

**Where I am Coming From and Where I Am Now:
From Conservative Catholic to Humanist Social Democrat**

by Michael E. Arth



Easter Sunday, 1961. Five of the original six capable of standing, lined up with our Easter baskets before heading off to church. I'm the serious one on the left, with the slightly exasperated expression, which sums up where I am coming from and where I am now.

Politics in the United States has devolved into a scheme where the rich get more, everywhere, all the time, and by deceptive means. The politicians and media outlets that profit from the spectacle, along with the plutocrats who can afford to buy influence at all levels, keep us distracted, divided, and confused in order to exploit us. The three branches of government are now like a three-ring circus, led by the biggest clown in the land. This is not only my opinion. According to the [2018 Democracy Index](#), our country is now a “flawed democracy” ranked ignominiously between Estonia and Cape Verde in 25th place. On the [Corruption Perceptions](#)

Index we are 22nd. **Life expectancy:** 43rd. **Global Gender Gap:** 52nd. **World Happiness:** 18th. Shouldn't we be number one in all these things? America's strength lies not only in having the most powerful military. Even more important is the aspirational, attractive power of example. How can we properly make the case to the citizens of illiberal and authoritarian regimes about the benefits of liberal democracy when our own domestic and foreign policies are questionable, and our own president praises dictators and does not understand win-win policies?

As of this writing (2018-2019), I'm aware that most people have never heard of me. While not a media hound, I recognize the need to be known in order to take a leadership role in transforming our flawed democracy. In a properly representative system, an informed electorate would need to assess a person's background, their political evolution, where they stand on issues and why they are running for office. So here it is:



Family portrait in Tennessee around 1906. My mother's father, Zeb Gupton, is the barefoot boy on the banjo. My great uncle is on the fiddle. The patriarch with the long beard—originally from North Carolina—is my great-grandfather who fought for the Confederacy and surrendered with Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. (On the other side of the family, my paternal great-grandfather fought for the Union).

My early politics were molded by nature and nurture as represented by geography, parents, teachers, culture, and religion. My mother's traditional ways were planted in the Deep South,

with roots reaching even deeper into Colonial history. My father, by contrast, was from Minnesota, and is descended from stern, mid-19th century German and Austrian immigrants. Essentially, I am a product of the American melting pot including—according to family lore—a soupçon of Native American. My great-grandfathers fought on opposing sides of the Civil War, and before that, my mother’s ancestors fought the British in the Revolutionary War. Going back even further in time, some of my ancestors *were* British—and by a fluke of fate I was also born in Britain. But this fact does not disqualify me (or my sister Michele) from becoming president because we were born to American parents on a United States Air Force Base in England. My father Harry J. Arth was a meteorologist, serving as an enlisted, noncommissioned officer during the Korean War.

After our father’s stint was over, we moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Dad went back to college on the GI Bill and became a geophysicist, which resulted in me and my siblings growing up in oil towns all over Texas. As a condition of marriage, my mother had converted to Catholicism, and both of them followed the Church’s strict edict to be fruitful and multiply. By the time I was seven, there were six. There would have been more, but what my father swore was a merciful “act of God” (a hysterectomy due to cancer) finally shut down my mother’s assembly line. However, after I left home Dad would remarry and have a seventh child.

There are benefits to being the oldest child from a large family. One learns detachment even while never being lonely. When I was not engaged with my next-in-age brother Greg in a fort-building projects, war games, or exploring



September 1961. After a glorious summer as free-range children, my sister Michele and I pose on the front steps of St. Ann’s Catholic School. Mother Superior “Bonfire” Bonfilia—with her veil, scapular, tunic, underskirt, rope belt, rosary beads, and Missionary-Sisters-of-the-Immaculate-Conception-medallion swinging—is blazing a trail toward us. She is holding a note that, in all probability, meant a knuckle-whacking for some hapless student (like the one I got later for uttering the word “pregnant.”)

the desert that bordered our neighborhood, I was the family documentarian—drawing, photographing, and filming. Beginning in my teens I also began keeping journals and wrote about all that I saw with reasonable equanimity. This objectivity helped me to avoid getting drawn into the swirling maelstrom of drama that enveloped my younger siblings and our poor, harried mother. This ability to stand apart as an observer would eventually serve me in my careers in art, filmmaking, architecture, urban design, and policy analysis.

As a young true believer in a conservative Abrahamic religion, I also had my eye on Heaven. Therefore, I understand too well why certain Islamists strap on suicide vests for God. I too would have gladly become a martyr, singing and marching to “Onward Christian Soldiers,” if it would have allowed me to avoid a lifetime filled with temptations of the flesh and Our-Father-Who-art-in-Heaven’s constant scrutiny. I longed to reach those Lofty Heights, as promised to those who kept the faith and hewed to the narrow, tortuous path, which we did. Our family dressed up every Sunday in well-starched garments that chafed the nipples of boys and girls alike, and we attended Mass at St. Ann’s Catholic Church in Midland. The liturgy was in Latin and the mass was cloaked in ritual, but some things were made very clear. If you did not make it to Heaven on the first round, weekly church attendance—including prayers, hymns, and the Holy Sacraments—was said to be an effective way to reduce your time in Purgatory. This was also assuming that your mortal life was bookended with the sacraments of Baptism, and what was then called Extreme Unction. As a devout student at St. Ann’s Catholic School, I would often go to church during my lunch hour to help keep my eye on the post-mortem prize. I also prayed constantly, and bought indulgences in the form of anointed medals and a devotional yoke (called a scapular) at the St. Ann’s Gift Shop. I was a good kid, and rarely had any new sins to confess, so I would just retell the same ones in the confessional every week: “I stole a nickel from my brother, took the Lord’s name in vain, and had impure thoughts (usually about Sister Claire Marie, my beautiful, second-grade teacher).”

The nuns, the priests, my parents, and the little old lady who ran the gift shop, were all in agreement about the Truth. The universe was the creation of the Supreme Being. The Prime-Mover-in-the-chain-of-causality, occasionally interrupted with a miracle, somehow gave us free will, but still scrutinized our every thought and action, and became wrathful every time we veered off course. If we didn’t obey the Ten Commandments—and the never-ending list of bewildering addenda—we would burn for a while in Purgatory, or for eternity in Hell. Furthermore, baptized Catholics, as members of the One True Church, were the only people who could enter Heaven. All mortally sinful people, no matter their faith, would be banished to Hell where they would dance forever on the end of the Devil’s pitchfork over a roasting spit. The best any well-behaved non-Catholic, or pagan, could hope for was to spend an eternity in Purgatory.



A St. Ann's Catholic priest greeting the nuns upon their arrival in Midland, in 1950. I feared that my private thoughts about Sister Claire Marie (second from the right) might land me in Purgatory.

Unbaptized babies went to Limbo, where, as a kid, I imagined they would endlessly crawl back and forth under the limbo stick.

My father used to say that he was to the right of Attila the Hun and that God was a Republican. Dwight D. Eisenhower was a Republican. So I assume Dad liked Ike, even though he never said anything about him one way or another. Ike was the invisible president in a time of increasing prosperity following the hardships of the Great Depression and the Second World War. According to a saying at the time, "Roosevelt proved we can love the president, Truman proved anyone could be president, and Eisenhower proved we didn't need a president." Well, as it turned out, Ike did have at least one important thing to say to all of us, and as a five-star general and former Supreme Allied Commander he was uniquely qualified to say it. Ike was sworn in just after my birth, and he gave his televised farewell speech just before I turned eight. His ghostly image in black and white saying something incomprehensible is the only thing I remember about his presidency. Ike was like an embryo of a president before the office gave birth to Kennedy who I remember in both thrilling and excruciating detail. Only later in life did I understand and appreciate Eisenhower's prescient warning about how the "Military-Industrial Complex" was slipping beyond democratic control.

Eisenhower had his own vast experience as a guide, but he would surely have known about the 1933 “Business Plot” by wealthy industrialists, led by the J.P. Morgan banking firm, to stage a military coup to overthrow Franklin D. Roosevelt and form a fascist dictatorship. The plot was exposed before the House of Representatives in 1934 by Major General Smedley Butler, a self-professed Republican (who voted for FDR) and the most decorated Marine in US history up until that time. Butler testified that conspirators tried to enlist him to help form an army of 500,000 men consisting largely of disgruntled World War I vets who would march on Washington. No action was taken by Congress, but the Congressional Committee wrote in their final report: "There is no question that these attempts were discussed, were planned, and might have been placed in execution when and if the financial backers deemed it expedient.”

Eisenhower must have also known about Butler’s 1935 book, *War is a Racket*, based on the Marine’s experiences with the business community, and his fighting in the Philippines, China, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and in World War I. Butler warned of domestic fascism and explained in his book how Wall Street bankers and business interests manipulate policy in order to profit from war. Butler summed it up in the November 1935 issue of the magazine *Common Sense*:

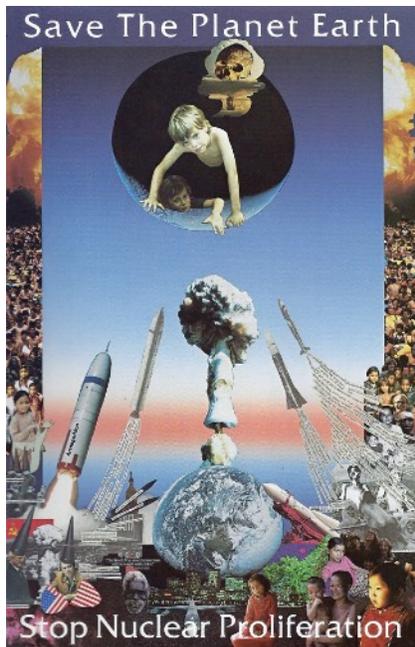
I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.

Of course I knew none of this in 1961, and I don’t think my dad was much concerned about it either. With six kids, a tumultuous marriage, a full-time job, and side businesses that included a “family billiards center” and two firework stands, Dad was under a lot of pressure. He would blow off steam by lighting up whatever fireworks were left over after New Year’s Eve and the Fourth of July. He also liked to drive on dirt service roads through grasshopper pump jacks, in the dead-flat desert of the Permian Basin, to shoot jackrabbits and cottontails from the family station wagon. I know this because he took us along once, but never again, because my siblings

spoiled the fun by crying over all the switching, bleeding bunnies. My father had no sympathy for animals or heathens, especially of the communist variety. “God put the soulless creatures here on Earth for our own purposes and to eat,” he would say, “They have no feelings and they only act on instinct, like robots.” As a result, there was a lot of animal cruelty back then, involving guns, firecrackers, stomping, stabbing, or drowning. I remember shooting birds and polliwogs with my BB gun. I felt bad about it, even if they were soulless, and finally stopped killing for fun. I preferred to play soldier with my toy rifles, but I also played the cowboy with my BB pistol, and made other boys dance by firing at their shoes.

The world was on edge during the Cold War. After two world wars within the living memory of my parents and grandmothers, World War III seemed inevitable. It was assumed that hundreds of millions of people (again, mostly heathens) would either be incinerated or die a slow, horrible death in an irradiated, post-apocalyptic world. While many adults were digging bomb shelters and stocking up, my brother Greg and I secretly dug two bomb shelters of our own—one in the dirt alley behind the fence and another out in the desert. The first secret was literally uncovered when one of the wheels of a Caterpillar grader crushed the tunnel in the alley, and the incensed driver charged through our back yard up to the kitchen door to inform my father. Dad was plenty mad about that. Later, he was really burned up after I came home covered with soot, and he found out about my desert hideout. I confessed to the having gotten a small taste of Armageddon when a wildfire, which Dad blamed me for, swept over the tunnel with me inside and the fire truck passing close by. My brother witnessed Dad giving me a beating and threatening to haul me down to the police station—which explains why he didn’t confess that he started the fire until we had grown to middle age.

At the time, Dad told me he had not prepared at all for the coming apocalypse: “It’s not a war you’d want to survive.” While in the Air Force, assigned to special projects related to studying wind patterns, he had been at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah from 1950 to late 1951 when “radiological bombs” (now known as “dirty bombs”) were being readied for testing. After my father died at age 56 from multiple myeloma, a cancer often associated with radioactive fallout, my step-mother told me Dad had also witnessed an atom bomb explosion. His comment about World War III, possibly related to his personal experiences, haunted me for decades, and the more I learned about the dangers the more concerned I became. The number of global nuclear weapons reached a peak of 70,000 around 1986, more than 98% of which were stocked-piled by the US and the Soviet Union. In that year, the Soviet Union had almost twice as many nuclear weapons as the US, presided over by the young, liberal reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev had replaced the old guard, a succession of senescent cold warriors, and introduced *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). With the fate of humankind hanging in the balance, I was hopeful Gorbachev could somehow make a deal with Reagan. At the Reykjavík, Iceland



My *Save the Planet Earth: Stop Nuclear Proliferation* poster.
Acrylic and collage, 1982.

Summit, on October 12, 1986, Gorbachev proposed to join with the US and others to eliminate all nuclear weapons as long as Reagan agreed to slow-walk development of his impractical Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) for ten years. Reagan would have given away nothing, since the scheme to kill incoming ICBMs is unreliable and inadequate even 30 years later. More to the point, SDI would have been incredibly wasteful and useless if there were no nukes to intercept. In a tragic turn of events, our own senescent cold warrior walked away from the best chance we ever had to have complete, verifiable denuclearization. I was bitterly disappointed, and assumed that Reagan's military advisors and minders had kiboshed the deal on behalf of the Military Industrial Complex. We could have used a dose of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* ourselves before both countries devolved into the more autocratic states they are today.

Despite significant mutual arms reduction, mostly of redundant, aging missiles, there are still about 14,500 global nuclear weapons in nine countries—and these upgraded weapons are still powerful enough to destroy human civilization many times over. Throwing fuel on the fire, in 2018 Trump threatened North Korea with “fire and fury like the world has never seen,” and called for the US to build more and better nukes, including tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use, virtually guaranteeing that other countries will follow suit. Raising the ante on Reagan's “Star Wars” fantasy, Trump also called for a military “Space Force.”

During the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when the US and the Soviet Union were at the brink of global thermonuclear war, I stood outside watching a blood red sky, left behind by the setting sun. I feared it might be the last sunset I would ever see. On October 28, 1987, Exactly twenty-five years after the Cuban Missile Crisis was settled, and only a year after the failed Reykjavík Summit, I had a similar, but even more terrifying experience. This time the sun, already below the horizon, illuminated an actual intercontinental ballistic missile coming over the western skyline. I was standing on the balcony of a house I was building in the Hollywood Hills and managed to snap a picture immediately after it exploded. I sold the photo to Associated Press and it was front page news across the western United States, along with the claim by the Air Force that it was a successful test launch of a Minuteman II missile from Vandenberg Air Force Base. It was hard to deny what I saw, and there was no contrail after the explosion, which was seen as far away as Salt Lake City. The LA Weekly later said that it was



I took this photo of an ICBM heading straight for Los Angeles just after it exploded on the evening of October 28, 1987. Perhaps the greatest lost opportunity in history occurred the year before when President Reagan walked away from a proposal by Mikhail Gorbachev to put the genie back in the bottle and eliminate all nuclear weapons. Several years before the summit, Reagan had wondered aloud if we were the generation that would see Armageddon as prophesied in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. Polls show a majority of white evangelical Christians still believe in the end times and that Jesus will return soon. The vast majority of Muslims polled on the subject also believe the end times are near. Denuclearization is presumably not a concern for those who long for Armageddon and the final reckoning of humanity.

indeed heading for Los Angeles and had to be destroyed. Two weeks later, the LA Times reported that another ICBM went rogue immediately after launch from the facility, and also had to be destroyed. This experience took me back to 1962, when it seemed to me that Dad wished the US would launch a first strike on the Soviet Union in order to eliminate the threat. He loathed Kennedy, even though they were fellow Catholics, and considered him soft on communism. Not long after the crisis had passed, I remember him blowing up over a tiny article in the Midland-Reporter Telegram that reported Kennedy had approved \$2 million in foreign aid for Tito's Yugoslavia, to help prevent that country from being drawn deeper into Russia's orbit. Decades later, I found out from Mom that Dad was so angry about the aid to Yugoslavia and Kennedy's peace overtures that he wrote a letter to Congress, in October 1963, saying "Kennedy ought to be shot!"

Shockingly, the following month Kennedy actually *was* shot, along with our governor. The elderly Irish pastor of our church, Father Kennedy, delivered the news about his namesake to us during a school play around noon on that fateful day. Father Kennedy was crying, and soon most of us were crying too. After we were back in our classrooms, several of us speculated that President Kennedy would be a vegetable if he somehow survived a shot to the head, which led to some dark levity as we reimagined Kennedy as a carrot in a suit with good hair. Our teacher, Sister Damien seemed shell-shocked as our mothers began arriving to pick us up. Did the Soviets kill Kennedy. Was World War III beginning? The school day was over. Back at home, we heard that Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested. On NBC anchorman Chet Huntley talked about “pockets of hatred in our country, and places where the disease is encouraged. You have heard,” he said bitterly, “those who say, ‘Those Kennedys ought to be shot!’... It seems evident that hatred moved the person who fired these shots. . .”

Apparently, one of those pockets of hatred was in our very own house. As my mother and I mourned with the rest of the nation at the foot of her bed, watching the proceedings on TV throughout the weekend, as well as the funeral on Monday, my father was mostly absent. We also watched Oswald being shot by Jack Ruby that Sunday on live TV. He grabbed his stomach and fell over, just like on *Gunsmoke*. Mom said later that at first they were wondering when the FBI was going to show up to question him, but Oswald and Ruby tied up those questions in a nice neat bundle just in time for the funeral. On Sunday, I took a break from the non-stop television coverage to ride my bicycle around our deserted neighborhood. I found a paper stand with Saturday’s Dallas Morning News and its huge three-tiered headline “**KENNEDY SLAIN ON DALLAS STREET, JOHNSON BECOMES PRESIDENT, Pro-Communist Charged with Act.**”



My pencil portrait of John F. Kennedy. 1963

I raced home to tell Dad, and he immediately drove us back to get a copy. On the way to the kiosk, he chuckled to himself, and then while pretending to be a reporter, he said, “Well, other than that, Mrs. Kennedy, how did you like Dallas?” So, naturally he voted for Barry Goldwater in 1964, the same year that Texaco transferred us to Houston, and the year I got beaten up by a girl. During the week leading up to the election, I turned my earnest 11-year-old self into a walking Goldwater signboard. All I had to do was remove a few staples and replace the wooden stick that

separated the front and back of the cardboard placard with my scrawny torso. I got on my bike and rode around promoting Goldwater for a few blocks. Suddenly out of nowhere, pedaled a sturdy creature not much older than me, sporting a ratty, strawberry-blonde pageboy. She tilted a Johnson for President yard sign toward me like a cross between a banner and a jousting lance. After the initial blow, she went “all the way with LBJ,” smashing away until I had been knocked to the ground and both of our signs were in tatters. Then she came at me with her fists, yelling that she was going to beat the hell out of me for being a stupid, idiotic Republican. She got the better of me, but my belief in both Hell and the Grand Old Party remained unbroken, at least until...

