second, because the idea of the *demos* directly exercising their sovereignty poses seemingly unsolvable political dilemmas. Hundreds of millions of citizens, even were they to have the moral conviction to restore the priority of commonweal and the courage to work for decades to achieve that moral vision (much as our founders did), cannot *directly* run the country.

Restoration of the sovereign power of the *demos* must begin at the grassroots. Individuals must be invited personally, face-to-face, by a credentialed organizer, to attend small-group meetings in their neighborhoods, churches, and workplaces. These first contacts focus on their personal experience of injury and injustice they and their families have suffered, especially their children, and how their moral and spiritual values inform their feelings about their experience. These early seeds of democracy can be developed into popular assemblies modeled on the well-tested, directly democratic New England "open" town governments.[60]

As in the New England directly democratic towns, individuals would not relate to one another as polarized ideological antagonists. Meeting face to face and becoming acquainted, talking about their common pressures and dreams for themselves, their families and their community, they would form neighborly relationships. The cultural wallpaper of their organizations would encourage members with different backgrounds and experiences to meet and talk with others *unlike* themselves, to work out their commonweal and mutually acceptable ways to achieve it. In that respect, it would be like the culture of small towns that have their eccentric "characters" and which include a wide range of values and lifestyles, but in which tolerance is highly valued because it enables the citizens to act together to achieve what they cannot individually.

How would such small beginnings lead to institutionalized empowerment? The popular assembly, patterned on the "open-town" governments of New England, stands alone as the ideal organizing model to radically root U.S. democracy. This home-grown form of local government can come to life in our cities as the lower tier of two-tier[61] municipal governance. Imagine the city no longer governed by a handful of elected representatives, exclusively in control of all the public powers and disingenuously claiming to represent constituencies of hundreds of thousands or even millions,[62] but that some of those powers have become shared with and accountable to directly democratic popular assemblies, *neighborhood governments*, in which every citizen is an empowered voting member. The assemblies would have a partnership role in decisions about public safety, public health, public utilities, zoning, and much more.

In the U.S., the most promising way to create urban popular assemblies with public powers that are the least vulnerable to state interference would be to amend municipal charters through ballot initiatives. State laws and constitutions grant charter cities "plenary" powers over municipal activities and affairs, subject only to constitutional limitations and matters of special state interest. Whether a particular activity falls within the purview of the state or the charter city in situations of conflict is determined by the courts. However, the courts consistently hold that numerous powers and activities are reserved to the municipalities.

The most important power of the charter city is that the charter itself can "... only be adopted, amended, or repealed by a majority vote of a city's voters." Furthermore, "... a city may tailor its organization and elective offices, taking into account the unique local conditions and needs of the community." In effect, "A charter transfers the power to adopt legislation affecting municipal affairs from the state legislature to the city adopting it."[63] Of course, to form a neighborhood popular assembly as a subdivision of a chartered city would require the ballot initiative to be available. Without it, the likelihood of any city council—liberal, moderate, or conservative—voting to dilute its own powers by sharing public powers with neighborhoods would be nil. Luckily, the ballot initiative process is available in a large percentage of America's charter cities.[64]

But why should anyone imagine that such neighborhoods, having formed popular assemblies, even with permanent public powers, will have any leverage on higher levels of government? Our understanding of bottom-up power-leverage comes first from America's own revolutionary experience. Looking back to our founding as a nation, we can identify the power-lever employed by the *demos*, one which was a tactical innovation and a "key event"[65] of the Revolution—the Boston Tea Party. The event was a dramatic rejection of British Crown authority through direct citizen action—demonstrating that ordinary colonists were willing to resist laws they deemed illegitimate even beyond what their formal governments authorized.[66]

Prior to the Tea Party, the colonies challenged the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act, which caused the British Parliament to repeal those taxes and, after some time, remove all the taxes except on tea. American outrage was not about the financial burden of the tea tax, which was only pennies a year for the average family, but their lack of representation in Parliament.[67] Their unreconciled demand regarding taxation, which aimed for some control over the powers of the British Crown, eventually led to the Revolutionary War.[68]

We can easily see the parallels to the current money-corruption of representative government in the U.S., perverted by massive corporate and billionaire special interests, effectively alienating the *demos* from their sovereign right to control of the public powers.

We all know the usual outcome of individual tax resistance. The individuals get charged, arrested, tried, and sentenced, or at least fined, for their violation of federal law. The picture changes dramatically when we imagine thousands of citizens acting simultaneously through their directly democratic assemblies, which they have already done in New England,[69] but in the future taking the profound step of negotiating reconciliation of their tax obligations with higher levels of government.