High School

My teenage years were spent in Euless, a Texas hick town on the edge of a prairie where the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport would eventually be built. In June 1965, my dad commuted to his new job with Mobil Oil at the Magnolia Petroleum Building in Dallas. The back of the skyscraper, with its red, rotating, neon Pegasus on top, overlooked Main Street where Kennedy’s open-top motorcade had passed below only 18 months earlier.

Nineteen Sixty-Eight was a chaotic year filled with news of bombings, demonstrations, and assassinations, with talk of conspiracy and revolution. In 1968, when I was 15, my mother was crying as we watched on TV the police beating up and tear-gassing protesters outside of the Democratic National Convention. The protesters were against the Vietnam War and chanting “Hey, Hey LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?,” “Hell no, we won’t go!” and “The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!”



“Hey, Hey LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?”

At that point, politically speaking, I was still my father’s son, but cracks were beginning to appear. Unlike my father, I had mourned the deaths of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Bobby Kennedy as if they were members of our family. However, in regards communism, I still believed in tumbling dominoes and what journalist Michael Herr wrote sarcastically a decade later about “maintaining the equilibrium of the Dingdong by containing the ever encroaching Doodah.” In my own form of counter protest, I cut off the bells of my bell bottom pants. I wanted nothing to do with “pinkos” and the hippies, and I was willing to fight for my country right or wrong. I even went to see Richard Nixon at a rally and cheered, even though I would have favored Bobby Kennedy if he had lived, because of his desire to

end poverty and discrimination, and his endearing resemblance to Bugs Bunny. Part of my reaction to communism or talk of socialism was that it seemed the free-loaders who didn't have to do chores or work after school were the most inclined toward long hair, bell-bottoms, and socialism. I had done chores as far back as I can remember, working after school and on weekends throughout my junior high and high school years. There were Kool-Aid stands at age seven and up, recycling soda bottles at 12, a newspaper route, door-to-door sales at 13, and then yard mowing and house painting beginning at 14. I worked as a janitor, cleaned disgusting apartments after tenants had left, swept parking lots, and worked at Pizza Hut in my sophomore

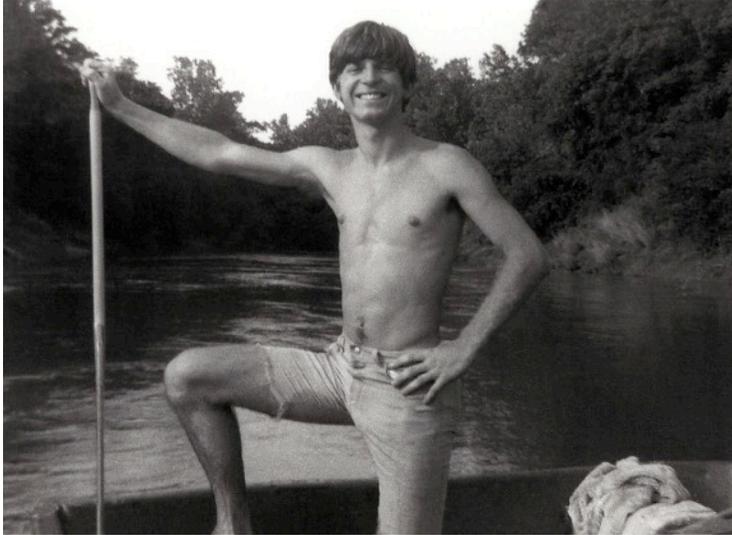
year. I taught swimming classes and was a lifeguard at 16 and 17, and worked as a portrait artist at Six Flags over Texas. If the revolution did come, I figured my sunburn and callouses would keep me from being sent to a socialist re-education camp.



My first political cartoon concerned pollution and the planned canalization of the Trinity River. 1969. That boondoggle was stopped.

Nevertheless, as a budding artist and someone who appreciates beauty and nature, I was deeply concerned about the environment. At 16, I read transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, about his simple life on Walden Pond where the naturalist focused on self-sufficiency and personal growth. It inspired me to write and illustrate a novel (in an extremely limited edition of one) about a young man named Jockey Tramshire Heddge who grows a beard and longs to transcend the blight of the industrialized world. Finally he and his girlfriend run away to live on a tropical island that has good surfing beaches. My love of nature was threatening to turn me into a hippie. One year had made a big difference. By 16 I was willing to wear bell

bottoms, and grow my hair out as long as parents and teachers would permit. I bought a small styrofoam boat and paddled down the rather polluted Trinity River several times with friends. My first political cartoon showed a boy like me and my father, in Dallas, next to the Trinity River, which LBJ, the Corps of Engineers, and the business establishment wanted to turn into a 400-mile-long barge canal to the Gulf. The bridges were already being raised in the late 1960s to allow ships to pass below. "Well son," says father to son, "standing here on the banks of this future canal—boyhood swimming hole of your father—let me congratulate you on being able to



Age 16, in 1969, just before paddling down the Trinity River.

“Conservative Poets” I was planning to edit, and how I had queried Vice-President Spiro Agnew to get his support. (In 1973 Agnew would resign in disgrace after it came out that he had accepted kickbacks and been under investigation for conspiracy, bribery, extortion and tax fraud. By then I was no longer a conservative.) Other than that, and stirrings of environmentalism, my newspaper was fairly apolitical, but I got into trouble over caricatures and cartoons of some of the high school teachers and coaches who were fond of corporal punishment. The coaches drilled holes in their paddles for better aerodynamics, and I got paddled when I got into fights with bullies I didn’t start. (“Takes two to tango, pardner, bend over!”) The principal called me into his office and threatened me with suspension if a single one of my papers, even if distributed off campus, found its way onto school grounds. I told him I would invite the ACLU to sue him and his

grow up in this great industrial age.”

To my relief, the canal project was defeated in 1973 by critics who said it was “welfare for the rich” that would cause “wholesale devastation” to the environment. Instead of being tamed with concrete, channelization, locks, and dams, most of the Trinity River was cleaned up and left in a natural state.

In 1970, I published an off-campus newspaper called “Hello,” where I wrote about an anthology of



My first op-ed in a big town newspaper was published in January 1971 in the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram, just after I had left home at 17. It was in response to the “America: Love or Leave It” bumper sticker.

school on the grounds of the First Amendment if he followed through. He backed down, and I graduated mid-term of my senior year without further incident. As a senior in high school I finally began questioning the status quo on all fronts, and wrote my first published op-ed. It was in reaction to the widespread, nationalist slogan “my country right or wrong” and the popular bumper sticker “America: Love It or Leave It.” My conclusion then, and now, is that to love our country as a true patriot we must do the hard work of making it better. Instead of having an infantile, familial relationship where we support Uncle Sam and cover up embarrassing family secrets, we need an adult relationship based on self-examination, and a willingness to evolve with the changing times. There’s always room for improvement, both individually and as a nation. Patriotism does not have to be self-delusional or nationalistic.

In my junior year of high school I tried marijuana a number of times, undeterred by the 1936 American propaganda film *Reefer Madness*, seen at a midnight theater with schoolmates. The film depicted a boy, high on marijuana, who gets in a hit-and-run accident that kills someone. A girl is nearly raped and then killed when a gun goes off while two young men are fighting. Another man is murdered. Another young woman jumps out of the window, followed by a man’s descent into madness. In other words, the characters were exhibiting behavior commonly associated with alcohol. I hated smoking, and marijuana was stupefying compared to LSD, which I tried for the first time at 17, on an empty stomach, alone under the covers in my dark bedroom. Before tripping, I had devoured any literature on the subject I could find, including *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, by R.E.L. Masters and Jean Houston, billed as “the comprehensive guide to the effects of LSD on human personality.” I knew psychedelics heightened consciousness, were non-addictive, and would be nothing like the risible propaganda film we were shown at school titled, *LSD: Insight or Insanity*. Instead, LSD or any other entheogen really can be about insight even while, at effective dosage, being potentially challenging and frightening. LSD forced me to confront my fears and assumptions unlike anything I have ever experienced. It broke down the part of my brain that controls the ego—which did not go down without a struggle—and put me in direct contact with religious feeling, which bore no resemblance to cartoonish Bible stories. LSD made clear that Western religions were based on gendered, hierarchical relationships within families, with the patriarch at the top, while the atheistic religions of the East were based on direct experiences that came out of non-ordinary states of consciousness. In Catholicism there was a focus on alcohol, with wine representing the blood of Christ. But Hinduism came out of Vedic philosophy which was inspired by a psychoactive plant or mushroom called “Soma.” After trying psychedelics many people lose their attachment to dualistic, dogmatic beliefs and become attracted to more rarefied Buddhist notions of non-duality. This is what happened to me and it also informed my skeptical, experimental, science-oriented attitude. I applauded the Dalai Lama when he said in February

2019: “Buddha himself told us, ‘Do not believe my teaching on faith but rather through thorough investigation and experiment,’ So if some teaching goes against reason, we should not accept it.”

My personal investigations and experiments with various entheogens, undertaken rarely and with great caution, helped me establish a deeper connection with nature that would inspire my art and force me to look at things from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, in 1996, I stopped the experiments for two reasons: 1. Much of my curiosity had been satisfied; 2. I wanted to publicly discuss my experiences and criticize drug policy without fear of persecution, prosecution or prejudice. Those opposed to my candidacy may seize upon my previous drug use for political purposes. I expect that, but reasonable people will see that my personal experiences combined with my critical assessment of the evidence helps me in formulating drug policy recommendations. I was in my teens when I first began to notice the hypocrisy regarding psychoactive substances. The authorities violently suppressed non-toxic, non-addictive substances that encouraged self-reflection and alternative modes of perception, including empathy for others, yet supported and even allowed advertising of the most lethal of the addictive “escape drugs”—alcohol and nicotine. I am inherently put off by the socially acceptable addictive drugs, which are even more lethal than the forbidden “hard drugs.” In the 70’s, powder cocaine was ubiquitous, and expensive because it was illegal. Because prohibition causes the most concentrated forms of an illegal substance to be developed quicker, cocaine’s most pernicious, and cheaper, form—crack cocaine—soon became widely available through criminal distribution networks. Even as dangerous as it is, less than 11,000 people died from cocaine in all forms from 2000 to 2016 in the US, while legal substances killed more than eight million during the same period. According to the Center of Disease Control and the Health in 2013, tobacco and alcohol killed 120 times more Americans than all other drugs combined. Throughout all those years psychedelics and cannabis killed no one. Casting the statistical net even wider, there is not a single, unambiguously documented case of overdose death from marijuana or LSD in the entire recorded history of the world.

As a teenager seeking guidance from authority, it was disturbing to learn that both the Church and State lie as a form of social control. I wanted to know the truth about everything, and did not want to accept common assumptions out of fear or wishful thinking. Science, which forms falsifiable theories deduced from repeatable observations, constitutes what we call “reality” and is the only reliable source of factual information. As a basic framework for knowledge about the world, the scientific method is so obvious, fair, and reasonable. Even so, I began to notice how propagandists sow doubt through pseudo-science, in-house research conducted with a desired result in mind, cherry-picking of data, and by soliciting opinions from hired experts in order to manipulate public opinion (e.g., oil and tobacco companies). Knowing that the public respects science and its proven results, science-sounding words and pseudo-science is used by Christian

Science, Scientology, Science of Mind, creation scientists, astrologists, climate change deniers, marketers, mediums, and other assorted schemers and scammers. With all this in mind, I sought a wide range of expert opinions and source material on every subject, with the assumption that all knowledge is to some extent provisional, at least until refined or overturned by additional observations. One can never be absolutely certain of the wisdom behind any policy decision, but reasonable people can act in good faith on a preponderance of evidence—especially on important things that would be hard to fix later if we fail to act. In the meantime, special interests, along with their bought politicians, game the system by sowing confusion while introducing self-serving, alternative scenarios.

I would soon turn 18, and be eligible for the draft. The biggest governmental lie at the time was telling young men they would serve their country by going off to Vietnam. But how could we be serving our country when the war was a *disservice* to humanity? Instead, the war served the Military Industrial Complex and the politicians it bought. Vietnam was only the latest in a sordid and brutal history of misguided military actions that began with the mistreatment of Native Americans. I resolved not to go, and to resist, if necessary. Fortunately, the issue was settled by an induction lottery based on one's birthday that let me off the hook. At the same time, a number of boys from my high school graduation class were duped into signing up, did not know what else to do with their lives, or had the bad luck of being born on the wrong day.

In 2002, the Bush administration lied about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction to dupe allies and convince Congress to pass a resolution authorizing the Iraq war, despite the public's preference for diplomacy over an invasion, and preemptive war being a violation of international law. It turned out that Saddam did not have WMDs—not even the ones that the US had sold him during the Iran-Iraq War. It was only the latest example in a long history of military and business interests profiting from deception, greed, and public bamboozlement. After the Iraq invasion, we also finally learned that LBJ had exaggerated and lied to Congress and the American public about attacks on the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 in order to commence open warfare against North Vietnam.

We did not know about LBJ's Gulf of Tonkin deception back then, but the massacre of unarmed Vietnamese villagers by US soldiers at My Lai was slowly brought into public consciousness beginning in November 1969. Gradually, it became clear that My Lai was only the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of non-combatants had been murdered by Americans, including old people, and women, who were often gang-raped and mutilated. Clinging babies were killed along with their mothers. There were organized attempts by the military and the government to cover it up or excuse it, but the big picture was much worse. All together, over the course of the nearly twenty-year-long Vietnam War, as many as four million civilians and soldiers were killed,

including 58,000 Americans. Over 300,000 young American men were wounded or maimed for life, and another 270,000 *still* suffer from full-on, post-traumatic stress disorder. The Pentagon Papers, a top-secret historical analysis of the war by the Rand Corporation was leaked in 1971. It exposed the clandestine American bombing of Cambodia, its complicity in the assassination of South Vietnamese president Ngô Đình Diệm, and the fact our government continued fighting the war, despite knowing it could not be won.

The war could not have been “won” anyway, in any meaningful sense of the term. The war was misguided, immoral, and genocidal and, in 1975, the US was defeated with China’s help. South Vietnam was taken over by the communist north. Today a united Vietnam is a fast-growing, modern, capitalist state, not much different from China and its one-party government, which is almost certainly what it would have been anyway if the US had never gotten involved. Vietnam was a huge mistake, pursued for nefarious ends, and the lessons had not yet been learned when the US invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. This passage illustrates the kind of egoistic thinking that got us into those wars to begin with:

There are two novels that can change a bookish fourteen-year old's life: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Atlas Shrugged*. One is a childish fantasy that often engenders a lifelong obsession with its unbelievable heroes, leading to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood, unable to deal with the real world. The other, of course, involves orcs.

—Canadian writer John Rogers

In late 1969 or early 1970, as a bookish kid trying to find answers, I became a kind of right-wing libertarian, influenced by Ayn Rand. Part of the reason for this was that my father confiscated all the books of which he disapproved, leaving me Rand’s novels *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged*; and her collection of essays, *The Virtue of Selfishness*. The theme of *Selfishness* presaged the *Wall Street* film character Gordon Gecko’s “Greed is Good” speech, the Tea Party, and our current semi-literate president, who is said to be a fan of Ayn Rand. Trump reportedly identifies with Howard Roark, the sociopathic, architect in Rand’s novel *The Fountainhead* who blows up a building when he does not get his way. Rand’s philosophy is that the most noble and efficient way to run a capitalist society is for everyone to act in their own self interest, even if there are only a few winners in a nation full of losers. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand contrasts “creators and innovators” with “moochers and looters” who “claim your product by tears...or take it from you by force.” She also extols egoism as a code of ethics and believes altruism to be destructive. Robert Ringer, the self-help author who wrote *Winning Through Intimidation* (1973) and *Looking Out for #1* (1977), called *Atlas Shrugged* Rand’s “masterpiece.” Rand also inspired Trump’s CIA chief Mike Pompeo, Trump’s former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, Andy Puzder (Trump’s pick for secretary of labor), and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Ryan was

raised Catholic, yet in 2005 Ryan credited atheist Ayn Rand with the reason he got involved in public service. He had also said he gave out *Atlas Shrugged* for Christmas presents, and to his staff to read. In 2009, he said, “Ayn Rand did the best job of anybody to build a moral case of capitalism...” Presumably Ryan soon after wised up to the fact it is considered political suicide for Republicans to be associated with atheism. When he was asked about Ayn Rand by *National Review* in a 2012 interview, he said, “I reject her philosophy. It’s an atheist philosophy....give me [Saint] Thomas Aquinas, who believed that man needs divine help in the pursuit of knowledge. Don’t give me Ayn Rand.”

Ayn Rand was right to say there is no proof for the existence of God, and that you do not have to prove there are no supernatural deities because you cannot prove a negative. At the time I also thought she was right about capitalism and selfishness. Everyone is selfish, and even if you do something that helps others, you receive personal gratification, the approval of others, or the hope of a pleasant reward after death. At 16, I told my mother I did not want to have kids, and she called me selfish. “Do you mean to say that you didn’t want to have children, and that you only had us to please God,” I asked, “or was it only because the Church forbids contraception?” She couldn’t come up with an acceptable answer, but admitted she really did want us, even though we drove her nuts. It got me thinking, because we obviously have something in mind when we say someone is selfish or unselfish. Eventually, I came to this conclusion: There is the lesser, childish self that thinks only of what it wants—the ego. This is like the idealized, dog-eat-dog capitalism, which actually does not exist anywhere because of rules and regulations that are being rewritten to benefit the rich. Its ubiquitous cousin, crony capitalism, however, structures the rules to benefit the cronies. In a healthy person, however, there is the greater self that connects to everyone through our common humanity. From this mature point of view, people seek to make themselves useful and feel good when they help others and trying to leave the world a better place than when they found it. It is the sort of thinking that influences the social democracies of Scandinavia, which regulate capitalism for the greater good. We need both competition and cooperation in society, and evolution has designed us in such a way that we generally want positive things for both ourselves and others. Society would sink into brutish barbarism if we were childish all the time, and it also might not work so well if there was no striving to define personal boundaries and prove oneself. Monotheistic religions confuse the issue even more, by claiming society is better when we do good to gain favor with a higher power. But a sane, healthy person raised in a loving home does not need a god to be good.