Tax reconciliation differs from tax resistance and refusal because it would seek neither to rebel against nor avoid taxation. Instead, the aim would be to negotiate neighborhood government economic support of higher levels of government based on agreement by them to vest in the neighborhoods some control over legislation, regulations, and services. The initial goal would be to reconcile through tax-liability negotiations the demands of the citizenry for a permanent share of control of the public powers.

Our understanding of the potential for power-leverage of the *demos* comes also from the labor strike, used to extraordinary effect during the first half of the last century. Labor's power developed in countless "locals" through face-to-face, base-building, workplace organizing which was not deterred by unrelenting oppression and physical violence by police and Pinkertons.[70] The local unions eventually joined together to form a national institution that combined the CIO industrial unions and the AFL craft unions, whose might was brought to bear on opponents by the power-leverage of the strike.

Believable Hope for Democracy

To remake and save American democracy, nothing holds more promise than reestablishing the sovereignty of the *demos* to mitigate and ultimately eliminate the nation's intolerable inequality of power. We are most resilient against poverty, oppression, and injustice when, driven by our deepest values and fortified by institutionalized rights, roles, and resources, we actively engage in the debates and decisions that shape governance. It is our combined individual acts of citizenhood that are transformative. This becomes democracy at its least corruptible and most committed to resisting forces that degrade our shared humanity. The amoral alternative leaves citizenship stripped of dignity, eroding self-respect and hope by leaving citizenhood powerless.

A public powers movement offers a vision of a better life for all Americans, transcending class, sex, nationality, race, and ethnicity, despite our differences. Yet launching a movement to establish empowered popular assemblies nationwide is only the end of the beginning in the effort to remake American democracy and halt its corruption. The beginning of the end will come when the *demos*, en masse, direct their assemblies to defund and disempower the oligarchy by refusing to sustain special interests with public resources. The true end will come only when the *demos* have decisively overwhelmed the oligarchy, which will be fighting for its survival, and when every government action serves to uplift the common good.

Securing public powers by the *demos* is the only viable path to restoring our sovereignty. No other path can empower the people to resist exploitation and realign government with the common good as its primary aim. This course alone offers credible promise to reverse the empowerment and enrichment of elites at the expense of the public.[71] A movement as momentous as democratizing public powers must be united by a moral covenant. It is the covenant's inspirational values that will enable such a movement to persist.[72] Rooted deep in our history, moral covenant is the muscle and sinew of our democracy.

This course may seem too demanding or far-fetched. But we have yet to fully experience the nation's deconstruction, the remainder of its moral goodness despoiled, the majority of our people politically disinherited and economically devastated, and our resilient history and majesty unceremoniously trashed. When that happens, only a mass grassroots movement to restore our sovereignty may make sense despite demanding decades of sacrifices.

Endnotes

[1] These included Bacon's Rebellion (1676, Virginia), New York Slave Revolt (1712), Stono Rebellion (1739, South Carolina), and the Regulator Movement (1765–1771, North & South Carolina).

[2] Our history includes: Jamestown Rebellion (1622), Glorious Revolution in America (1689), Natchez Rebellion (1729), Stono Rebellion (1739), Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-1766), Boston Tea Party (1773), American Revolution (1775-1783), Whiskey Rebellion (1791-1794), Gabriel's Rebellion (1800), Burr Conspiracy (1805-1807), Tecumseh's War (1811-1813), Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831), Amistad Revolt (1839), Dorr Rebellion (1841-1842), Bleeding Kansas (1854-1859), John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry (1859), American Civil War (1861-1865), New York City Draft Riots (1863), Red River Rebellion (1869-1870), Battle of Blair Mountain (1921), and Wounded Knee Massacre (1890).

[3] Fewer than three percent of Americans owned stock in 1920. See Hoover Institution (U.S. National Archives), The Great Stock Market Crash of 1929: Why History Textbooks and the Conventional Wisdom Get It Wrong, Hoover Institution (blog), June 15, 2022.

[4] It's widely acknowledged that Hoover's policies reflected a laissez-faire stance toward markets, and that this climate was ideal for the wealthy at the time. Over the long arc of the last century and more, in fact going back to Alexander Hamilton's well-known views, elite and oligarchic interests have strongly and consistently favored weak regulation and low taxes, because both maximize their autonomy and accumulation of wealth.

[5] Dating roughly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the writings of many intellectuals, commonweal came to mean by the 1640s, "… Good things to all people. Whatever you were—Protestant or Catholic, or Arminian, Cavalier or Roundhead, Possessioner, Digger or Quaker—you were for the Commonwealth." See David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People: Popular Politics and England's Long Social Revolution, 1066–1649* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 13-14. The word represented the hope and faith of the people in the possibility that all the important institutions of society would be committed to their well-being and prosperity. The root and measure of the commonweal is unanimity of *values*, typically faith-derived, which require that governance uplift every individual life equally and equitably, although members of the community do not have the same needs and need not share the faith of the majority. Commonweal cannot comfortably and permanently accommodate the second-class citizenship of marginalized classes.

[6] The first U.S. immigration quota system, the Emergency Quota Act, which took effect in 1921, established a numerical limit on immigrants from any country to three percent of the number of foreign-born people from that country already living in the U.S. based on the 1910 census. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed act made the quota permanent and more restrictive, basing quotas on the 1890 census, which heavily favored northern and western Europeans. It also placed quotas based on "national origins." Before 1921, immigration restrictions mostly excluded specific groups, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

[7] European immigrants, especially in the 1600s and 1700s, couldn't afford the cost of crossing the Atlantic. In exchange for passage, they signed a legal contract (i.e., "indenture") committing themselves to work for a certain number of years (typically 4–7). See, "Indentured Servitude in the Colonies," *U.S. History I: Pre-Colonial to 1865* (University of Wisconsin), accessed August 28, 2025 [https://wisc.pb.unizin.org/ls261/chapter/b-indentured-servitude-in-the-colonies/].

[8] *Demos*, as defined by *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971): "The people or commons of an ancient Greek state, esp. of a democratic state, such as Athens: hence, the populace, the common people: often personified."

[9] The Enlightenment philosophers saw the government as separate from the people, and from which they had to be protected. John Locke proposed natural rights, social contract theory, and the right to revolution, arguing that individuals possess certain inherent rights, including life, liberty, and property, that government exists to protect those rights, and if a government fails in its obligations, the people have the right to alter or abolish it. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, believed in popular sovereignty, the idea that the legitimacy of government arises from the consent of the governed, and emphasized the importance of civic virtue and the common good.

[10] Dave Roos, "What's the Difference Between Puritans and Pilgrims?" *History.com*, July 31, 2019; updated February 18, 2025. The handful of Pilgrims believed the Church of England was beyond reform and sought a radical separation from it. They were intent on achieving religious freedom for themselves. They were the first settlers from England to arrive in the New World in 1620, when on the Mayflower they founded the Plymouth Colony. At that time they created the Mayflower Compact, their covenant of self-governance. They never numbered more than a few thousand and by 1691 their colony officially merged with the Massachusetts Bay by royal charter. The Puritans came a generation later in a wave of thousands. They had enduring influence on American identity, law, and education.

[11] *Citizenship* has been defined as the *position* one holds as a member of the *demos* (the "ordinary people") who are constitutionally defined as possessing the ultimate sovereign power of the nation. On the other hand, *citizenhood* has been understood to be every citizen's absolute right and obligation to *exercise* that sovereignty to restore the nation's constitutional governance when it became corrupt, inept, or lawless. See Robbi Williams, *Model of Citizenhood Support*, 2d ed. (Unley SA, Australia: JFA Purple Orange, 2013), p. 8, which defines citizenhood as "... a situation in which a person is actively involved as a valued member of their local community." Citizenship, on the other hand, is "... static, through a largely unchanging set of rights and obligations."

[12] We explored this subject extensively in our 84-page paper, "Remaking American Democracy V: Reviving Our Founding Moral-spiritual Covenant," Gather the People (2025) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD_COVENANT.pdf].

[13] Roos, op. cit.

[14] Op. cit., endnote 12.

[15] In practice, that choice need not always entail intellectual agreement on the necessary characteristics of any of those fundamental values, but instead on their *absence or denial*. That is, when a judge finds a defendant not-guilty because a bribe has been paid, we need not debate whether that's injustice; when people are malnourished and dying prematurely in an affluent society, we know that's unjust; and when elections are the corrupted outcomes of gerrymandered districting, we need not discuss at length whether or not the freedom of thousands to hold their government accountable has been denied.

[16] The term *Gemeinschaft* was originally coined by the German social and political theorist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), in contrast to *Gesellschaft* social life, in which human relations are more impersonal and indirect, being rationally constructed in the interest of efficiency or other economic and political considerations. We define a *Gemeinschaft* community as an association of individuals in near enough proximity to sustain face-to-face relationships, who typically but not necessarily have some history of continuous engagement in activities essential to their survival and success, which require collective decision-making (despite many differences in their personal backgrounds, interests and ideologies), based on their acceptance of shared basic values and their agreement on what constitutes their commonweal or general welfare. Although many variations of *Gemeinschaft* community may still be found in small towns and urban and suburban neighborhoods, our American archetype for this model of community are the wagon trains that crossed the country in the 1800s. Many of the families crossing the frontier had pre-existing ties, possibly because they came from the same town or were members of the same family, church, or friendship group. All had the goal of surviving the punishing trek to start new lives. The challenges they faced fostered a heightened sense of unity and camaraderie.