It was not only the lingering, bitter taste of my Catholic upbringing that turned around my thinking. I would have eventually arrived at the same conclusions from my own reasoning, combined with reading the books I got from raids on my father’s sock drawer. You see, I discovered where Dad hid the books he had confiscated from me, so I was able to withdraw and

replace one volume at a time without him being the wiser. One of the books on the forbidden list of the secret lending library was Robert Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Idea of the Great Economic Thinkers*. It introduced me to the notion that while hugely complicated but mutually interpenetrating unseen forces (Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand") determine how the market operates, economies should be regulated and engineered to prevent hardship and conflict. Another book was Philosopher Bertrand Russell's, *Religion and Science*, which helped teach me how to dissect irrational views. It angered me to see religions making unprovable, outlandish claims for a Supreme Being they claimed to represent, and using these lies to manipulate people for profit and power.

Religion and Politics

Today the oppressive Church I grew up in is struggling to stay relevant in an increasingly secular world. The liturgy is no longer in a dead language, musicians play Jesus songs at guitar masses, they have reluctantly begun purging the clergy of pedophiles, and science is finally being given some grudging respect. In 1633, the Catholic Inquisition threatened to burn Galileo at the stake unless he recanted his observation that the Sun revolves around the Earth. Only in 1992, after a 13-year-long deliberation, did the Church finally conclude that Galileo was right, even though they qualified their statement by saying the Inquisition was "acting in good faith" because Galileo could not prove "beyond all doubt that the Earth moved." Religious indoctrination is still largely to blame for the fact recent polls show about one in four American adults still think the sun revolves around the Earth, and a third do not accept the unassailable facts proving evolution.

Some years ago, I visited my old Catholic grade school in Midland. The building was still in operation, but the nuns who taught me were all gone. The few sisters remaining had traded the "Catholic hijab" for plain skirts and sturdy, sensible shoes. The principal was an open-minded, lay woman in her 30s, with an ecumenical attitude. She was a living example of how, as the culture evolves and people wise up, cultures tend to become less dogmatic while on the way to becoming less religious. Truth and justice will win out eventually, even for the churches. Aside from the preachers and priests who cynically use religion for debauchery or other personal gain, unknown numbers of clergy do not believe the dogma they profess, but may stay on because they do not want to lose job security, and/or rationalize they are doing some good by comforting others. There are also groups of clergy and ex-clergy who reject authoritarianism and any literal interpretation of religious myths. The Sea of Faith network, for example, explores and promotes religion as a human creation. According to a 2014 YouGov poll, as many as 16% of Anglican clergy in the United Kingdom are agnostic or atheist, with the doubters rising as high as 28% among those who became priests in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the impulse to gather and share with others is so strong that there are now so-called "atheist churches" where people are bound

together by fellowship instead of religion. In my neighborhood, the First United Methodist Church easily fills their large auditorium with a mostly gray-haired crowd to listen and sing along with gospel singers. Rock concerts serve the same function for younger folks.

Politics is about who gets what, where, when, and how. This could just as well be said about religion, which is why it can be problematic to discuss religion or politics in polite company. It is also why politicians and priests make so many false statements—telling the truth can put them out of office. Religion and politics are often mentioned in the same breath—not only because both want your donations—but also because religion is a form of politics. One major difference is that some religions also purport to allocate resources and provide social security in the hereafter. Both religion and politics have naturalistic origins in our prehistory and genetics, and they both have evolved into the institutions we have today. I believe that the fairy tales inherent in religious dogma will continue to lose relevance, but the primordial instincts that begat religion—ineffable feelings of the numinous and transcendent—will endure. Religious feeling naturally evokes a reverence for life and inspires compassion toward others. Even though religions may fade away, humans will continue to experience feelings that include the awe and fascination with the mysteries of nature and our place in an unfathomable cosmos. Even though religion has political elements, the Founding Fathers were right to separate church and state in the First Amendment. Politics in the real world should remain secular, since it is the only practical way to unite and govern people with a myriad of conflicting, personal beliefs and superstitions. It has been said that humans can be rallied around one of three things: their religion, their tribe, or their ideals. There are thousands of religions with competing dogmas, none of which are factual. (Christianity alone has over 40 major divisions including more than 33,000 denominations). There are also millions of rival tribes that demand loyalty to their own. All this contrasts with ideals, which can be universally applied to all humans, and which are based on our shared humanity and the commonality of our desire for justice. My strict upbringing and indoctrination inside the dominant Christian sect allowed me a detailed look at anti-scientific authoritarianism from the perspective of a true believer. Today, the fact-challenged Trump presidency affords a similar opportunity to scrutinize the actions of a sociopathic, pathologically dishonest, autocratic leader and the flawed electoral system that produced him. Right-wing politics and fundamentalist Judeo-Christian religions are usually paired because both foster tribal loyalty and blind faith, while denigrating critical thinking and science. Trump, and the most loyal of his followers who come out of this pairing, personify some of the gravest threats facing democracy because they choose dogma over science, while sacrificing the common good for individual or partisan gain.

I had a rough couple of years while questioning my own ingrained beliefs. I studied philosophy, desperate to find reasons to believe, but reason eventually forced me to conclude that faith is not a valid epistemology—either in religion or politics. Evidence won me over, not dogma or

ideology. Even so, I remained curious about religion from an evolutionary, psychological, and historical perspective. Because of the unifying religious experience I had on LSD, I became even more interested in its origins and practices. I took a world religion class in my first semester at the University of Texas at Arlington, taught by two professors. I found the course fascinating, and asked a lot of pointed questions. At the end of the semester, the professors subjected me to a private inquisition and said they could not in good conscience give me an A grade in the class unless I professed to believe in God. I told them I had sympathy for the god of Einstein and Spinoza (“god” as a synonym for nature) but no respect or belief in the autocratic god of Abraham. They seemed personally insulted that I did not share their beliefs or give an oath of loyalty. I accepted the B grade as a badge of honor. Those in power tend to demonize people who question their authority. This is why Trump attacks the media. This also helps explain the origin of the war on drugs, and why the law would come down so hard on a physically harmless drug that caused people to question authority. By 1967, the possession or distribution of LSD was highly illegal throughout the US, with penalties for use comparable to murder. In that year, LSD guru Timothy Leary famously said to the Establishment: “The kids who take LSD aren’t going to fight your wars.” President Richard Nixon declared the official War on Drugs on July 17, 1971, calling drugs “public enemy number one.” Soon thereafter he said Leary was “the most dangerous man in America.” This was ironic because Nixon’s War on Drugs and his Vietnam War easily made *Nixon* the most dangerous man in America—especially considering that he would later say of his crimes, as a prequel to Donald J. Trump, “If a president does it, that means it’s not illegal.”

End the War on Drugs

Nixon was a mendacious hypocrite with at least two drug abuse problems (nicotine and alcohol) that were and still are tolerated, regulated, and taxed. His War on Drugs was a revival of Prohibition—without the cover of a constitutional amendment—including all the same problems that alcohol prohibition had caused from 1920 to 1933. The 18th Amendment forbade the sale of alcoholic beverages in the US and 21st Amendment repealed the same law only 13 years later. The “noble experiment,” driven by religious fervor, turned out to be horrifically ignoble because it spawned smuggling, mass murder, organized crime, police corruption, reduced tax collections, criminalization of vast swaths of the population, and increased incarceration—while also heightening the potency, danger, and lure of the forbidden substances. Some of the reasons why Nixon, and many others since, have pursued irrational and ineffective drug policies were further enumerated in 1994. In an interview with writer Dan Baum, Watergate co-conspirator, and Nixon’s counsel and assistant John Ehrlichman admitted:

We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

To arrest and jail people for using psychedelics or cannabis is so misguided as to seem diabolical. Psychedelics are of low toxicity, non-addictive, and have been used therapeutically with great success to treat addiction and depression. They can also induce full-blown, crying-with-joy, mystical experiences and life-changing metanoia even in the most locked down, uptight person, which is considered by those experiencing it to be a good thing. So why is it illegal? As Timothy Leary used to say, "LSD is a psychedelic drug which occasionally causes psychotic behavior in people who have NOT taken it." Marijuana, an immensely useful weed that thrives just about anywhere it is planted, has never killed anyone from overdose, but thousands have died indirectly as a result of its illegality. As former Fernandina Beach, Florida Chief of Police Jerry Cameron, and a member of LEEP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), told me, "To overdose on marijuana you'd have to have a bale of it dropped on you." Its wide-ranging medical benefits are well-known and feared by Big Pharma. Various studies have shown that states with medical marijuana laws report vastly reduced opioid prescriptions and overdoses. Cameron also said the cops always knew who was drinking and who was smoking pot. "The drunks would be speeding, swerving all over the road, and blowing through stop signs. Someone high on pot would be driving under the speed limit, have his hands at ten and two, and be stopping ten feet before the stop sign."

Legalizing cannabis and psychedelics is a no-brainer. Even legalization of the addictive drugs, combined with health care, regulation, education, taxation, and lack of advertising, would greatly reduce the harm they doing now, and remove the criminal element from the equation. There are no compelling arguments for continuing drug prohibition, and decriminalization does not go far enough. As Chief Cameron explained in a filled-to-capacity auditorium at Stetson University in 2008:

Let's say I put some pure pharmaceutical heroin on the table and give you a nurse practitioner to inject it. We'll dose you perfectly. You have no risk dying and I'll give it to you for as long as you want it for free. How many want to come up and get started?...No hands."

Seeing no takers, he asked rhetorically, "If the absence of the law and the ability to even get it for free doesn't affect your decision not to use it, and the existence of the law and it being hard to get doesn't deter the drug dealer, then what is the purpose of the law?" He looked around for a few

seconds and continued, “The effect of the law is only to create an environment where the black market can thrive. I put this guy in jail and he comes out. What’s he going to do? There was only one thing he knew how to do when I put him in, and he’s learned how to do it better while he was in there.” In the 1970s, I was heartened to find agreement on the futility of prohibition with my father, whose idol, William F. Buckley, had also come out for legalization. Other than drug war profiteers, authoritarians, and the religious people who often see drug usage as evil and deserving of punishment, legalization is an issue that unites disparate thinkers across the political spectrum.

Ironically, I inadvertently ended up waging my own private war on drugs that came about in a roundabout way. In 1999, as a result of my interest in architecture and urban design, I founded a more ecological and pedestrian-oriented version of **New Urbanism** called **New Pedestrianism**. The desire to build a new town based on these principles led me to searching across the country for a project. In 2001, I began rebuilding a crime-ridden, drug-infested slum neighborhood in downtown DeLand, Florida. With two dozen, private loans at 20% interest in the first year, I bought thirty-three homes and businesses in an area formerly known as “Cracktown,” “Dead-Land,” and “The End,” and rechristened it “The Garden District.” Other people bought into the neighborhood and we quickly turned the slum into a charming, walkable community.

Pardon me for gushing, but every town in this county needs a Michael Arth.
- Mike Lafferty, Orlando Sentinel

Arth's a visionary. His dedicated efforts... represent a triumph of will over adversity.
- Daytona News Journal

Before **After**

On a sweltering day in August 2001, a stranger appeared in a crime-ridden Florida neighborhood known as "Cracktown." Armed only with big ideas and determination, artist/urban designer/developer Michael E. Arth saved this slum from a date with the wrecking ball. Reborn as The Garden District, it is now a living laboratory demonstrating Michael's New Pedestrianism, an ecological and pedestrian-friendly vision for new towns and neighborhoods.

Take a trip into the wild frontier of real estate in this inspiring and educational documentary that answers the question, "What can one person do about the world's problems?"

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New Urban Cowboy: TOWARD A NEW PEDESTRIANISM

New Urban Cowboy
TOWARD A NEW PEDESTRIANISM

“★★★★ 1/2!”
- Jeff Farance, Daytona News Journal

“★★★★!”
- Roger Moore, Orlando Sentinel

“A MIRACLE!”
- Film Critic, Jason Wiener

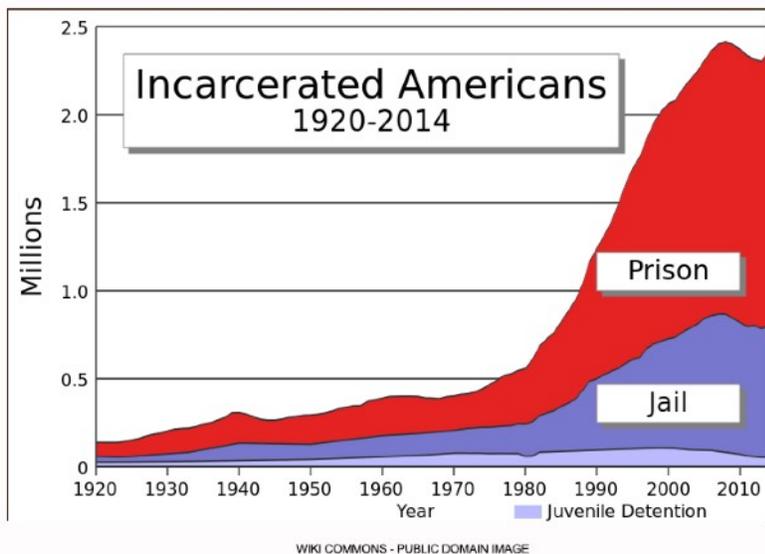
“GRIPPING... ASTOUNDING!”
- Robert Aris, SF360

Michael E. Arth is fixin' the Earth one town at a time!

In 2001, my daughter Sophie was born in a renovated, former crack house, and subsequently grew up in the Garden District. By the time she was in fifth grade, our neighborhood was so safe she could ride her bicycle to school. More recently, I acquired land that had been cleared of homes long before my arrival, and designed Craftsman-style homes that will face a car-free pedestrian lane and linear park. Today I still live in the mixed income, mixed-race, mixed-use neighborhood on a quiet, tree-lined cul-de-sac, along with my partner, Shasta Solis, and her two children. As for the drug dealers and their associates, they either moved to another neighborhood, or they moved into jail, but not before my workers and I had some frightening encounters with a local drug gang. Filmmaker Blake Wiers and I made a feature-length film, [New Urban Cowboy: Toward a New Pedestrianism](#), which documents these struggles.

Kicking out the drug dealers and rebuilding Cracktown demonstrated to me that a little bit of enlightened public policy could have prevented decades of misery. If not for the [War on Drugs](#), abetted by the decline of public transportation and the rise of automobile-facilitated flight to the suburbs, drug slums all over our country would never have come into existence. In 2011, the FBI estimated there were 1.4 million gang members in some 33,000 gangs in the United States. Gang members are the primary distributors of illegal drugs on the street, and they are responsible for

nearly half of all violent crime.



Since the War on Drugs began in 1971, the US incarceration rate has grown 700%, falling disproportionately on minorities and women. The rate of increase has even surpassed the Prohibition era. The US has only 4% of the world's population, but 22% of its prisoners.

The US has also spread the drug-war-related misery throughout Latin America, with Mexico being its biggest victim. Gang formation, the destruction of the inner cities, and a 700% increase in the incarceration rate since 1971, are all largely attributable to drug prohibition, which gives immense wealth and power to drug cartels and the violent, male-dominated, gangster culture. Meanwhile, the established patriarchy keeps claiming that by increasing the violence and repression, they can “win” the drug war. President Trump’s latest iteration of failed law enforcement

solutions is to call for executions of drug dealers. His inspiration is the macho Philippine strongman, Rodrigo Duterte, who Trump called up to congratulate on how he was doing an “unbelievable job on the drug problem.” If there is anything we have learned from prohibition is that it causes far more harm than was ever caused by the prohibited substances. It is time to finally end the boondoggle and replace it with regulation, taxation, treatment, and the banning of all advertising for psychoactive substances, including alcohol and tobacco.

Homelessness

Rebuilding an inner city slum brought me into contact with a large number of homeless people, some of whom I hired to help. Unfortunately, most were useless as workers because of co-occurring mental illness and substance disorders. This experience led to a decade long quest to resolve local issues with the homeless, and address the problem nationally. There are solutions that costs no more, and possibly less, than dealing with the fallout and expense to the public from people living on the street. The first step involves **Housing First** type solutions for those who, along with access to supportive health and rehabilitative services, are able to integrate back into the community. The second solution involves the creation of a local **holistic, transformational**

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"Dirty Dave" Grimsley is a pint-sized blend of Randle McMurphy in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and George Clooney's Ulysses Everett McGill in "O Brother Where Art Thou." Also known as "Dammit Man" and "Tom Sawyer" because of his profane hucksterism, Dave is a hard-drinking leprechaun with the gift of gab, a heart of gold and not a pot to piss in. He runs a homeless camp while waiting for local authorities in Volusia County, FL to donate public land for Tiger Bay Village, a community of services for adults who fall through the cracks.

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campus of services, which could be a model elsewhere. Such villages would provide the full range of services in a beautiful setting for non-violent persons, who for whatever reason, are either temporarily or permanently not able to live in the inner city where their mental illness and addictive behavior may be exploited by others. The villages could also serve as jail diversion and rehab centers for drug offenders. While trying to get what I called [Tiger Bay Village](#) built in Volusia County, a similar 33-acre campus of services called [Haven for Hope](#) was actually built in San Antonio, Texas. Based on their success, the city of Daytona Beach finally approved and agreed to fund a much scaled down version of my plan, called [First Step Shelter](#), in the location I had proposed, just outside of town that has potential of expanding into a more comprehensive campus of services. During this process, I made a documentary called [Out of the Woods: Life and Death in Dirty Dave's Homeless Camp](#), which documents life in a homeless camp in DeLand, and my nascent effort to build the village. Of even greater help than these solutions would be a universal basic income, which I will get to later in this essay.

Liberalism v. Conservatism

From ages 16 to 18, while learning about psychoactive substances and witnessing the initial stages of the War on Drugs, I read everything I could get my hands on, including philosophy, psychology, science, politics, religion, and Zap Comix. One by one, the assumptions of my youth fell away. As I was evolving in my thinking, I learned the dictionary definitions of the terms “conservative” and “liberal.” A conservative is defined as someone holding onto traditional attitudes and values, who is cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to religion or politics. Synonyms include peevish, tight, buttoned-down, orthodox, old-fashioned, dyed-in-the-wool, hidebound, unadventurous, set in one’s ways, stuck-in-the-mud, narrow-minded, bigoted, selfish, and reactionary. Conservatives are known as right-wingers, and diehards. Conservatives are usually either traditionalists, wanting to preserve the status quo and existing institutions, or reactionaries wanting to return to the good old days “when America was great.” The reactionaries talk about a mythical golden age based on old-time religion, conformity, white supremacy, and rigidly defined gender roles that kept women in the kitchen, with a bun in their oven. The past is re-imagined as some version of the TV sitcoms many of us grew up with, like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966), *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), and *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968). What is rarely acknowledged by reactionaries about this period of idealized American history is that the prosperity and upward mobility of the middle class was due to economic factors conservatives disapprove of, including:

1. Strong unions, pensions, and plentiful, well-paying jobs for the semi-skilled disappeared after Reagan’s 1982 rule changes that benefited the rich. Corporations were no longer accountable to stakeholders (workers and their communities) as well as shareholders.

2. More equitable Taxation: Progressive taxation with a marginal federal income tax rate was 94% in 1945 and 91% as late as 1963. It didn't drop below 70% until the 1980s. Corporate tax receipts averaged around 4% of collections during the 1950s and 1960s. They were 1.3% in 2018.
3. Wage and wealth equality as a result of the destruction of capital during World War II.
4. Educational and home purchasing benefits given to returning veterans.
5. Lower wages for CEOs. In the post-war era, CEOs earned around 20 times the average worker, and they generally considered their companies to be public trusts for the good of the community, the employees, the customers, and the stockholders. In 2017, the top 350 American CEOs earned 312 times what their company's average worker earned, and their overriding concern is for stockholders, short-term profits, and their personal gain.
6. Shared wealth: In the three post-war decades middle-class income doubled. In the last three decades middle class income has stagnated while the rich have taken the gains.
7. The New Deal legacy: Social Security, unemployment insurance, and banking reforms.

For extreme reactionary Roy Moore, Republican politician and former Alabama Chief Justice, America's golden age came before the Civil War, when human beings were considered property to be beaten, raped, or killed, who could be sold with or without other family members. In response to a question by an African American at a 2017 rally, about when America was last great, Senate candidate Moore said, "I think it was great at the time when families were united—even though we had slavery—they cared for one another. Our families were strong, our country had a direction."

In stark contrast to conservative values and beliefs, the word liberal is defined as being open to new behavior or opinions, and a willingness to discard traditional values. Liberals are favorable to or respectful of individual rights and freedoms. They tend to regard traditional religious beliefs as dispensable, invalidated by modern thought, or liable to change. After reading William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, I learned the difference between religious feeling and religious belief. Religious (or numinous) feeling encompasses awe, mystical states, mystery, metaphor, empathy, inclusion, tolerance, nuance, and change. It is often associated with non-ordinary consciousness and psychedelics. Religious (or ideological) faith is usually conservative, and as such it is often dogmatic, inflexible, literal, dualistic, demonizing, intolerant, sexist, messianic, delusional, oppressive, controlling, abusive, cruel, and capricious. It is often associated with alcohol.

A liberal believes that government should be active in supporting political change. Synonyms include: openness, tolerance, unprejudiced, inclusive, broad-minded, open-minded, enlightened, flexible, free, easy-going, liberated, and progressive. A liberal education means broadening one's

general knowledge and experience. The word liberal also means generous, openhanded, unstinting, unsparing, ungrudging, lavish, free, munificent, bountiful, bounteous, beneficent, benevolent, big-hearted, philanthropic, charitable, altruistic, and unselfish. Most importantly, our nation was founded on the liberal principles that came from John Locke and the Enlightenment. Toward the end of World War II, the groundwork for a liberal international economic order was established—mostly led by the United States—at the Bretton Woods conference in New Hampshire. The concepts of democracy, equality, tolerance, transparency and open markets, along with the alliances, institutions and rules that support them, brought peace along with the greatest expansion of wealth in history. Post war efforts to rebuild ravaged countries, including countries that waged war against us, was based on positive-sum liberalism. Challenges to liberalism have included communism, the Cold War, the rise of authoritarian states, Great-Power rivalries, and neoliberalism (think Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Alan Greenspan, austerity, privatization, reduced social services, tax cuts for the rich). Yet, through it all, and despite its flaws liberalism is still the guiding paradigm of the free world for the simple reason attempts to restrict the benefits of liberalism have usually resulted in causing grave harm. The previous interwar “beggar thy neighbor” policies, which Trump is trying to resuscitate, were a factor in the rise of fascism and World War II.

Understanding liberalism, in both its domestic political sense, and in the Lockean sense, made me realize I did not want to be *that other guy*. I wanted to be a *liberal*, not the self-centered, tight-ass traditionalist, or the reactionary trying to recreate an America that never existed. I also wanted to be tolerant, not the person telling adults what they cannot ingest or do with their own body, or what sex acts they cannot enjoy consensually with others. In the philosophical sense I was opposed to authoritarianism, ideology and closed economies. Why would *any* informed, empathic person want to be *illiberal* or *conservative*? It became increasingly clear that it was the privileged few—along with constituencies the religious and business interests could bamboozle—who wanted to preserve the status quo or change laws to suit them. One Orwellian tactic used by conservatives was to redefine liberalism, a great and decent force for good, into a bad word. As Orwell himself once said, “The English language becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” Authoritarians and conservatives want us to forget that centuries of liberal progress has improved lives through a vast number of reforms, which include liberation movements, labor laws, free speech, environmental protections, voting rights, ending slavery, desegregation, women’s rights, rule-of-law, free trade, regulated markets, and improving standards of living. They want us to forget that liberalism ended religious persecution, allowed for individual property rights, created economic opportunities, and reduced inequality. Liberalism also brought us public education, Social Security, and Medicare, which conservatives are now chipping away at. The attack on liberalism and the word “liberal” has continued for decades, with the alt-right

creating new synonyms for liberals like “blue-pill” and “snowflake,” or the portmanteau “lib-tard.”

How did this happen?

One thread of this trend can be traced to a specific date and person. On August 23, 1971, Lewis F. Powell Jr., a corporate lawyer, board member to eleven corporations, and champion of the tobacco industry, sent a confidential memo to the director of the US Chamber of Commerce, two months prior to his nomination by Nixon to the US Supreme Court. It was titled “Confidential Memorandum: Attack of American Free Enterprise System.” What subsequently became known to the public as the “Powell Memo” was leaked to syndicated columnist Jack Anderson after Powell’s confirmation. Powell, while framing his message with the words, “freedom, fairness, and truth,” defended the rich while attacking the colleges, the media, activist Ralph Nader, and liberalism in general. Powell, who was a conservative Democrat, advocated using the resources of the United States Chamber of Commerce (USCC) to study and analyze possible courses of action and activities. He suggested they create a staff of business friendly scholars and, “...a speaker’s Bureau which should include the ablest and most effective advocates from the top echelons of American business.” He called for authors, publishers, and users of textbooks to be subjected to review and critique by these scholars, and he wanted the schools to give equal time to corporatists. He wanted to buy or influence the media through “constant surveillance,” vastly increase lobbying, and establish new institutions that would serve business interests. Indeed, the memo can be said to have inspired the creation of the Business Roundtable, the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society, the Reason Foundation, the Adolph Coors Foundation, the Castle Rock Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council, and the Chamber of Commerce National Litigation Center. More recently, in 2004, the Koch brothers founded Americans for Prosperity, to replace their Citizens for a Sound Economy. Since the 1970s, Supreme Court decisions (including ones that Powell joined in) have strongly favored the Chamber’s positions, and vastly increased the ability of corporations to legally bribe politicians through campaign contributions.

The Chamber is now by far the country’s largest conservative lobbying group, with the majority of corporate contributions going to support climate-change-denying conservatives who, for nearly forty years, have been cynically ignoring scientific findings in order to protect their corporate sponsors. Even now, as we inch toward disaster, carbon-producing companies place profit over the prevention of the destruction of conditions necessary for our survival. Recently, a secret 1982 study commissioned by Exxon showed a startlingly accurate projection of atmospheric CO2 levels that by 2020 would approach 420 ppm. In May 2019, it was announced that atmospheric carbon dioxide exceeded 415 ppm, the highest level since about three million

years ago. In other words, it hasn't been this hot since the Pliocene Epoch, long before humans existed. At that time, sea levels were about 25 meters higher and the Arctic was ice-free during the summer. The current annual rate of increase is 3 ppm, unequivocally the result of humans burning fossil fuels, and this global warming is bringing with it increasing temperatures, climate change, rising sea levels, species extinctions, acidification of the sea, and other existential threats.

To make matters worse, a conservative Supreme Court has reinterpreted the First Amendment to allow the powerful to defeat the powerless in decisions regarding hate speech, abortion providers, labor unions, tobacco addiction, gender rights, animal rights and, worst of all, to defeat campaign finance reforms that would allow the people equal representation. Powell's plan worked fiendishly well for corporate America. Our country moved so far to the right that television talk show host Rachel Maddow could say without exaggeration, "I'm undoubtedly a liberal, which means that I'm in almost total agreement with the Eisenhower-era Republican party platform." Even Richard Nixon's administration, abetted at the time by a Democratic Congress, would be considered liberal by today's standards. Aside from his moral turpitude, which included Vietnam, Watergate, and the obscene War on Drugs, the Nixon administration's liberal accomplishments arguably surpass Obama's. (Some argue that Obama would have done more, but he only had control of Congress for four months.) Despite preposterous, right-wing propaganda that Obama was a left-wing socialist, he was actually a center-right conservative and dyed-in-the-wool capitalist, no more liberal than Eisenhower.

As to President Nixon's liberal bonafides: He proposed ending welfare with a negative income tax. He opened China to the West. He initiated détente and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and ended the military draft. He enforced desegregation in the South. Nixon also signed bills for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Safe Drinking Act. Nixon was also a Keynesian in economics, and he took the country off the international gold standard. (In 1934, FDR took the US off the domestic gold standard and reserved it for foreign trade, helping to end the Great Depression. No country is on the gold standard today). The Nixon administration also allowed large increases in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. It was during Nixon's administration that I became acutely aware of politics, and despite his liberal advancements, I strongly opposed him for his deplorable character, the War on Drugs, and Vietnam. My first eligible vote cast in a presidential election, in 1972, was for George McGovern.

A conservative media company, Capital Cities, which had taken over the much bigger American Broadcasting Company, lobbied Reagan to do away with the FCC's fairness doctrine, which

required media companies that licensed our public airways to give equal time to opposing viewpoints. This allowed conservatives to take over AM radio with a formula that combined sports reporting with right-wing talk shows, pairing passion with propaganda. Even worse, conservative media mogul Rupert Murdoch's companies bought up media outlets in Australia, the UK and the US. He created Fox News, and bought *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Geographic Magazine* along with a slew of newspapers. Time Inc., which owns *Fortune*, *People*, and a slate of other magazines, was bought up by Meredith, a corporation backed by the Koch brothers, mega-donors to the Republican party and conservative causes. All of this belies claims of a liberal media bias, which is a propagandistic red herring to begin with, since the media *should* represent liberal values by definition, because reporting the facts is an inherently liberal undertaking, and as we all should know by now, "Reality has a well-known liberal bias."

In an October 17, 2004 *New York Times Magazine* article, journalist Ron Suskind quoted an "unnamed Bush administration official," widely assumed to be Karl Rove:

People like you are still living in what we call the reality-based community. You believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.

This was the sort of thinking that created the "reality" there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq as a basis for the US invasion, and has ushered in our post-truth era, in which journalists are broadly accused of fake news, while "alternative facts" are cooked up with contemptuous disregard for the evidence. With the election of Trump, the Republican break with reality is nearly complete, and it is worsening. According to the *Washington Post*, by the end of Trump's first 828 days in office, the President had made false or misleading claims 10,111 times, more than 12 lies per day. When he was at his most mendacious, it seemed that his core supporters liked him even more. At one point in June 2018, when he was averaging 16 lies per day, he garnered a 90% approval rating among Republicans. These are apparently the same Republicans who agree with one of Trump's rare true statements that he could get away with shooting someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue and it wouldn't shake off his base.

Ever since I was little, people have been telling me lies: Santa Claus brings me gifts; a fairy brings me money for my baby teeth; the world was created in six days; and tax cuts for the rich will trickle down to the rest of us. As Voltaire wrote in 1765, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." Because of Trump's harmful policies, built on thousands of lies, I believe that a majority of voters in 2020 will conclude that honesty is the best

policy, and that the reality-based community is better than the faith-based, self-serving, make-it-up-as-you-go community. Coming to terms with reality in a way that helps everyone is the only politics that makes sense.

Gender Politics, LOGOS & UNICE

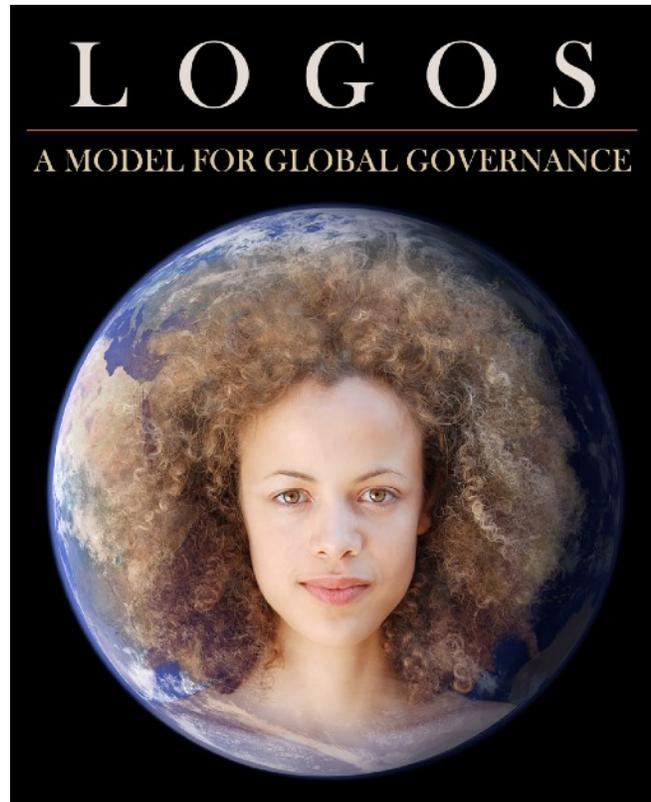
Another reality, which I know all too well, is that we all make mistakes in the learning process. Having been indoctrinated in a patriarchal religion and culture, with double standards for men and women, I understand where many people in the faith-based community are coming from. As a result, I had to unlearn residual biases related to politics, including gender politics. I apologize in advance for any sexist things I have said and done, or might say, in relation to women, who are justifiably angry about thousands of years of patriarchy. I'm angry too, for my own reasons. There were years where I struggled to man up, squash my feelings, be a player, and avoid emotional involvements, with the goal of being a lot more like James Bond than any man actually is. Along the way, I also chafed at the rigidly defined roles for my gender—including the expectation of being a stoic breadwinner with the highly competitive, alpha male held up as the ideal. After I told my father, beginning at age six, that I wanted to be an artist, he dismissed it by saying they do not make any money. Later he let me know he also thought of artists as lazy, self-indulgent sissies, and that I was not a man unless I played sports. Consequently, I played all sports. In football I was fearless, but only because I was trying to injure myself so I could get sidelined. In dog piles I would deliberately stick my arm out to try and break it. When that did not work, I convinced my dad that I should work as a janitor after school to earn money for college. Being a janitor was not much fun either, but I could be alone with my thoughts while I swept.

In the early 1970s, I read feminist literature and began to be more sensitive to the feelings of women, who have always fascinated and mystified me. As someone with a mother and three sisters, I was somewhat grounded in reality about their nature, while still holding them in awe. In the early 70s, I read *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. I could see that women were also having issues with some of society's expectations, but I also had arguments with women who claimed people are all the same, regardless of gender, except for society's conditioning. They were wrong about that, but over the years I learned to understand, respect, and accept the inherent biological differences among individuals, and realized that feminine and masculine traits can be found in all of us. In the late 1980s I was a card carrying member of NOW, the National Organization for Women. In the 1990s I made a study of mythology, including feminine mythology. *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myth and Secrets*, a weighty tome by Barbara Walker, was my bible, along with the writings of

mythologist Joseph Campbell, archeologist Marija Gumbutas, and cultural historian Riane Eisler. Regardless of the facts surrounding Gumbutas' theory that the female-centered Neolithic culture of Old Europe was overrun by the male-dominated Kurgans of the Russian Steppes during the Bronze Age, I favor a partnership-oriented society over the patriarchal domination model.

At the same time, I oppose exclusionary attitudes regarding gender or agender. Thus, I support gender equality and have always been pro-choice. In my book *The Labors of Hercules*, I wrote a chapter on sexism and consider it one of the Herculean struggles to overcome. I have great respect for the traditional feminine values of empathy, sensitivity, gentleness, compassion, tolerance, and nurturance—qualities that

can be found and/or taught in people regardless of their gender. The so-called feminine qualities are more conducive to a liberal, representative democracy than traditional masculine traits like stoicism, competition, combat, aggression, and dominance, which are more commonly associated with fascism and authoritarianism. As a result, I used a woman as a model for **UNICE**, a universal and anonymous public policy wiki, and for **LOGOS**, a second stage, non-anonymous wiki for policy professionals, which will eventually incorporate an answer engine structured by artificial intelligence. Efficient government should favor legislation over litigation, so gender equality (that includes homosexual, transgender, and non-binary) should be enshrined in a new civil rights amendment to the Constitution, instead of being litigated for decades in the courts all over the country.



Logo for my public policy wiki at LOGOSwiki.org

Global Travels

Soon after I turned 18, I got permission from the draft board to leave the country, and spent four months hitchhiking and visiting different cities across Europe. I traveled overseas again the following two years, soaking up the culture, and doing portraits on the street to help finance my travels. From 1978 to 1981, I went around the world twice, and worked as a painter and

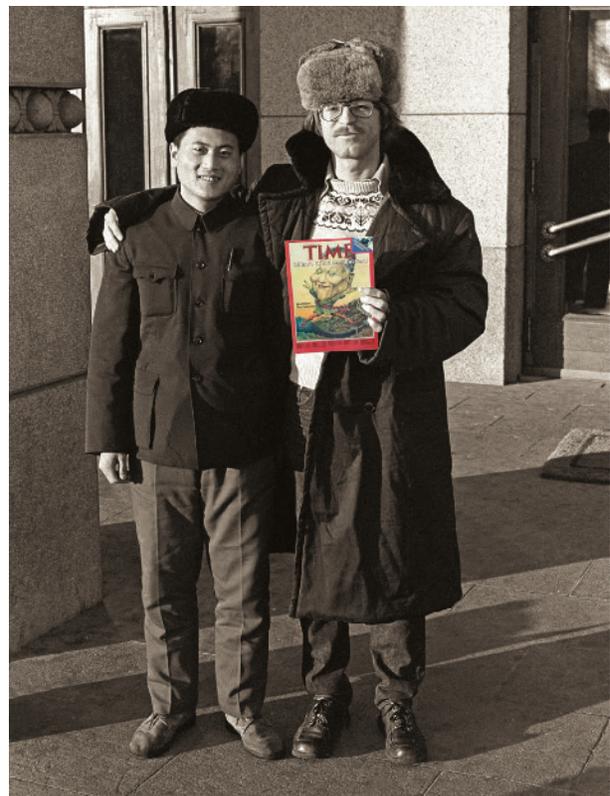


Doing pastel portraits on a pedestrian street, in Copenhagen, September 1972.

reforms transformed it into the modern juggernaut it is today.