[17] In "Remaking American Democracy III: 'Keep Your Eye on the Ball'—The Arch-Enemy of Democracy Among Us," *Social Policy* (Winter 2024), we surveyed the historical roots of American oligarchy, beginning with the class culture imported from Europe and the early rise of partisan parties, the political action arm of the elites [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD3_OLIGARCHY.pdf]. In "Remaking American Democracy IV: Kleptocratic Oligarchy and America's Economic Destiny 2.0," *Social Policy* (Spring 2025), we explored the economic destiny of the U.S. based on kleptocratic oligarchic government, the kleptocratic economic development model, and the economic development model of competitors confronting the U.S. [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD4_ECONOMICS.pdf],

[18] They could not have imagined what was coming in the next 75 years. Even when the USSR launched Sputnik, the country was sufficiently unified to pass the National Defense Education Act. The effect was to "… make America into the world's undisputed leader in science and technology." See Stephen Greenblatt, "We Are Watching a Scientific Superpower Destroy Itself," *New York Times* (September 8, 2025). Now, according to "2025 Research Leaders: Leading institutions," Nature Index [https://www.nature.com/nature-index/research-leaders/2025/institution/all/all/global], only one U.S. university (Harvard) is included among the top ten based on contributions to scientific journals. All the others are Chinese, except one from Germany.

[19] Perhaps the most unexpected but poignant insights into what has been lost since the end of that era comes to us from the personal experience and reflections of German POWs in the U.S. during World War II, which they recorded in letters home and in their diaries (many of which were not found until long after the war). They witnessed the overwhelming productive prowess of American industry and agriculture in the 1940s, the unique political freedom and civil rights enjoyed by Americans then, and the humane values and moral basis of American compassion as a nation—all of which unmistakably demonstrated to the POWs, the building blocks of American democracy and the foundation it provided in turn for the country's exceptionalism. A narrated YouTube video and accompanying transcription of their experience is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gykVp3JJNdI.

[20] "World War II US Defense Spending," *Two centuries of government spending in the United States*, usgovernmentspending.com (March 31, 2009) [https://usgovernmentspending.blogspot.com/2009/03/world-war-ii-us-defense-spending.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com].

[21] According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA), corporate profits after taxes in current dollars went from $7.5 billion in 1939 to $20.1 billion in 1945.

[22] *A History of Government Contracting, Vol. II*, Chapter 19, World War II Begins, which notes that "Such an unprecedented mobilization required new forms and techniques. The nation swept away all vestiges of competitive bidding" (p. 99) and "Business surveys, such as one in the Business Week issue of November 6, 1943, indicated that contractors profits were unjustifiably high" (p. 105). Arthur I. Preis, "World War II and the Monopolies—How War Strengthened Monopoly," *The Militant*, 10(30):6 (July 1946) describes the tenor of the times in which "1940 legislation allowed full amortization of war-related plant and equipment investment over just five years. Corporations were thus able to shelter otherwise taxable profits.Anti-trust prosecutions were eased at the direction of the President, while military procurement agencies issued contracts on a cost-plus basis, with guaranteed profits for the contractor. It was a system, in the words of historian David Kennedy, "… beyond the most avaricious monopolist's dreams." While the government made extraordinary efforts to control costs, the major corporations often had the upper hand in negotiations.

[23] The progression from military production to new heights of consumer-goods production is supported by a large body of peer-reviewed articles and books by highly regarded professionals—including: Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Robert J. Gordon, "Postwar Macroeconomics: The Evolution of Events and Ideas," in (Martin Feldstein, ed.), *The American Economy in Transition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 101-182; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Stanley Lebergott, *Pursuing Happiness: American Consumers in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and John Bound and Sarah Turner, "Going to War and Going to College: Did World War II and the G.I. Bill Increase Educational Attainment for Returning Veterans?" *Journal of Labor Economics*, 20(4): 784–815 (2002).

[24] See our paper, "Remaking American Democracy III: 'Keep Your Eye on the Ball'—The Amoral, Oligarchic Arch-Enemy of Democracy" *Social Policy* (Winter 2024) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD3_OLIGARCHY.pdf]

[25] Taylor Jaworski, "World War II and the Industrialization of the American South," *Journal of Economic History* 77(4): 1048–1082 (2017); Jason E. Taylor, "Net Exports and the Avoidance of High Unemployment During Reconversion, 1945–1947," *Journal of Economic History* 71(2): 442–467 (2011); Tamás Vonyó, "Postwar Reconstruction and the Golden Age of Economic Growth," *European Review of Economic History*, 12(2): 221–241 (2008); Diego Comin and Bart Hobijn, "Technology Diffusion and Postwar Growth," *NBER Macroeconomics Annual*, 25(1): 209-246 (January 2011); and Clifford F. Thies, "Expectations of a Post-WWII Depression," *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* 39(2): 1-22 (2021).