Living and traveling abroad gave me a different perspective on my own country. I could see how America is viewed by others by absorbing the local culture and making friends. It brought into focus that almost 96% of the world's people are not American, but certainly no less important. I had learned a little German while living in Vienna and Munich, and became semi-fluent in French during my 2-½ years in Paris. Later I would also learn basic Spanish while building houses in Los Angeles. Living among other people, understanding some of their language, and immersing myself in their culture, broke down my own cultural barriers and helped me to see people in other countries as they see themselves.

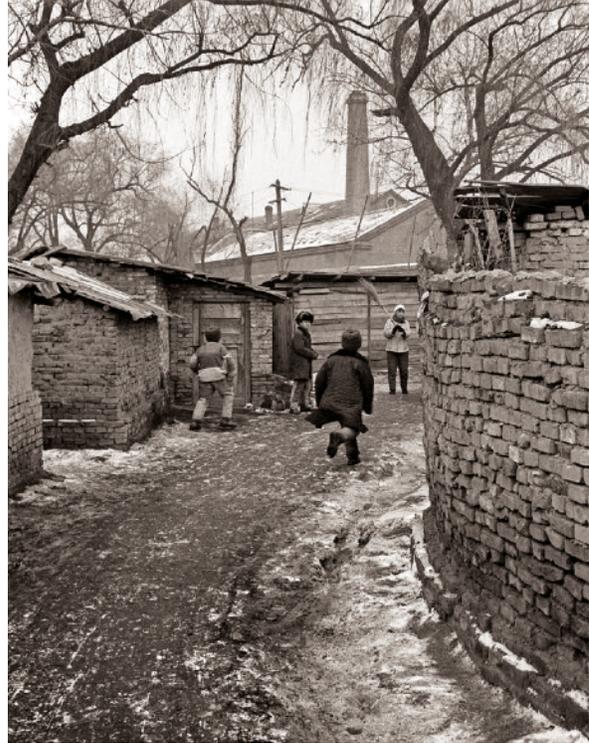
printmaker in Paris. One of my most memorable experiences was in China, where people either ran away in terror, or stopped dead in their tracks to stare at me with dumbfounded curiosity. At that time, most Chinese lived in mud brick houses, and rode bicycles and donkey carts on dirt streets, swept with stick brooms. As a stranger traveling in an insular land, marooned in the past, I got to see China before the one-child policy, gender equality, and economic



In China, in 1978, with one of our study tour's minders, Mr. Wu. The suspiciously regarded Asian edition of Time Magazine that I brought from Japan, was titled "China's Great Leap Outward." It featured a caricature of soon-to-be paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, leaping over the Great Wall.

The Labors of Hercules - Overpopulation - Global Warming

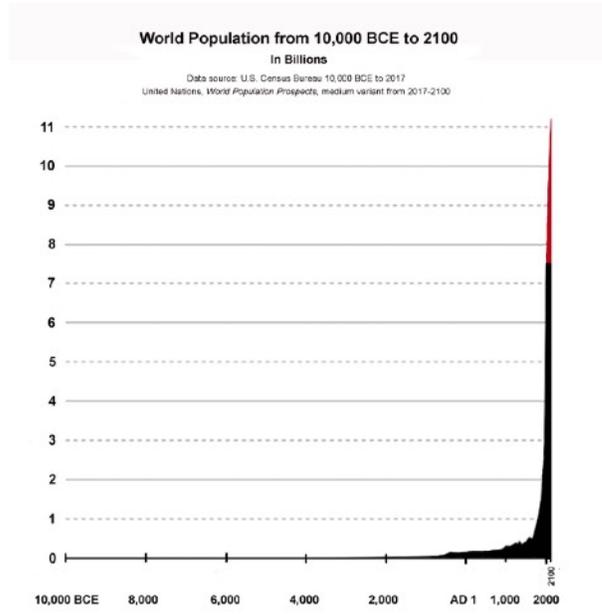
On Earth Day, 1994, I began a project to condense all the world's major problems and solutions into one volume, **The Labors of Hercules: Modern Solutions to 12 Herculean Problems**. While still deep into the study of mythology, I thought it might be easy to compare the mythological struggles of Hercules with our modern problems. It turned out to be a Sisyphean project, but other careers emerged as a result of *The Labors of Hercules*, which I began researching and writing while working as a designer and builder in Los Angeles, after a productive career in fine art. In 1996, I proposed a choice-based marketable birth plan to the Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian governments, and met with various demographers on my third global circumnavigation in 1997 and 1998 that took me again to Asia and [Africa](#). The effects of global overpopulation—most apparent in developing countries—was alarming. We complain about climate change, de-speciation,



Above: People fleeing from me, a “foreign devil,” on a frozen, dirt street in Jilin, Manchuria, China. December 1978.

Below: A few blocks away, in the main street. At first, every single person ran away, but after a while, all of them, along with many more, returned to have a closer look.





Overpopulation is the ultimate threat multiplier. A preventable tragedy is being ignored by our leaders: We are projected by the UN to increase our numbers by nearly four billion in this century, thus multiplying most of the world's problems.

World Population Growth from 1960 to 2100

Source: United Nations Population Division, *Population Prospects, the 2017 revision*, medium variant

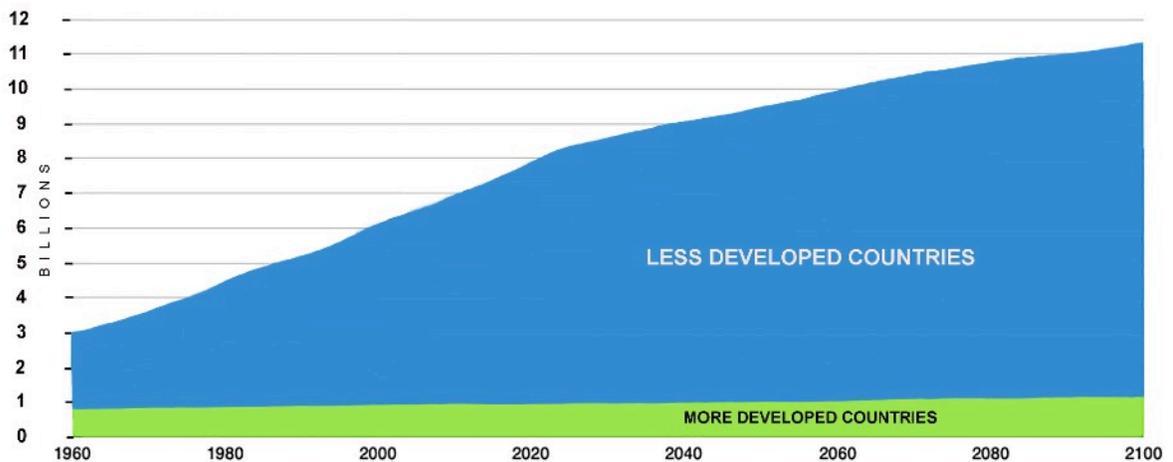


CHART BY MICHAEL E. ARTH

The graph, based on UN data and median projections, clearly shows the dichotomy between near zero population growth in the developed vs. runaway growth in the developing world. Ecological and economic problems in the global South cannot be solved without addressing overpopulation.

pollution, dwindling resources, overfishing, civil strife, wars, immigration, the refugee crisis, increasing regulation, and dozens of other issues, while rarely acknowledging that all of these problems are multiplied by overpopulation, being constantly made worse by the huge global imbalance between births and deaths. *Each day*, around 380,000 babies are born, but only 160,000 people die, increasing the population by 220,000. This results in an annual increase of over 80 million, which is less than the number of unintended pregnancies that end in abortion (50%), unplanned births (38%) or miscarriage (13%). This results in a **serious toll on women**, especially those in the poorest countries where high fertility rates perpetuate poverty and limits development. The severe unmet need for contraception and the control of women over their own bodies has been exacerbated by Reagan and Bush's **global gag rule** that Trump reinstated denying federal funding for any non-governmental agency that advocates the decriminalization of abortion, provides abortion counseling or referrals, or seeks to expand abortion services. Some of the factors keeping overpopulation out of the political debate are:

1. **Math:** As mathematician Bertrand Russell once said in relation to population when it was far less than half of current levels: "Mankind would rather commit suicide than learn math."
2. **"Overton Window" effect:** Politicians straying too far outside the window of public discourse are marginalized as being extreme or radical, even if the discourse is urgent and perfectly reasonable. For example, Republicans deny well-documented facts concerning climate change. At the same time, the Democratic National Committee **declined to host** a 2020 presidential debate on the subject, presumably for the reason they wanted to hew toward the hard right in order to siphon off enough Trump supporters to win the election.
3. **Media bias and attention span:** Overpopulation is a boring, incredibly slow-moving story compared to daily news cycles.
4. **Certain capitalists, religious interests, and post-positivists put up roadblocks:** Business interests, including Charles Koch, focus on profits by encouraging growing international markets and increased immigration without considering the environment or overconsumption. The Catholic Church and evangelicals oppose contraception and/or abortion. Many post-Positivists (Marxists, neo-Marxists, radical feminists, constructivists) like **Betsy Hartmann**, claim overpopulation is a made up or exaggerated problem caused by neo-colonialist capitalists who are blaming climate change on the global South and using it to promote enhanced national security measures. Marxist feminist **Kalpana Wilson** lambasted the Bill and Melina Gates Foundation for announcing in 2012 a \$2.6 billion initiative to get voluntary family planning to 120 million more girls and women. Wilson claims such family planning efforts exploit young women for the purpose of making them better prospects for offshore capital seeking cheap labor. (Ironically, it used to be that providing free and easily accessible contraceptives was about female empowerment, but now

scholars like Wilson seem to argue the opposite, even though 40% of pregnancies are unplanned.)

5. **Demographic fallacies:** Some demographers ignore automation, increasingly longevity, and the fact that older populations with low fertility correlates with greater prosperity, and falsely conclude we need high levels of young people to take care of the old. Exponential growth and population momentum is not understood by the public. Even if fertility was immediately dropped from the current five to one child per woman in Africa, the continent's population would likely still rise from 1.3 billion to two billion because of a young (not yet child-bearing) population.
6. **Ignorance of causal factors:** More people = more environmental damage. Or, for example: Trump wants to build a wall in an attempt to keep the world out, while ignoring poverty-and-migration-inducing overpopulation abroad, and cutting funding for family planning. European Union and Schengen countries allow their nationals to enter and reside in each other's countries. This is possible because they are affluent social democracies with zero population growth. The only hope of attaining such freedom of movement in the rest of the world is to achieve zero population growth along with global equality and prosperity.
7. **Tragedy of the commons:** Those in rich countries see slow or zero population growth at home caused by socio-economic factors, and encourage *pro-natalist* policies like child tax credits and paid paternity leave. So there is a tendency to ignore how the tragedy of the commons occurring in poor countries will affect all of us.
8. **Hard Choices:** Elizabeth Cripps, in her 2015 book, *Climate Change, Population, and Justice: Hard Choices to Avoid Tragic Choices* warns that must face up to hard choices now regarding family planning to avoid foisting tragic, unjust choices on future generations.
9. **Patriarchy:** Men in developing countries, including religious patriarchs, often overrule women's contraceptive choices.
10. **Chicken and Egg Dilemma:** In poor countries socio-economic gains are negated by high fertility. The only practical way to quickly bridge that gap is to do what the Chinese did, and have an *anti-natalist*, one-child policy. However, instead of coercion, this could be done through voluntary incentives and free contraception provided by the rich countries to help the poor. Many well-meaning people in the rich countries think that economic development has to come first, as it did in the global North, or that they should not interfere with the South and focus on reducing their own consumption. This is a chicken and egg dilemma, but the solution is not to argue over which should come first (economic development or zero population growth) but for the chicken to only have one egg in order to accelerate the economic development.

Politicians seem completely oblivious to the UN projection that Asia will add another billion people, and that Africa will add another three billion in this century. That will mean having 4.2

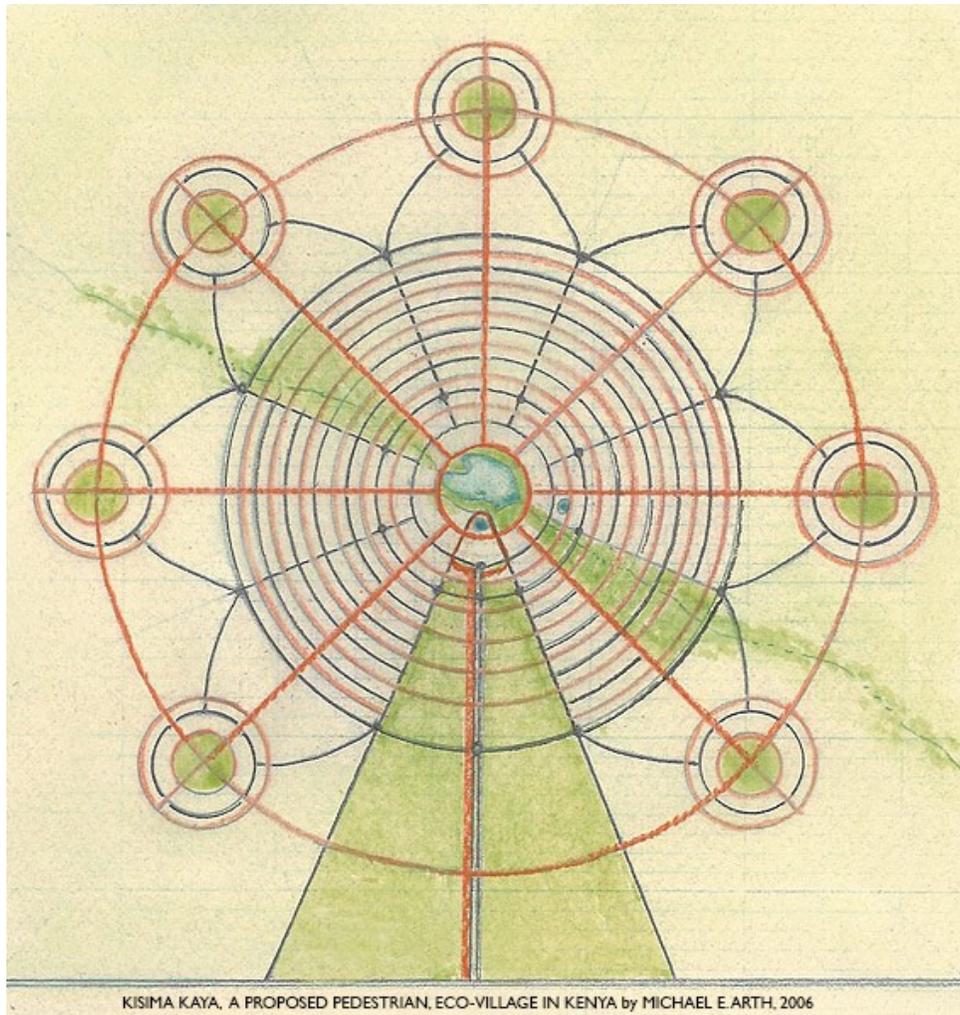
billion people on a continent that only had 180 million people in 1950. Huge waves of migrants may overwhelm democratic institutions. This will doubtlessly increase the fortress mentality and neo-fascist movements—being just a few of the effects we can expect among a cascade of frightening consequences for every living thing on Earth. The worst effects will fall upon those living in the developing countries where gender inequality and poverty correlate to high birth rates. There are reasonable solutions that could be enacted now before it is too late, but the world is not paying attention.

Overpopulation severely impacts climate change. In this case, the [world has been well aware](#) of the problem of increasing carbon dioxide emissions due to burning fossil fuels for four decades, but American politicians have preferred to let their corporate masters in the oil-and-gas industry dictate policy. Like President Reagan, and all Republican presidents since, Trump has disregarded the scientific consensus on the dangers of increasing carbon dioxide levels, promoted the worst carbon-emitting energy sources, and denigrated alternative energy. Republicans, often with Democratic acquiescence, have wreaked havoc on laws and institutions protecting the environment. Reagan literally and symbolically removed the 32 solar thermal panels installed by his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, from the roof of the White House. At the behest of fossil fuel companies, and despite hollow promises, President George H.W. Bush blocked an agreement at the Noordwijk conference in the Netherlands in November 1989 to set a hard, binding target of emissions reductions. Horrifically, and perhaps irrevocably, as much greenhouse gas has been emitted since that date as in all of previous recorded human history. The oil-and-gas industry, which was well-versed on the dangers of climate change since the 1950s, also went all out in a disinformation campaign to influence Congress to quash the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 during the Clinton administration. However, something can be done to limit the damage and help all of us.

The Eco-Initiative

An Eco-Economic Solution for Africa, Asia, and the World

Eco is the name for a failed West African currency that never got off the ground because of intractable problems related to economics, governance and corruption. However, Eco would be a good name for a properly-structured global currency that would alleviate the ecological and economic problems of Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. It would also be a good name for an eco-financed initiative that could simultaneously tackle overpopulation, health care, environmental and resource issues, corruption, authoritarianism, global warming, sustainable energy, and poverty. I propose that the global North, possibly including China, in collaboration with the 55 African countries of the African Union, as well as other developing countries throughout Asia, take a novel and expedited approach to all of these issues. The result would be positive sum benefits for everyone on the planet.



One example of a scalable African eco-village, financed by the eco, a proposed global currency for developing countries backed by the global North. The pedestrian villages, which separates roads for vehicles and bicycles (shown in red) from (blue) pedestrian lanes into separate networks, would be a carbon neutral nexus for health clinics, family planning, banking, education, housing, courts and resource extraction mediation. On the periphery would be factories for the manufacture of solar panels and other sustainable products for domestic and foreign use.

No matter the plan, the burning question is always how to pay for it. It may sound incredible, but one to two trillion dollars could be spent into circulation every year for a decade or more in Africa by the developed countries without costing them anything, while also tackling the biggest problems of our time. The solution lies in so-called “helicopter money,” an expression that conservative economist Milton Friedman coined in 1969. The idea is that in an economic downturn money can be created out of thin air and spent into existence by a central bank and distributed directly to the people most likely to spend it. This would prime the pump and the economy would recover. This works best when the money is spent on productive activity which

stimulates the economy. Former Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke in 2016 called helicopter money by a more scholarly term, a “Money-Financed Fiscal Program” (MFFP) and described it as “an expansionary fiscal policy—an increase in public spending or a tax cut—financed by a permanent increase in the money stock.” If MFFP had been done during the Great Depression, along with lowering the international trade barriers, the downturn would have been inconsequential. The danger is in printing too much money, thus leading to inflation, but there are situations where a MFFP could work and not be unduly inflationary. It seems reasonable to me that a form of MFFP, coupled with certain guidelines and backing by countries with strong currencies would pull Africa and Asia out of its semi-permanent economic malaise, while also accomplishing many other positive goals. Previous and ongoing attempts to create a common West African currency failed because no country but Ghana met the primary criteria set out by the West African Monetary Institute. Also, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the United States have punished institutionalized corruption with economic sanctions and only allowed loans with harsh conditions that often leave countries worse off than they were to begin with.

Having a hard-currency-backed eco, structured in a way that fights corruption, eliminates debt and inflation, and establishes fair and reliable tax collection, could make a common currency possible. An eco, supported by a basket of major convertible currencies could function like currency substitution, but with currency controls to regulate conversion back into other hard currencies to prevent excessive inflation. Caution is advised, however, because creating fiat money without limit and a without a sound economy able to absorb the growth in the money supply could lead to hyperinflation such as occurred in Zimbabwe a decade ago. [Zimbabwe's hyperinflation](#) peaked at 89.7 sextillion (annual) percent in November 2008 prompting the government to abandon the Zimbabwean dollar and adopt currency substitution—primarily with the dollar, but also with other hard currencies. (By comparison, the 2019 US inflation rate is about 2%.) To prevent inflation from affecting the hard currencies, analysts and economists could monitor any inflationary effects as the eco is spent into existence in order to find the optimum level of spending. The money should also spent on productive things things that will lead to sustainable self-sufficiency. [World GDP](#) in 2019 is about \$88 trillion. The GDP of the advanced countries in the G20 is 78% of the total, or \$69 trillion. The growth of the money supply is related to inflation as well as the workings of the economy. For example, in the US the growth of the money supply is sometimes higher than inflation. Vast quantitative easing after the Great Recession seemed to have no affect on inflation. Adding an amount equivalent to two percent of G20 GDP to the annual money supply of emerging countries along with currency controls should not harm the economies of the advanced countries, but it could vastly improve conditions related to economics and the environment. It is reasonable, responsible, and ethical to test the premise.

Existing aid to Africa, even when well-intentioned, has been the subject of criticism for various reasons. A **2015 report** states that Africa receives \$162 billion in remittances, loans, official aid and grants, but \$203 billion was taken out in the form of multinational profits, debt repayments, capital flight including illicit financial flows into tax havens, corruption, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. In other words, the claim is that Africa loses more than it gains in its transactions with the global North, and this, along with a horrendous birth rate, contributes to Africa staying poor. The combined GDP of the African countries, with 1.3 billion people, was \$2.33 trillion (nominal) in 2018, which was estimated at \$6.74 trillion (Purchasing Power Parity with the US). The nominal per capita GDP is \$1,890 compared to the US, which is \$62,518 (both nominal and PPP).

China, with excess capital to invest, has also sought opportunities in Africa, as well in countries in varying levels of development. Since its launch in 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to join 152 countries and international organizations on five continents together with infrastructure and investments to create a global supply chain with China at its center. China is no longer communist, but rather a highly-industrialized, state-capitalist enterprise, and is now the **top carbon polluter**--more than twice US levels. The Chinese Communist Party (communist only in the sense of being authoritarian and centrally controlled) led by nationalist Xi Jinping, insists on the survival and monopoly of power by the party as its top goals, want to make China the center of the world, as it saw itself for 5,000 years. China has, with increasing confidence, been promoting its brand of police state authoritarianism while decrying the chaos, as exemplified by Donald Trump, of the western democracies. We should turn this around, not through coercive, mostly self-serving means, or military aggression, but through positive-sum actions that recall the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Europe after WWII. Ideally, China would join the West in this venture and the Eco Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative could be mutually complementary for the benefit of all.

Under the Eco Initiative, the nominal GDP of Africa could be doubled within five years, which would raise the PPP GDP from \$5533 to \$11,077, eliminating dire poverty and bringing population growth into balance by 2050. The ecos could be spent to replace slums with low-impact, pedestrian-oriented, eco-villages, based on local architecture, which can be scaled up as needed. Each village would have infrastructure that would handle sustainable energy production and waste processing. Educational centers consisting primarily of internet access and schools would provide education and work training. Amenities and markets could be at the center of every village. Neighborhood banks would issue credit cards to citizens, make micro-loans, and finance projects. There would also be a town hall where agreements concerning communal issues would be discussed and where contracts regarding the extraction of commonly owned resources can be deliberated in full transparency by all stakeholders. Housing would be provided with low-

interest financing. Direct payments could function like a universal basic income scaled in proportion to one's commitment to temporary or permanent contraception. This should disincentivize those who are having children for their labor value.

With the cooperation of the African Union, the eco could initially be freely convertible with local currencies. The eco could be backed with a basket of hard currencies including the dollar, euro, pound, yen, and others—ideally also including the renminbi. The eco could be pegged to the dollar and any eco spent outside of Africa would be redeemed in any desired currency but debited on the ledger proportionally in relation to the backing currencies. Ecos could be created out of thin air, just as sovereign money consisting of notes and coins are now created by nearly all countries. Strict currency controls would be put in place to prevent corruption, capital flight and transfers to tax havens, but any African citizen going abroad for study or vacation, or spending money abroad for any other legitimate purpose, could be able to convert whatever they needed. All remittances coming into African countries could be converted into ecos, but transfer fees could be much less than is the case now. This plan essentially entails a form of currency substitution, but it would not be inflationary to the Western guarantors because repatriation of ecos into the currencies that back the eco would be reduced to a trickle, and the burgeoning economies of the African continent would have a stimulative effect on global trade that should counteract any inflationary effect. Thus, the vast majority of ecos would stay in Africa (and other places where states agree to use it) putting trillions into circulation where it is needed most and acting as a stimulus to sustainable development. In addition, a full-reserve central bank could be created and ecos would be spent into existence as needed and at such a rate that inflation would be no higher than in the host countries. The governors of this central bank could initially be composed of a majority of donor country representatives, but after the eco becomes strong enough to exist without outside guarantees, the administration would become fully African and become a hard currency on its own. The rising wealth would allow poor countries to eventually become significant trading partners. There would also be a resource council to make sure that resource extraction by transnational corporations would fairly compensate the local populations and that the money would benefit all, thus preventing the corruption associated with the “resource curse.”

Global CO₂ levels are higher now than they have been in about three million years. The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) **Special Report on Global Warming** warns that “deep emissions reductions” are required to prevent exceeding a rise of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Failure to do so will cause “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.” This means that drastic action is urgently called for. As sustainable energy products such as solar panels are manufactured in the global South, the rich countries should institute more stringent carbon taxes while also subsidizing the conversion to clean energy.

Revenue from carbon taxes, as well as the judicious use of a Money-Financed Fiscal Program could be used in the rich countries to finance the installation of solar panels, thermal energy storage facilities (to even out solar energy production), wind turbines and other clean energy sources. Shared, zero emissions, self-driving vehicles would allow us to vastly reduce the number of vehicles in the world while also eliminating a major source of greenhouse gases. Financing solar panel manufacturing and local installation with MFFP in the developing world and then subsidizing the installation of spare production in rich countries could create a virtuous circle to replace the vicious circle that is now leading us toward eco-suicide.

Addressing Inequality: Health, Education, and a Citizen Dividend

A **Universal Basic Income** (UBI) has the potential of solving a vast range of problems—including the fact that automation is beginning to replace jobs, especially those requiring simple skill sets. A UBI would address inequality, restore dignity, and break the cycle of generational poverty. It would also reduce crime, increase personal freedom and security, improve education, promote gender equality, raise the status of unpaid caregivers, and advance society as a whole. It would also render moot the question of reparations to the descendants of Native Americans, slaves, or anyone else who feels they have been shortchanged in our capitalist system. **Evidence** shows that cash transfer programs don't make people lazy, and the **research** on UBI is highly supportive of the concept. With a basic income, and universal health care, people without homes could either afford to pay rent, or pay to live in a village where shared housing and other costs would be minimal. If they are capable of working, they could also have access to re-training and education.

No force is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. Universal Basic Income is such an idea. We are all stakeholders in our society. Thomas Paine, one of our founding fathers, promoted a UBI as our “natural inheritance,” and the term “Citizen Dividend” might be a better way to describe it. A Citizen Dividend has already been successfully tested in various locales, including Alaska's ongoing **Permanent Fund** which provides every resident a percentage of the profits from the state's collectively-owned oil resources.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that with progressive taxation, every person 18 and over would automatically receive an inflation-adjusted monthly income that begins at \$1,000 per month, along with universal health care, and free higher education or job training in public colleges. This could perhaps be coupled with a term of public service for young people fresh out of high school or college. Qualified service would include AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, military service, or local community programs. The Dividend paid during this public service would automatically allow reductions in the military budget. Republican and Democratic politicians

beholden to their corporate sponsors will tell you that universal health care, a Citizen Dividend universal postsecondary education, and resolving the student debt crisis are not financially possible, so it is important to confront them with the simple math inherent in the following scenario:

There are 250 million adults in the US. If every citizen 18 or older got a UBI of \$1,000 per month, it would cost \$3 trillion per year. Providing \$25,000 vouchers to each of the 20 million postsecondary education students would cost \$500 billion. (Public colleges would be required to accept the voucher for full tuition.) National health expenditure is \$3.6 trillion, or about 18% of GDP, which is far more than what the rest of the developed world pays both in sheer numbers and as a percentage of GDP. In actual spending we spend more than twice what the British pay, yet around 44 million Americans have no health insurance at all.

Medicare and Medicaid together comprise 37% of health care costs. Once we institute price controls, reference pricing, cost effectiveness thresholds, and regulations that limit the profitability of drugs, we should be able to save enough to drop health care costs for Medicare and Medicaid to 33% of health care costs (\$1.18 trillion). Switching to Medicare for everyone else—which includes younger and healthier people—should not add more than \$1.1 trillion. This would be \$2.28 trillion, or 11.4% of GDP, which is what Canadians, who live two years longer than Americans in a country much like ours, pay to cover everyone. Thus, Medicare for All should save the public at least \$1.32 trillion per year, which would help finance the citizen's benefit through taxes. Because the issue of taxes is dealt with separately, we won't include this health care savings in our calculations here. **The total annual estimated cost for the Citizen Dividend, universal postsecondary education, and Medicare for All would be \$4.6 trillion.**

In 2018, the size of our economy is roughly \$20 trillion. Federal tax revenue of \$3.34 trillion plus state and local revenues of \$2.87 trillion equals total government revenue of **\$6.12 trillion**. Tax collections, now about 30.6% of the GDP, would increase to 49.5% of GDP (\$9.9 trillion) Taxation would become more progressive and inheritance taxes on large estates would increase. There would also be a wealth tax that ranges from 0.1% to 1% on fortunes over \$5 million, as much for purposes of transparency in order to help prevent tax evasion as for collection purposes. Increased collections add **\$3.780.5 trillion**, including a Value-Added Tax (VAT).

Keep in mind that taxpayers would be able to apply \$1.32 trillion in health care savings to their taxes, and the rich would bear the brunt of the additional tax burden. Private health care and private insurance would still be available for those who want it, as it is in the United Kingdom, but it would be much less expensive than it is now because of regulated drug costs, and the

private health care industry would be in competition with Medicare. Indeed, this is the case in the UK.

Eliminating bureaucratic waste and spending associated with means-tested welfare, food stamps, disability and other such programs would save **\$600 billion**. Ending the War on Drugs with legalization, regulation, taxation, and Medicare-covered treatment could save **\$100 billion** in law enforcement and incarceration alone (savings estimates range up several times higher). A small financial transaction tax, combined with a globally adopted, flat-rate automated payment system would add about **\$50 billion** to collections and also help prevent excessive speculation and volatility in the market—especially that caused by high-frequency “black box” traders using sophisticated algorithms on supercomputers.

The part of the 2018 US military budget that includes the Department of Defense and the overseas contingency operations budget totals \$639.1 billion. This could be rolled back to the fixed amount of the 2011 Budget and Control Act cap of \$587.1 billion. Inflation and the growth of the economy would allow this fixed amount to drop as a percentage of GDP until it reaches 3%. From that point on it could be pegged at about 3% of GDP until global peace initiatives allow it to drift lower. Initially this would be a savings in the defense budget of **\$52 billion** but the savings would grow until the goal was reached. At that point, the defense budget would grow with the economy. At the same time, foreign aid, especially family planning aid, could increase until it reaches at least 1% of GDP. Further savings would be realized from subtracting the citizen’s benefit from Social Security payments. There are currently 67,494,000 beneficiaries receiving an average of \$1,297. Thus **\$67.5 billion** in Social Security benefits can be subtracted from the UBI budget.

How to Save Capitalism and Create a More Equitable America

(In Billions)

\$1,000 monthly Citizen Dividend to every adult citizen.....	3,000.0
Medicare for All.....	1,100.0
Universal post-secondary education.....	500.0
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Total Cost	4,600.0

How to Pay for it

Progressive tax, including inheritance and global wealth tax.....	2,890.5
VAT of 20%, (less average 5% sales tax already being collected).....	(1,120.0 x .75) = 840.0

Financial Transactions Tax.....50.0

New Taxes 3,780.5

Direct Savings

Ending Means-Tested Welfare, Food Stamps, Disability..... 600.0

Ending Drug Prohibition.....100.0

Military Budget reduction.....52.0

Social Security savings from Citizen Dividend.....67.5

Direct Savings 819.5

Total of New Taxes and Direct Savings 4,600.0

Indirect Savings

Health Care Savings from Medicare for All over existing private system.....1320.0

Social cost of inequality.....unknown or unquantifiable but enormous

Since the Citizen Dividend would be completely taxed away for those earning substantially more than the median income, the primary benefit will fall on those people most likely to spend it all every month, thus being a reliable boost to the economy. Those earning income less than the median would pay little or no federal income tax, but everyone would pay an all-inclusive VAT on taxable goods and services. The VAT would replace state sales taxes that now average about 5% across the states. A VAT is already being used by more than 160 countries, including all developed countries, as a highly efficient consumption tax. A European-style VAT of 20% would capture about 5.6% of the GDP, or \$1.12 trillion, some of which would be redistributed to the states to make up for the loss of sales tax revenue.

The Citizen Dividend would appear on a weekly basis as an electronic entry on individual accounts in a newly created National Bank of the United States. Every citizen would have a debit card for expenditures and they could use their account like any other bank account. Creation of the National Bank, either under a hybrid system that preserves the fractional reserve system, or under the proposed full-reserve system, would solve the \$1.5 trillion student debt crisis. Anyone with an existing student loan could get immediate refinancing with a zero-interest, principal-only

government-sponsored loan with payments to be automatically deducted from their Citizen Dividend account.

Full-Reserve Banking

Switching from [fractional reserve banking](#) to [full-reserve banking](#) may be the best way to help finance government programs, increase prosperity, and ensure economic stability in our monetary system. Currently, only bank notes and coins are issued by the Treasury (about 9% of money) while the vast majority of money is created by private banks on electronic ledgers out of thin air and lent out with interest. With full-reserve banking, both specie and electronic money would be created by the government under rigorous guidelines, as many economists believe it should be. Instead of banks only holding about 10% of their deposits in reserve with the government having to provide deposit insurance to prevent runs on the banks, banks would be required to hold 100% of deposits. Taxpayers would no longer pay seigniorage on money to private banks for taking over the job of the treasury. Sovereign money would stabilize the banks, vastly reduce boom and bust cycles, help reduce public and private debt, and provide a bonus that could be used to lower taxes and finance government programs. Sovereign money and the Citizen Dividend would everyone to share in the common wealth, while also eliminating the stigma, inefficiency, and unfairness of means-tested welfare. Those who profit from the public and its collectively owned resources and infrastructure should be required to share the wealth more equitably. Money is an important part of that commonly held wealth.

The banking and financial sector would lobby vigorously against sovereign money to protect their profits, while predicting disaster. They will also point to the fact that no country currently has a full reserve system, even though polls show that most people already think that is how money is created. After experiencing grave hardships during previous recessions, one country is seriously flirting with the idea of adopting a full reserve system. Iceland is a small but progressive, and highly developed country of only 350,000 people, with an economy that is one-thousandth the size of the US. I propose that the US and other countries offer them an incentive of—say \$1 billion—that would give each of its three major banks money for the transition, and each of its citizens \$250 in cash.

Iceland's economy collapsed and all three of the major, privately owned commercial banks defaulted during the Great Recession from 2008 to 2011 due to a run on their foreign deposits which could not be guaranteed by their central bank, so they know well the dangers lurking in fractional reserve banking. This experiment would give Iceland all the economic benefits of a full-reserve banking while also calling more attention to its magnificent scenery and its burgeoning tourist industry. Once full-reserve banking is shown to work in Iceland, we can move

toward our own monetary reform. The next serious downturn—especially one precipitated by the failure of politicians to implement banking reforms—might even facilitate it.