[26] The best source: "United States Congress. Senate. Special Committee to Study Problems of American Small Business. Economic Concentration and World War II: Report of the Smaller War Plants Corporation to the Special Committee to Study Problems of American Small Business, United States Senate," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946). The Report confirms that in many industries an average of a four to eight firms manufactured most of the wartime production, with the principal industries of aircraft, steel, aluminum, petroleum, and shipbuilding dominated by a handful of companies. Prime contracts went overwhelmingly to large corporations. These companies gained new plants, much greater manufacturing capacity, and the benefits of government-paid research and development. The Report concludes World War II entrenched monopoly power in the U.S. economy, leaving large corporations with greater dominance than before the war, which raised urgent concerns about preserving competition in the postwar period.

[27] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

[28] Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960 (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2005).

[29] The most widely read were the books by Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1957) and *The Waste Makers* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1960); Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951); and David Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

[30] Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[31] Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928–1935* (Oxford University Press, 1993); and Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

[32] Which we have explored in our recent paper, "Remaking American Democracy IV: Kleptocratic Oligarchy and America's Economic Destiny 2.0," *Social Policy* (Spring 2025) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD4_ECONOMICS.pdf].

[33] "Social morality" refers to the moral values, principles, and behavioral norms that govern social relations. It reflects a collective understanding of right and wrong, guiding interpersonal relationships, communal responsibilities, and the functioning of societal institutions. It pertains not to an individual's conscience and ethical choices, widely shared standards that enable cooperative living and mutual respect among diverse individuals and groups, providing a framework for addressing social issues such as inequality, rights, and the common good. See Moshe ben Asher, "Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing," *Social Policy* (Winter 2020) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI_CO.pdf].

[34] Corporate advertising expenditures for the decade 1950-60, the increases, decade by decade and recently year by year until the present are available: 1974, $26 billion; 1980, $54 billion; 1990, $130 billion, 2000, $247 billion; and 2007, $280 billion. See Douglas A. Galbi, *U.S. Annual Advertising Spending Since 1919.* Galbi Think! (blog), 2008. [Updated dataset and commentary: [https://www.galbithink.org/ad-spending.htm]. See Statinvestor, U.S. advertising spend (August 23, 2025) [https://statinvestor.com/search/?q=U.S.+advertising+spend] for the following years: 2019, $218 billion; 2019. $231 billion; 2020, $245billion; and 2021, $259 billion.

[35] See our paper,"Remaking American Democracy IV: Kleptocratic Oligarchy and America's Economic Destiny 2.0" [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD4_ECONOMICS.pdf].

[36] Our view is that the kleptocratic-oligarchic regime now dominating U.S. politics and economics has been purposively indifferent to the morbidity and mortality that has followed from their policies. We do not have direct evidence that the regime's primary purpose, an upward redistribution of wealth to billionaires, has been the driver of the indifference to the human suffering and death. But two lines of evidence make the case. First, in regard to the amassing of wealth: Thomas Piketty shows that when the return on capital systematically exceeds the rate of economic growth, wealth tends to concentrate in fewer hands, producing rising inequality over time. See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) and *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). But also see: Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012): and Elizabeth Popp Berman, *Thinking Like an Economist: How Efficiency Replaced Equality in U.S. Public Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022). Second, the effects of exercising inequality: Many studies have verified the effects. The most widely read of many nowadays is Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3):564–81 (September 2014). The classic studies include: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); and E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

[37] Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) commentary on Genesis 18:19.

[38] Adrian Vermeule, "Supreme Court Justices Have Forgotten What the Law Is For," *New York Times* (February 3, 2022).

[39] Regarding the effects on public health generally, see: Roman Pabayo et al., "Political party affiliation, political ideology and mortality," *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 69(5):423-431 (January 2014); Ethan Nadelmann and Lindsay LaSalle, "Two steps forward, one step back: current harm reduction policy and politics in the United States," *Harm Reduction Journal*, 14(37):1-7 (June 2017); and Justin Kaashoek et al., "The Evolving Roles of US Political Partisanship and Social Vulnerability in the COVID-19 Pandemic from February 2020-February 2021," Social Science Research Network (October 8, 2021) [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3933453].