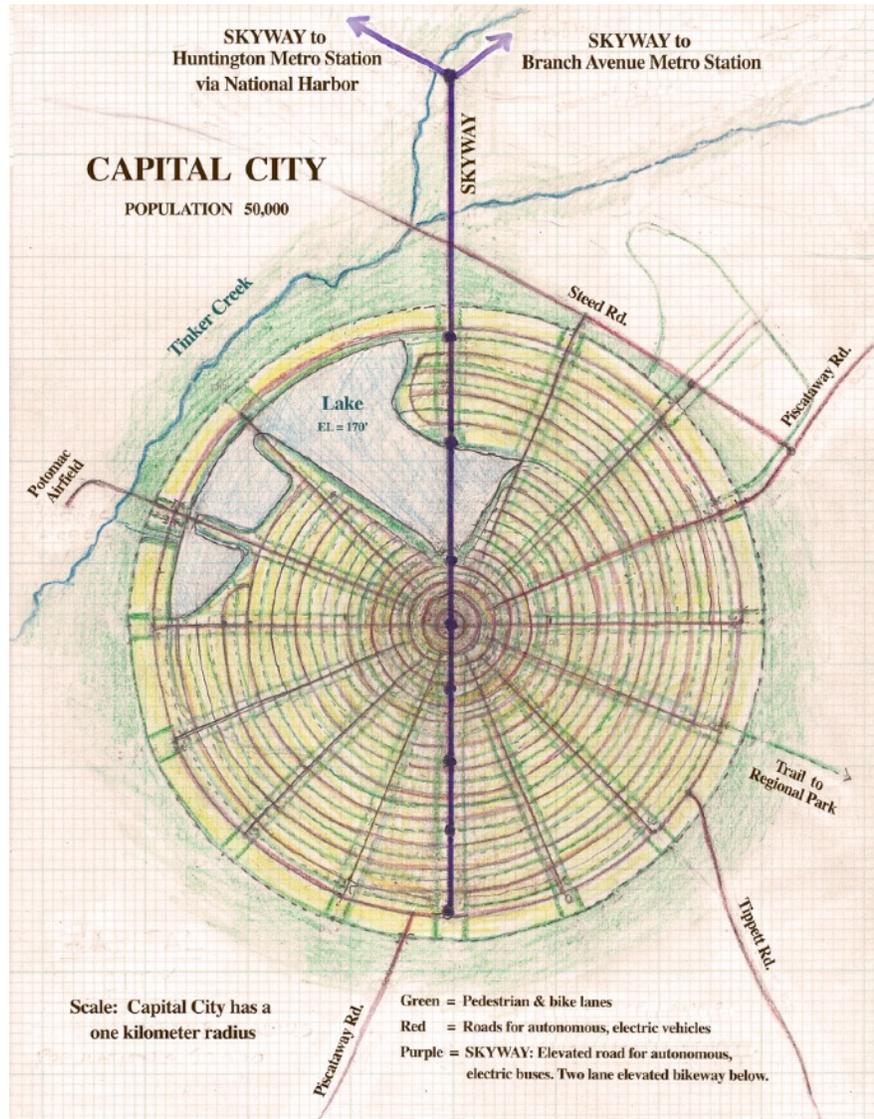
Proposed Capital City



At the same time Iceland is running its experiment in full reserve banking, we could run a few experiments of our own using what ex-Fed Chief Ben Bernanke called Money-Financed Fiscal Programs. The more important one is to take the solar panels, thermal energy storage modules and batteries in Africa that are being paid for with Ecos and finance the installation of the panels and other non-carbon emitting energy sources in the US. At the same time we can also finance the rebuilding of our infrastructure that would ensure we have the fastest and most secure internet in the world. The funds, along with the cost of the program, could be spent into existence by the US Treasury under the supervision of the Federal Reserve Board. From Iceland's full-

reserve banking to money creation in America, we could assess the effect on inflation and the economy in order to determine future decisions regarding monetary and banking policies. As long as our economy is strong and new value is being created, such fiscal practices should not be inflationary. If this proves to be the case, then a Citizen Dividend might also be partially or fully funded in this manner.

We can also build a new town—Capital City—where we can test the most advanced sustainable urban design, waste disposal, transportation, and technology. It would also be an experiment in how to finance development solely through adding value and economic vitality. The compact, model development could be on 1000 acres, on the edge of Washington D.C., on the former site of Hyde Field/ Washington Executive Airport. The site happens to be in Prince George’s County, the richest African-American-majority county in the US. Building on the [New Pedestrianism](#) model, the city of 50,000 could become the gleaming new headquarters of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). The detested, brutalist-style HUD Washington D. C. headquarters from



The design for Capital City, a pedestrian village of 50,000 with pedestrian lanes in front and streets in the rear. The futuristic new town could become the headquarters of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation. It would cost taxpayers nothing.

the 1960s was long overdue for replacement. The DOT had been wastefully leasing its offices for years, and was looking for a permanent location. Capital City could be integrated into the Greater Washington light rail/Metro system with the Capital City Skyway, which could have two lanes for self-driving electric buses above, and bicycle trails suspended just below, similar to the Xiamen Bicycle Skyway in China's Fujian province. The Skyway could be built over parks, streams, and other greenbelts where ordinary roads should not be built. A bicycle trail on the ground level would provide park and greenbelt access and allow maintenance of the Skyway. The Skyway could connect to the terminus of the Green Metro line at Branch Avenue Station, and the terminus of the Yellow Metro line at Huntington Station.

Waste collection could be handled through an [automated vacuum collection \(AVAC\)](#), that transports trash and recycling through a system of underground pneumatic tubes to a central processing facility. There could be no more than a handful of stop signs, with almost all intersections negotiated with roundabouts, and pedestrian lanes crossing under the roadbeds on a network separated from motor vehicles. Even from the inception, only self-driving electric cars and trucks could be allowed in Capital City. Parking would be vastly reduced by discouraging private car ownership in favor of shared, self-driving vehicles. Consequently, above-ground parking lots could be completely eliminated. Many, if not most, of the cars would return on their own to underground garages or private owners for recharging or service. Shared bicycles are also available that can be picked up or dropped off at these garages, or at one of the skyway stops. Most dwellings do not have, or need garages, except for storage and bicycles, and the ones that do have garages only accommodate one car and a few bicycles. Those who do own cars, such as handicap or other specialty vehicles, could also let their cars roam for profit when not in use.

One shared, self-driving car in Capital City, combined with public transportation, could provide as many passenger miles as 15 private vehicles do in the rest of the country now. Even better, automobile transportation will become convenient for those who previously could not drive themselves, and it allows them to connect seamlessly with other public transportation. This



This is how I imagine my partner Shasta and me, in 2024, sporting our new augmented reality glasses (with photochromic lenses) in Capital City.

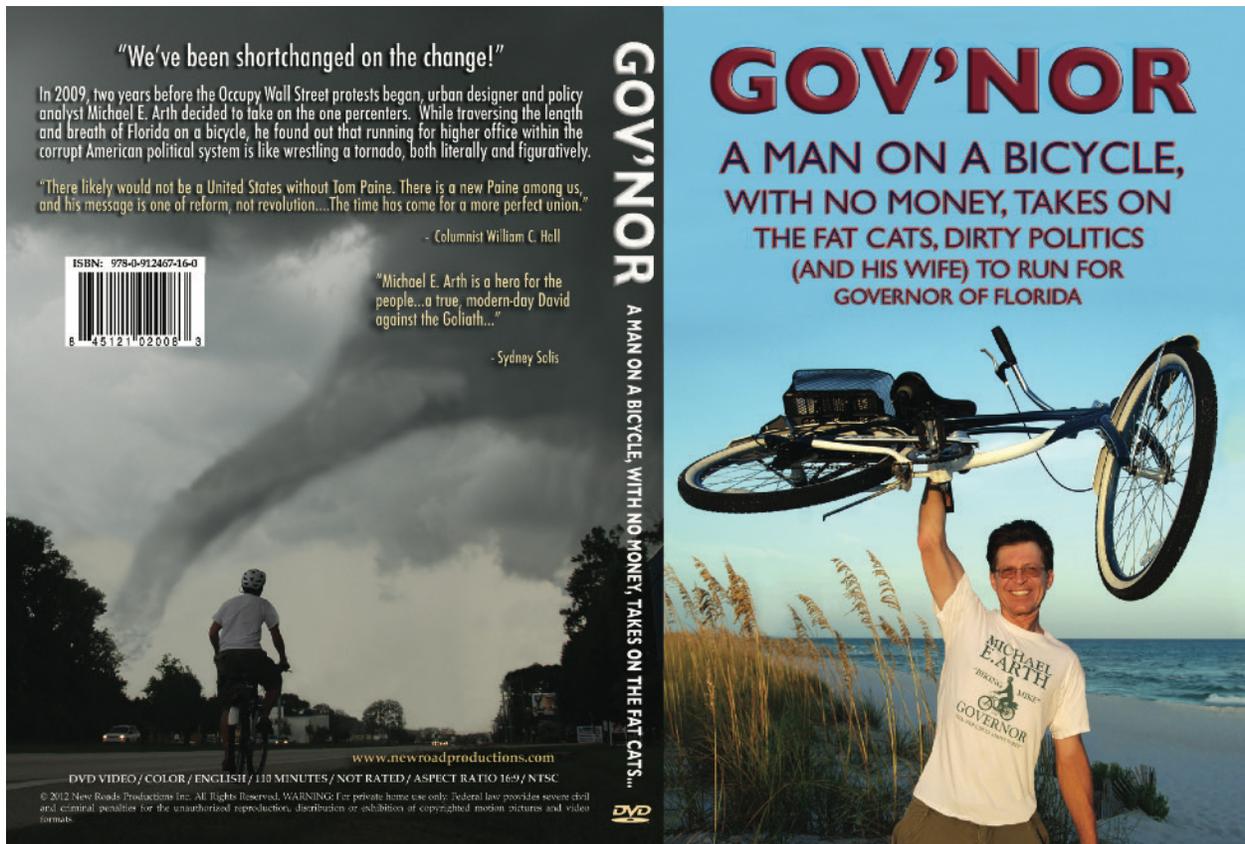
would permanently solve the “first and last mile problem” that has dampened the use of public transportation. Driverless car sharing also costs far less because riders don’t have to buy a car, or pay for drivers, gas, or insurance. There would also a huge savings to the health, as vehicle-related injuries or deaths would be rare once the technology is perfected. In 2016 there were more than 6 million vehicles crashes in the US causing 40,000 deaths. By 2050 the number of deaths from car crashes could be less than a few hundred (And I’m sure that many people will still complain that autonomous cars are not safe enough).

Solar panels both on and offsite, coupled with offsite thermal energy storage, could supply all the energy needed for the city. All residents could receive the latest model of augmented reality glasses—almost indistinguishable from regular glasses—which can connect them to the fastest broadband service in the country, which will be free. The internet of things could monitor all data for maximum efficiency. Water features, many miles of trails and pedestrian lanes, swimming pools, easy access to the metro area, and countless urban amenities could supply entertainment and healthy outdoor activities. Many other innovations, too numerous to mention, or not yet conceived, could be adopted in Capital City, and it could be a living laboratory for how to build a city.

As a result, it would be the perfect venue for a World’s Fair to show off all the modern and sustainable features. I can imagine a Capital City World’s Fair (Expo 2028) lasting from April 15 to October 15, 2028. Most visitors would receive smart glasses with their admission ticket, tailored to their own prescription, which would greatly enhance the experience. There would probably be 100 times as many visitors using virtual reality glasses at home for a fully immersive experience. Virtually all of the Expo buildings could be built to be permanent or repurposed after the fair. All the money used to build Capital City and finance the Expo could be spent into (debt-free) existence by the Treasury, at no cost to the taxpayers, with much of the costs returned to the government through the sale of buildings, property taxes, and economic benefits. The new town could show off America as a world leader again in housing, urban design, transportation, and technological innovation.

The 2010 Florida Gubernatorial Campaign

For nearly two decades I grappling with a wide range of policy issues in obscurity—often related to urban design—before taking my concerns into the political arena. In 2009 and 2010, I ran for governor of Florida and got an inside look at dirty politics, and our archaic, winner-take-all electoral process, including those problems related to private campaign financing. The chairman of the Florida Democratic Party (FDP), Karen Thurman, and some of her underlings, harassed and suppressed my campaign because they had already picked Alex Sink as their candidate, and



DVD cover of the documentary, *Gov'nor: a man on a bicycle, with no money, takes on the fat cats, dirty politics (and his wife) to run for Governor of Florida.*

they didn't want to have a real primary. After the state party headquarters ignored my announcement about running, I managed to get communications director Eric Jotkoff on the phone. He was annoyed that I would have the audacity to run, even though it was the beginning of the race, 17 months before the election. He pulled up my web page and said, "You focus too much on the issues, It's not about the issues, it's about the money. Unless you have \$3 million to start, and spend \$1.4 million a week thereafter, you have no chance of winning. Anyway, the media will not write a single word about you unless you have the money."

I wrote to various newspapers across the state and challenged them over Jotkoff's statements. The response was not overwhelming, but there were several front page articles, including titles like, "Can a renaissance man with no money be governor?" and "He turned 'Cracktown' into a gem. Now, he wants to remake **Florida.**" There was also an endorsement from the Orlando Weekly, which also ran a cover story. A PBS affiliate began re-running a half-hour interview with me that had first aired nearly two years before. A FOX TV affiliate ran a news feature, and despite my liberal views, a surprising number of Republicans sympathetic with my reform-minded agenda, libertarianism, and criticism of our two-party system endorsed me. At one point,

very early in the campaign, despite being frozen out by the party leaders, and having no mailers, or paid advertising of any consequence, one poll showed that 45% of Democrats would have voted for me if the primary had been held that day. Considering that my name recognition was about 6% at that point, it showed me that a lot of Democrats were ready for change, even if it meant going with an unknown.

The Fourth Estate (mainstream media) and the Fifth Estate (bloggers, social media, and journalists out of the mainstream) broker a critical role in electing our leaders. With the election of Trump, a media-savvy, reality-show star, I could see that reporting lurid and sensationalistic stories to garner viewers, thus selling advertising for an entire range of products and services, is even more important to the media outlets than lucrative paid-political advertising. It's no secret that the media is making a fortune off Trump's antics while air time devoted to important issues

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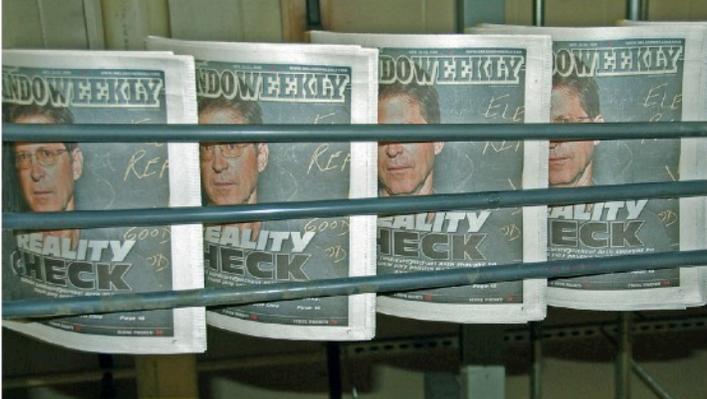
FINAL EDITION

He turned **'Cracktown'** into a gem.
 Now, he wants to remake **Florida.**



ART OF THE GARDEN
 ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

News-Journal/PETER BAUER



Can a Renaissance man with no money be governor?

Amid successes here, Arth sets sights on governor run

By KARI COBHAM
 STAFF WRITER

DELAND — Michael Arth is an enigma — at once driven and intellectual, hands-on, somewhat eccentric, a nomadic jack of all trades.

You might know him as the cocky yet earnest man who moved from California's Santa Barbara hills in 2001 to transform a decrepit DeLand neighborhood into the Garden District — picturesque blocks of restored turn-of-the-century homes, quaint shops and pastel facades.

Or you might remember Arth two years ago as the vocal proponent of a pedestrian village for the mentally ill and homeless out near the Volusia County Branch Jail.

He's also an artist, self-taught green urban planner, author and futurist.

Now meet Arth the gubernatorial candidate.

His campaign strategy? "To tell the truth, to speak up openly and honestly about what



Michael Arth photos

BEFORE: What is now DeLand's Garden District was a haven for drug dealers and buyers as recently as 2001.



DeLand's Urban Cowboy runs for governor

By PAT MATHFIELD
 pmathfield@newsjournal.com

He doesn't have the money. He doesn't have the political machinery or the support of leaders in the party. None of that is stopping DeLand's Michael Arth from seeking to lead the state as governor.

Arth, a 56-year-old Democrat, will announce his name recognition outside of Volusia County. He started a job of recognition from the City of DeLand and the County of Volusia, however, and he has the backing of local business leaders and residents in the Garden District.

So far, Arth is one of six Democrats considered for governor. Arth is a businessman and a member of the Florida Democratic Party.

Arth is an author, painter and architect by trade. He is also a former owner of a construction company.

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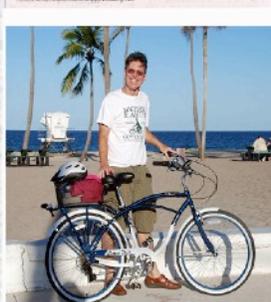


Photo by AP/WIDE WORLD

is dwindling away. As Leslie Moonves, the Democratic CEO of CBS said of Trump’s “bomb-throwing circus” in 2016: “It may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS. Who would have expected the ride we’re all having right now? This is petty amazing...Who would have thought that this circus would come to town?...The money’s rolling in and this is fun...I’ve never seen anything like this, and this is going to be a very good year for us. Sorry. It’s a terrible thing to say. But, bring it on, Donald. Keep going.”

I got a smidgeon of earned media, but I couldn’t get quality, affordable advertising because the party bosses in Tallahassee denied me access to any of the services they usually provide to

MICHAEL E. ARTH - YOUR INDEPENDENT CHOICE FOR GOVERNOR

**FINISH:
PENSACOLA**

**THE
STATUS
QUO
HAS GOT TO GO!**

**BIKING MIKE
CLEANING UP FLORIDA**

**1000 MILES BY BICYCLE
FROM JUNE TO AUGUST**

**START:
KEY WEST**

**BRING
SOLAR
ENERGY
TO THE
SUNSHINE
STATE**

GULF OF OIL SPILLS

GULF STREAM OF POTENTIAL HYDROPOWER

MICHAEL WILL ALSO TRAVEL TO OTHER CITIES FROM AUGUST TO ELECTION DAY, NOVEMBER 2.



At the Florida Democratic Conference, after being exiled to political Siberia by the party apparatchiki—symbolic of where we all are when it comes to fair representation.

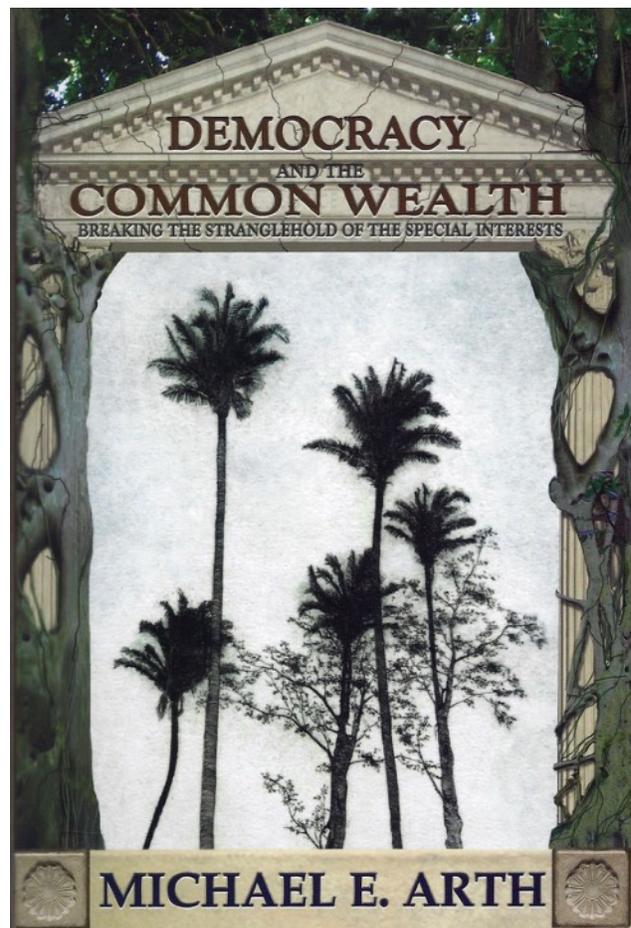
Democratic candidates. This included mailing lists crucial to fundraising, and any mention of my candidacy on their website. The FDP even put out the false claim, repeated by some media outlets, that their anointed candidate, Alex Sink, was running unopposed in the primary. They also ran ads exclusively for her, in violation of their own neutrality clause. I filed a grievance on this and other issues, but the FDP lawyer informed me that the bosses had written the neutrality laws to apply to the Democratic party members, exclusive of themselves. Even worse, to attend the party conference, I had to pay a large fee, and my delegates and I had to sign loyalty oaths promising to vote for Democrats in all non-judicial races, no matter how despicable the person or how the person came to be nominated.