[40] Brian Neelon et al., "Associations Between Governor Political Affiliation and COVID-19 Cases, Deaths, and Testing in the United States," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 61(1):115-119 (July 2021).

[41] Andy Stern, "Unions & Civic Engagement: How the Assault on Labor Endangers Civil Society," *Daedalus* (Spring 2013); and Reid Wilson, "GOP plans new assault on unions," The Hill (December 7, 2016) [https://thehill.com/regulation/labor/309122-gop-plans-new-assault-on-labor].

[42] Aaron M. Cright and Riley E. Dunlap, "Anti-reflexivity: The American Conservative movement's Success in Undermining Climate Science and Policy, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27(2-3):100-133 (2010); Christopher Sellers, "How Republicans came to embrace anti-environmentalism," Vox (June 7, 2017); and Samantha Gross, "What is the Trump administration's track record on the environment?" Brookings (August 4, 2020).

[43] Bruce Western et al., "Economic Insecurity and Social Stratification," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38:341-359 (August 2012); and Arloc Sherman et al., "Widespread Economic Insecurity Pre-Pandemic Shows Need for Strong Recovery Package," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (July 14, 2021) [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/7-14-21pov.pdf].

[44] Rand A. Conger et al., "Economic Pressure, Parent Personality and Child Development: An Interactionist Analysis," *Historical Social Research*, 35(2):169-194; and Aislinn Conrad-Hiebner and Elizabeth Byram, "The Temporal Impact of Economic Insecurity on Child Maltreatment: A Systematic Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(1):157-178 (2020).

[45] Cynthia J. Shilkret and Robert Shilkret, "Attachment Theory" (in Joan Berzoff et al., eds.) *Inside Out and Outside In*, 5th ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), pp. 169-187; Susan Hart, *The Impact of Attachment: Developmental Neuroaffective Psychology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); and Lenora Duhn, "The Importance of Touch in the Development of Attachment," *Advances in Neonatal Care*, 10(6):294-300 (December 2010). And see Joseph Spinazzola et al., "Developmental Trauma Disorder: A Legacy of Attachment Trauma in Victimized Children," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 34(4):711-720 (August 2021).

[46] For a well-developed bibliography on this relationship, see Ilene Schecter, "A secure place: Attachment patterns and socioeconomic status," Master's thesis (Pacific University, 2013) [https://commons.pacificu.edu/spp/1110].

[47] B. Rose Huber, "Four in 10 infants lack strong parental attachments," Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University (2014) [https://www.princeton.edu/news/2014/03/27/four-10-infants-lack-strong-parental-attachments].

[48] Bessel A. van der Kolk, "Developmental Trauma Disorder," *Psychiatric Annals* (n.d.) [https://traumaticstressinstitute.org/wp-content/files_mf/1276541701VanderKolkDvptTraumaDis.pdf]; Zara Abrams, "Improved Treatment for Developmental Trauma," *Monitor on Psychology* (July/August 2021), pp. 39-43; Robin M. Hartinger-Saunders et al., "Improving Access to Trauma-Informed Adoption Services: Applying a Developmental Trauma Framework," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 121: 119-130 (2019); and Karyn B. Purvis et al., "Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): A Systemic Approach to Complex Developmental Trauma," *Child & Youth Services*, 34(4):360-386 (2013).

[49] DTD is not yet included in the DSM. See: A. Bremness and Wanda Polzin, "Developmental Trauma Disorder: A Missed Opportunity in DSM V," *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 23(2):142-145 (May 2014); and Mary Sykes Wylie, "Developmental Trauma Disorder: Distinguishing, Diagnosing, and the DSM—How One Tenacious Task Force Worked to Separate Developmental Trauma Disorder from PTSD in DSM-5," Psychotherapy Networker (n.d.) [https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/blog/details/35/developmental-trauma-disorder-distinguishing-diagnosing#].

[50] The CDC-Kaiser Permanente adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study is one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being. The original study was conducted at Kaiser from 1995 to 1997 with two series of data collection. Over 17,000 HMO members from Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors. See Vincent J. Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults, The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4):245-258 (May 1998). See also: Vincent J. Felitti et al., "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Health," *Academic Pediatrics*, 9:131-32 (2009); Peter Fonagy et al., "Morality, disruptive behavior, borderline personality disorder, crime and their relationships to security of attachment," in L. Atkinson & K.J. Zucker (eds.), *Attachment and Psychopathology* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1997), pp. 223-274; and Paula R. Pietromonaco et al., "Health and Attachment Processes," in (Jeffry A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes, eds.) *Attachment Theory and Research: New Directions and Emerging Themes* (New York & London: Guilford Press, 2015).

[51] See the overlapping reports (1960-1997 and 2001-2021): *Education Week*, Chart: Suicide Rates by Age Group, 1960-97 (April 2000) [https://www.edweek.org/education/chart-suicide-rates-by-age-group-1960-97/2000/04; and S.C. Curtin and H. Hedegaard, "Suicide and homicide death rates among youth and young adults aged 10–24: United States, 2001–2021," *NCHS Data Brief No. 471 (*June 2023) [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db471.htm].

[52] See our paper, "Directly Democratic Metropolitan Government: Envisioning Beyond Oppression, Rebellion, and Reform," *Social Policy* (Spring 2016) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/METRO_GOVT.pdf].

[53] Such extraordinary estimates are supported by scholarly, peer-viewed studies—notably: Christopher J.L. Murray et al., "COVID-19 Projections," Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2020); Christopher J.L. Murray et al., "Modeling COVID-19 Scenarios for the United States," *Nature Medicine*, 27:94-105 (2021); Wei Lyu and George L. Wehby, "Community Use Of Face Masks And COVID-19: Evidence From A Natural Experiment Of State Mandates In The US," *Health Affairs*, 39(8):1419-1425 (2020); and Derek K. Chu et al., "Physical Distancing, Face Masks, And Eye Protection To Prevent Person-To-Person Transmission Of SARS-CoV-2 And COVID-19: A Systematic Review And Meta-Analysis," *The Lancet*, 395:1573-1587 (June 27, 2020).

[54] As Rabbi Hirsch's commentary on Genesis 4:24 teaches us, "… the whole product are men who work with all their forces to fight against God [i.e., against the godly practices of Righteousness, Truth, Justice, Freedom, Peace, and Compassion]. Such a generation kills the ancestors who preceded them, kills the generation that comes after them, and only creates deep wounds and pain for themselves. It sacrifices the past and the future and gains no present."

[55] The *The Economist Democracy Index* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Economist_Democracy_Index], based on 2024 data, classifies the U.S. as a "flawed" democracy. This rating may no longer be justified after the first half of 2025, given the government's dramatic implementation of anti-democratic policies and practices—including: masked secret police detaining citizens without warrants on the basis of ethnic and racial profiling; planning and actual construction of isolated imprisonment facilities in which detainees are denied access to counsel, visits by family, and members of Congress; intimidation threats and demands for large payments to avoid harassment by the Justice Department, directed particularly against Democratic-majority states, major broadcast networks, national newspaper, law firms, and liberal universities—all of which reject unconstitutional federal edicts; and baseless prosecution and legal harassment of opponents of the administration and economic and political favoritism to supporters; and massive, open financial corruption of the administration during the first half of 2025.

[56] Moshe ben Asher and Khulda Bat Sarah, "The Blinding Rapture of Mobilization," *Social Policy* (Spring 2017) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MOBILIZATION_RAPTURE.pdf].

[57] Certainly, a radical or reactionary vanguard party could birth a revolutionary war. But we have seen the results of such morality-free revolutions, those inspired by fantasies of military and police power that will give rise to fabulous wealth. Russia and Mexico are classic examples. One group of murderers and thieves replaced by another in endless cycles of poverty, oppression, and injustice for the *demos*. And we have a very different and immeasurable more successful revolutionary tradition, one built by a morally, spiritually inspired *demos* over more than a century.

[58] Barber, op. cit., *Strong Democracy*, p. 224.

[59] See our papers:"Ethical and Moral Demands of Professional Community Organizing," *Social Policy* (Fall 2020) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MORAL_ETHICAL_ORGANIZING.pdf] and "Evaluation of Base-Building Community Organizers: A Tool with Nuts and Bolts for he Job," *Social Policy* (Spring 2023) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/COMMUNITY_ORGANIZER_EVALUATION_-TOOL.pdf].

[60] See Michael Silver [now Moshe ben Asher], *Social Infrastructure Organizing Technology* (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1980), especially Part Three—Macro Technology, and in particular the Organizational Model chapter, which discusses the New England directly democratic towns in detail (on pp. 205-239). For an updated version, see Moshe ben Asher, "New England Town Government: A Model for Popular Assembly in Two-Tier Metropolitan Government," Gather the People (1980) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/TOWN_GOVT.pdf].