The same issue about party neutrality in the primary arose on the national level in the 2016 presidential campaign when Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz and her staff at the Democratic National Committee violated the DNC's neutrality clause and colluded against Bernie Sanders in favor of their anointed one, Hillary Clinton. Wasserman Schulz lost her job over the public outcry, but the DNC's lawyers (who were also Hillary's lawyers) argued against a class action lawsuit by Bernie Sanders' supporters, saying that any pledge of a fair and balanced Democratic primary is just like the empty campaign promises that people don't expect to be kept. This of course subverts the democratic process, and is another reason to bust up the two-party duopoly through electoral reform including direct voting, public campaign financing, and ranked choice voting (RCV).

RCV, also known as preference voting, is as easy as 1, 2, 3, because candidate preferences are simply ranked. This eliminates spoilers in single member elections and always results in a majority winner. If there's not a majority on the first rounds, the least popular choices are dropped and the votes are transferred to one's other choices. RCV is used by American Idol and the Academy Awards, although it is said that the Academy previously used plurality voting just to flummox those trying to guess the winners. Republican party leaders also use a form of RCV to elect their chair. Presumably, leaders in both parties don't want it for the rest of us because they know it would end the two-party system, vastly improve representation in our elections, and improve our selection of candidates.

After my delegates and I left at the end of the first day at the Florida Democratic Party Conference in October 2009, my table at the Walt Disney resort was assigned to someone else, and my campaign materials were locked away. It took a good part of the next day to get my stuff back and find out my new table was assigned to an empty room away from everyone else. I wasn't allowed to speak to the assembly, and our delegates were falsely told by the communications director himself that we couldn't hang our banner because we didn't have the "official Disney tape" sanctioned by the resort.

After being frozen out of the party, I changed to No Party Affiliation, which meant I had next to zero chance of winning. This is because our plurality voting system forces any serious candidate to be a Democrat or a Republican, and subject to the whims of party leaders. At this point, my campaign continued only for the purpose of publicizing the flaws in our dysfunctional electoral system. I took my film crew and volunteer staff to the streets, riding my bicycle from Key West to Pensacola, talking with thousands of people along the way. We documented much of this, while also describing the various ways democracy is compromised, on both the state and national level, in our film, *Gov'nor: a man on a bicycle, with no money, takes on the fat cats, dirty politics (and his wife) to run for Governor of Florida*. I also wrote about the



campaign in my book, [Democracy and the Common Wealth: Breaking the Stranglehold of the Special Interests](#).

Alex Sink, the Democrat hand-picked by the Florida Democratic Party chairman and staff was outspent and defeated by Rick Scott, the founder and former CEO of Columbia/HCA, a for-profit health care company that defrauded Medicare and Medicaid and other federal programs. After Scott's company was caught and pleaded guilty to 14 felonies, they had to pay \$1.7 billion in fines, damages, and civil penalties, then the largest healthcare fraud settlement of its kind in US history. Scott was forced out of the company, but still got nearly \$10 million in severance and over \$350 million in stock. With \$75 million of this tainted money, Scott essentially bought himself the governorship of our nation's third most populous state by vastly outspending his opponents in the primary and general elections. And he paid-to-play again in 2014, with \$22 million of his own money, and about \$61 million from Republicans. Scott is low key, but otherwise he and Trump are cut from the same cloth. Scott chaired a pro-Trump super PAC, Trump endorsed Scott for Senate in 2016, and Scott is said to have his eye on eventually taking Trump's place in the White House.

During the campaign I learned first-hand that the main activity of our political leaders is soliciting private campaign funds. This is a highly corrupting activity and should be abolished because contributions buy unequal influence. Our democracy is now essentially being sold off to the highest bidders. The top one percent of one percent (0.1%) of Americans are now worth more than the bottom 90% due to their increasing ability to game the system. From one in a thousand Americans comes a quarter of all campaign contributions. These are the corporate executives, bankers, ideological donors, financiers, lobbyists, and lawyers who live in places like Donald Trump's neighborhood on Manhattan's Upper East Side or on Millionaire's Row in Naples, FL, where Rick Scott owns a \$15 million getaway on the beach. At the same time, the latest tax cuts and other economic policies are increasing the gap between rich and poor. If this isn't bad enough, according to the judgment of conservative Supreme Court justices, corporations are also now considered persons in terms of campaign contributions, and they can spend unlimited amounts in Political Action Committees, while still shielding their owners from personal liability.

It is corrosive to justice and demeaning to candidates to beg for money. It is also annoying to voters to be constantly bombarded with solicitations and paid political advertising spent on brutally effective attack ads and propaganda. It has gotten worse as the First Amendment has been repurposed by a conservative Supreme Court into a tool for the elite to control elections. The biggest weakness in our system is due to an electoral system that is imperfectly and incompletely formulated in the Constitution. If elected, I will make it one of my highest priorities

to pass a [Voting Rights Bill](#) that reforms the electoral process and turns the US into a representative democracy. Here are 13-steps toward better serving the voters:

1. Make private campaign financing illegal.
2. Curb influence peddling: No person or other entity may offer any politician a bribe, perks, meals, travel, donation, or any other personal incentive. Payments to lobbyists, who now feast like fleas on the body politic, should be so minimal and regulated that it would effectively end the corrupting influence of paid lobbyists and the revolving door in politics. In accordance with the First Amendment, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, there should be created a freely accessible and petition process (like [UNICE](#) and [LOGOS](#)) for citizens and corporations to make their wishes known.
3. Ensure transparency, fairness, and efficiency by providing websites where qualified candidates must list qualifications, personal information, policy statements on all issues, and conflicts of interest, including previous three years of tax returns. Voters can indicate their preferences on issues and qualifications to see how candidates rank on their voter profile. Public debates would be held after a winnowing process that involves voters distributing points to their favored candidates.
4. One person, one vote. Implement [direct voting](#) and abolish the Electoral College, which was a racist compromise to begin with. Our highly mobile, interconnected, better-informed electorate does not compare to 1789 where only land-owning white men could vote in most of the (widely disparate) states.
5. Change single member elections (e.g. president, governor, senator) from winner-take-all to ranked choice voting.
6. Implement proportional representation, known as single transferable vote or choice voting, in multi-member districts (e.g. the House of Representatives). This will end gerrymandering and redistricting fights, vastly increase representation, and will begin to improve voter approval of Congress, which was 10% in August 2017. This can be easily done by creating larger, multi-member districts where House members are elected through proportional representation.
7. We should also have proportional representation in the Senate. John Adams in his 1776 pamphlet, *Thoughts on Government*, wrote that Congress “should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large.” However, to appease the small states, it was decided at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 that each state would have two senators. Today this means that someone living in Vermont or Wyoming has 67 times more influence in the Senate than a Californian. It’s outrageously unfair, but it’s also highly unlikely that enough of the smaller states would agree to true proportional representation. However, a reasonable compromise is in order. The House allocates by population and grants at least one representative per state. We should do the same for the Senate. In single member states, the

voting should be by ranked choice voting. In states with multiple senators, the voting should be by choice voting, which is also a ranked system.

8. Educate the voters. Democracy depends on an involved and informed citizenry. Higher education and job training should be free in state schools. Civic lessons should be required at all levels.
9. End voter suppression efforts. Voter registration should be automatic. The right to vote should not be denied to any citizen of voting age for any reason. Even convicts in prison should have the vote, and be able to participate in the political system as part of their rehabilitation process.
10. Make Election Day a national holiday so people can think about their civic duty and make it to conveniently located polls.
11. Lower the voting age to 16, so that young people in high school can participate in the system, and get in the habit of studying the issues and the candidates. Research also shows that it helps get their parents to vote. Even though 16 year olds are often impulsive and hotheaded, their calm “cold cognition” is already in place, and this is precisely the type of cognition needed for deliberative decisions like voting.
12. Supreme Court Justices could be limited to staggered 18-year terms so that each president would get two nominees for each four-year term. No other democracy has life terms for their versions of the Supreme Court, and our own system was devised at a time when people did not live as long. Even healthy people tend to lose some of their mental acuity as they age. Shorter terms would increase democratic accountability, lower the political stakes for each nomination, and help keep justices from getting out of touch with the people.
13. End the two-party system where viable candidates have to align themselves with one of two camps, polarized into the blue team and the red team. When we withdraw into tribal affiliations or political factions, we set ourselves up for conflict instead of consensus. When George Washington was elected there were no parties, and he warned against their formation because of the “continual mischiefs of the spirit of party” that would lead to “the alternate domination” of each party taking revenge on one another. Studies show that people will support policies they think originate from their own party, or reject them if they think they don’t, even if it’s not true. (The [phenomenon](#) is more pronounced with Republicans). Plurality voting (“winner-take-all”) is a flawed, antiquated relic we inherited from the British. Combined with our presidential system, plurality voting forces voters to choose between two factions of a ruling elite, doesn’t require a majority winner, and makes spoilers out of all who dare to challenge it—whether by running as an independent or in a “third party.” Adopting the 13 proposals listed above will end plurality voting and the two-party system. In the future people may organize into parties, but funding should be limited and regulated. The issues and their relation to the health of our republic is paramount, not party affiliation.

There is a good chance I would just now be ending my second term as governor of Florida if we had had fair elections in 2010 and 2014. If Bernie Sanders had been treated fairly by the DNC in 2016, poll data analysis shows that if he had won the primary, he almost certainly would have defeated Trump in the general election. This was confirmed by the massive Cooperative Congressional Election Study, involving 50,000 people, which showed that 12% of Trump voters would have voted for Bernie in the general election because his honest and inclusive progressivism aligned better with the majority than the politics of hate, division, and inequality. Fair elections with a properly representative voting system would permanently open the gate to decent candidates who could focus on the issues instead of the money. At the same time, getting accurate information to an informed electorate is critical to restoring our democracy.

As an interactive and collaborative tool for governance and education, I have already established two public policy wikis as a proof of concept at www.UNICEwiki.org and www.LOGOSwiki.org. Interactive answer engines, combined with the wikis, will eventually be able to speak to anyone in the world at their own level and in their own language. All the world's data, and the tools to interpret it, will be available to everyone at all times so we can make informed decisions about how to govern ourselves. Our elected leaders could then be held accountable by an objective standard everyone can understand. Measures might also be taken—preferably through treaties—to ensure that no government can block internet access to these tools.

These wikis, especially LOGOS, may allow us to restructure the United Nations (UN) so that it can better represent all of us across national borders. The veto power of the Security Council members often prevents the UN from implementing beneficial policies. As a potential solution, I have proposed a detailed plan at [LOGOS](http://www.LOGOSwiki.org) which would improve the UN's fact gathering and deliberative processes. If the UN does not adopt more representative methods to address transnational policies, then LOGOS can formulate policies and organize treaties independently much more efficiently and at a fraction of the cost.

I had many opportunities during my life to study, travel, and work in various fields. This broad experience has given me an advantage in policy analysis and problem solving. Also, in 2018, at the age of 65, I went to the University of London to do a master of science degree in global politics in order to further educate myself. My studies included American foreign policy, international political economy, geopolitics, population and the environment, global politics, governance and security. In return for the opportunities I have had in acquiring this knowledge and experience, I owe it to others to do whatever I can to improve and protect our democracy. Unfortunately, many disparate forces—individual, corporate, and institutional—have used their

privilege to exploit the common good, whether through design, indifference, or ignorance. It is our duty as citizens to step up, and do our part against those who would weaken our society in pursuit of selfish goals.

Visits during the 1970s to East Germany, Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, Red China, and Egypt, as well as visits to numerous other repressive regimes over the decades, has given me memorable and enduring lessons in how autocracies and theocracies, whether communist or capitalist, fail to bring the greatest good to the greatest number. But capitalism in the United States is also failing us. According to The Economist Intelligence Unit, *even before Trump took office*, the US was listed as a “flawed democracy,” coming in at 21st among nations, with the same ranking as Italy. To even call the United States a democracy may be generous. A Princeton University study (Gilens, M., & Page, B. 2014), based on survey data from 1981 to 2002, concluded what we all should know: our system fits the Economic-Elite Domination model (plutocracy) as a result of being “dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans.”

Our country’s democracy has deteriorated even more since the 2002 study, because the few who already own so much seek to acquire and control even more. Instead of being number one in democracy, the United States now leads the world in crime, incarceration, military spending, arms dealing, public mass shootings, street gangs, cumulative air pollution, drug addiction, national debt, private debt, divorce, gun ownership, car thefts, reported rapes and murders, police officers, student loan debt, women on anti-depressants, obesity, health care expenses, and the cost of prescription drugs. Instead of allowing ourselves to be distracted with lies, lame excuses, gun advocacy, Bible thumping, flag waving, xenophobic fear-mongering, sensationalism, partisanship, vote-buying, and demagoguery, we should resolve our dubious distinctions, and strive to be number one in the things that really matter.

Instead of itching to start wars with our vast war machine, we should use more carrot and less stick to make us all safer and better off. Diplomacy should replace saber rattling. Soft power is preferable to hard power. Development aid, including family planning to reduce overpopulation, should be at least 1% of GDP instead of the current 0.15%. (By comparison, Sweden gives 1.4%). The vast Military Industrial Complex should be reined in, while cybersecurity should be increased. Trump was right about one thing, our allies can spend 2% of their GDP on their own defense, but he is wrong about the need for US to grow the Military Industrial Complex. With our allies spending more in most cases, we can gradually lower our own defense spending to 2.5% of GDP, instead of the current 3.2%. Even at 2.5%, we would still be spending more than China, Russia, India, the United Kingdom, France, and Israel combined spend today. The “disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist,” Eisenhower warned in 1961. “Only

an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Misplaced power has not only persisted, it has grown so pervasive that elections, industry, congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and the military no longer represent the best interests of the American people. The social democracies of northern Europe are proof that industry and capitalism can be regulated for the good of all, and that the military can serve the peace. We already have the knowledge to govern ourselves properly. We know our electoral system is rigged, inequality is increasing, the infrastructure is crumbling, and social mobility is stalled. We can see the rich getting richer while the middle class is stagnating and the lower class is experiencing generational poverty. It can all be fixed—capitalism can work for everyone—but it requires systemic reform followed by diligence and vigilance on the part of an informed electorate. The Progressive Era replaced the Gilded Age with the election of Teddy Roosevelt in 1901—a Republican leader more liberal, conservation-minded, and honest than almost any national politician we see today in either party.

Trump’s presidency may inadvertently help us make America great, even though it will not happen on his dismal watch. Trump, who lost the popular vote, was elected with Russian help by only one-quarter of the eligible voters—who were forced to choose between two widely disliked candidates. These facts, coupled with Trump’s outrageous behavior, have caused him to be the least popular president since modern polling began. Historians were *already* ranking Trump as our worst president ever, even before his befuddled and treasonous performance in Helsinki where he accepted the denial of election interference by Russian tyrant and former KGB officer Vladimir Putin over the voluminous evidence and indictments produced by seven of our own intelligence organizations. A handful of Republican leaders dared to criticize Trump for that performance—at least before a poll showed that 79% of Republicans were fine with Helsinki, just as they also seem okay with the reprehensible notion that a grossly dishonest president with multiple conflicts of interest is above the law.

I believe historians will someday remark about the silver lining that will long outshine the shadow cast by Trump’s cloud on our democracy. They will write about how the current band of robber barons, represented by the president’s vulgar and pompous, gold-plated hubris, were humbled by the New Progressive Era. They will say that disgust with Trump’s macho narcissism, and bumbling, authoritarian disdain for the people was the catalyst that ushered in reality-based politics, which allowed darkness and hate to be replaced with reason, honesty, and compassion. Especially in these dark times, most of us believe we should have a society where, if you work hard and play by the rules, even the poorest among us can prosper. Unfortunately, many of those

who approve of our arrogant, self-serving, plutocrat-in-chief believe—against all evidence to the contrary—that we already live in such a society, and that the poor should only blame themselves for their predicament.

Because of the inherent flaws in our system, we don't need a crystal ball to conclude it was not entirely surprising that someone so incompetent and harmful to the common good could get elected, and continue in office. Looking ahead, I believe it is only a matter of time before we will make the reforms necessary to allow us to rationally follow the facts to the truth, thus banishing foolish ideas and elevating the good. This means being progressive where progress is needed, and conservative in things that need to be conserved, such as in sustainable population levels, national resources, wildlife and the environment. Politics is more art than science, but facts and political realities have to be carefully considered, so idealistic goals must sometimes be adjusted to accommodate reality. Idealism has to be pragmatic and utilitarian to be useful. The ideological approach might seem to serve a purpose at times for some, but eventually blind faith and the stubbornness of belief in the face of contradictory facts will become an impediment to justice.

As James Madison wrote in 1788, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” (Federalist No. 51) The purpose of government is to encourage our better angels and to make rules that help society function smoothly, while tending the common good. Government is necessary, but it must also be restrained, which why our founding fathers established built-in checks and balances, and separation of powers, in order to protect the weak from the strong. Our president is not a dictator because he is only one-third of a government guided by a constitution. Finding the right balance is a process. The Constitution is not set in stone, and laws must be refined and interpreted in keeping with changing circumstances. The balance and separation of powers was designed to prevent one branch from overthrowing the others and tipping the balance of power toward tyranny. Unfortunately, over the last four decades, the three branches of government have been undermined by special interests slowly chipping away at its foundational roots, exploiting its weaknesses with devious tactics and propaganda. As a result, the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial branches have increasingly allowed plutocrats to rewrite or reinterpret the rules through the lawyers they hire, and the lobbyists, judges, and politicians they buy, in order to lawfully steal from good citizens.

It is easy to know what goodness is, since there is, in nearly all cultures, an all-purpose rule of thumb. It's called the Law of Reciprocity—do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This can be expanded upon with a Golden Rule of Politics: The goal of politics should be to bring the greatest good to the greatest number, in the most efficient manner possible, to this and future generations. This sums up the practical ideal we should strive for, not only as a nation, but as all the people of the Earth.