[61] For an introduction to the "two-tier solution," see Robert L. Bish and Vincent Ostrom, *Understanding Urban Government: Metropolitan Reform Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1973), pp. 12-15; and Vincent Ostrom, *The Political Theory of a Compound Republic: Designing the American Experiment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987). On the two-tier metropolitan and small cities model, Roy W. Bahl et al. (eds.), "The Decentralization of Governance in Metropolitan Areas," in *Financing Metropolitan Governments in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2013), pp. 85-106, posits: "If sentiments about home rule are strong, a jurisdictionally fragmented system, or a two-tier metropolitan government structure with a strong bottom tier, is more likely than a dominant metropolitan government" to effect "... greater influence of an individual voter on budget choices" (p. 86)—"... it keeps government close to the people" (p. 88). Unfortunately, the literature on the two-tier model does not include studies of governance by urban municipal government and directly democratic neighborhood jurisdictions, presumably because no such two-tier government exists.

[62] Joshua Kalla and Ethan Porter, "Correcting Bias in Misperceptions of Public Opinion Among American Elected Officials: Results from Two Field Experiments," OSF Preprints (July 7, 2019) reports findings that strongly suggest the speciousness of such claims of representation. The experiments revealed that legislators and their staff "... systematically misperceive their constituents' opinions on salient public policies." Those who had the benefit of access to opinion data were equally off-base in their perceptions. The experimental evidence "... portrays such officials as immune to our non-partisan efforts to correct those misperceptions, possibly opening the door to influence from others, such as likely voters, co-partisans, political activists, lobbyists, or donors." Writing for public consumption in "Politicians Don't Actually Care What Voters Want," *New York Times* (July 11, 2019), Kalla and Porter were not reticent about their findings: "What we found should alarm all Americans. An overwhelming majority of legislators were uninterested in learning about their constituents' views."

[63] See Berkeley Law, "Foundational Aspects of Charter Cities," U.C. Berkeley School of Law (n.d.) [https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Albuquerque3_-_Foundational_Aspects_of_Charter_Cities.pdf].

[64] For details on the availability of the ballot initiative in every state and virtually every city in the country, see Ballotpedia, "Cities that allow direct legislation via ballot initiative," Laws Governing Local Ballot Measures (n.d.) [https://ballotpedia.org/Cities_that_allow_direct_legislation_via_ballot_initiatives].

[65] See Boston Tea Party Historical Society, "Boston Tea Party, the Key Event for the Revolutionary War," (2008) [https//www.boston-tea-party.org/essays/essay6.html].

[66] 1 MassHist.org, "Explore MHS Collections Relating to the Boston Tea Party," Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed September 15, 2025 [https://www.masshist.org/features/boston-tea-party]

[67] Ibid.

[68] American society was also divided at that time. "The American Revolution, while not often called a civil war by modern historians, was referred to as a civil war in its first year... ." See American Battlefield Trust, "What is a Civil War?" (n.d.) [https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/what-civil-war]. Patriots reacted to "... statements and other persistent acts of British sympathizing by ... Loyalist families [which] caused them to be subjected to public humiliation and violence. Property was vandalized, and homes were looted and burned." See, SAAM, "Loyalists and Patriots," Smithsonian American Art Museum (July 2014) [https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Loyalists-and-Patriots.pdf].

[69] For examples, see: Nancy Shulins, "Vermont Towns Vote to Prohibit Nuclear Plants," *Lewiston Evening Journal* (March 2, 1977); and David Scribner, "Resistance to gas pipeline spreads across Western Mass.," *Berkshire—The Edge* (July 2, 2014) [http://theberkshireedge.com/resistance-gas-pipeline-spreads-across-western-mass]. Collaboration of New England towns for policy advocacy and provision of services has been furthered by organizations such as the Massachusetts Municipal Association and the Southern Maine Solar Collaborative.

[70] The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, first employed by the anti-union industrial corporations of the late nineteenth century, took an active role in strike-breaking, using surveillance, intimidation, and violence by their officers to disrupt labor organizing. See David McLean, *The Pinkertons and the Labor Movement: Espionage and Violence in Gilded Age America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[71] Moshe ben Asher, "Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing," *Social Policy* (Winter 2020) makes this case in great detail [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI_CO.pdf].

[72] The importance of moral covenant is apparent in the nation's military. Rav Moshe Taragin, "Shoftim: A Society Worth Defending," Torat Har Etzion (January 9, 2024), proposes that, "A society rooted in justice, fairness, and civility cultivates a stronger, more resolute military. Military success often hinges on the spirit and morale of its soldiers. Armies born from savage and lawless environments are little more than violent gangs, driven by base emotions like hate, greed, and bloodlust. These ignoble traits may spark a furious, fleeting burst of violence, but they lack the endurance required for sustained conflict. In contrast, soldiers driven by the defense of values worth preserving—principles of justice, the sanctity of life, and the freedoms of democracy—fight with selfless devotion and an enduring sense of purpose. They risk their lives not out of mere duty, but out of a profound commitment to safeguarding a civilization that stands for something greater than themselves."