

**The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:**  
***Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter***

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*Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.*

***Latest News from the Hopeful Realist***

**The Improbability of Achieving Societal Solidarity.** If there is one thing most Americans agree on it is that the nation is experiencing more divisiveness than ever. On one side is the growing extremism that has taken over the Republican Party—which leaves traditional conservative Republicans on the sidelines. On another side is the fragmentation of the Democratic Party—the split between what some call ‘corporate Democrats’ and the so-called ‘progressive wing’ of the party. “But wait, there’s more.”

These political splits have consequences, of course, but they reflect much deeper fissures in the American culture as well as the distortions we find in the nation’s economy. The heyday of ‘American Exceptionalism’ (in the good sense) is long gone. The ‘Great Acceleration’ of the post-World War II era of economic growth and opportunity has evaporated into a Great Transformation of the economy into an ever more hierarchical structure of inequity, revealed by intolerable disparities in income and wealth, accompanied by growing indifference and cruelty deployed from the top down.

The new American exceptionalism is not a good thing. Yes, the nation has dominated international relations as the one remaining “great power” for some time now, not always with ‘success.’ We remain the wealthiest nation on the planet, although the distribution of that wealth is distorted in the extreme, even more extreme than just before the Great Depression of the 1930s.

We are exceptional in having the highest infant mortality rate in the industrial world. The life expectancy of our population has actually begun to shorten. Rampant addiction and overdoses from Fentanyl and methamphetamine excel beyond those of other ‘industrial democracies.’ The poverty class continues to grow while the middle class shrinks; all the while, the financial elites grow vastly richer. I could go on, of course, listing a wide range of health system failures as well as the many health problems that go untreated for growing numbers who are too poor to pay for treatment even when they have (inadequate) insurance. Obama’s Affordable Care

Act was a feeble effort to make American healthcare more inclusive while leaving most of the profiteering in place. Who is surprised that life expectancy is falling behind the technological progress in medicine that only the well-insured and wealthy can afford to use. American exceptionalism includes the premise that only money has exercisable rights, in a culture that denies Nature itself.

All this could not have evolved at a more inconvenient time, at least from the perspective of the immediate unprecedented need for societal solidarity in the face of the multiple catastrophic crises that accelerate toward various tipping points that are certain to spill over into chaos and collapse, barring extreme intervention.

No, that is not 'chicken little' hyperbole. The evidence for extreme and rapidly growing existential danger to us all from accelerating climate disturbances and ecological collapse is powerful and undeniable—of course, the facts do not deter the compulsive deniers of climate chaos, ecological destruction, accelerating species extinctions, and severe global financial crises, as well as societal instability and oppression.

Political cruelty is the handmaiden of the compassionless culture. Increasing dehumanization of *The Other* foments political violence. The politics of the winner-take-all economy enable both. Exclusion of the un-moneyed is the underlying principle of the uncaring economy, which is expressed in punitive economic legislation. One hesitates to use the term, "cultural revolution," because of its Maoist association. However, if the American culture of uncaring industrial consumerism, devoid of a wellbeing ethic, is not transformed into a caring culture of economic and societal mutual support founded in the principle of optimizing wellbeing for everyone, then the societal solidarity necessary to face the great existential threats of our time will not be achieved.

**The Updated Update of the Publishing Plan stands.** The first volume of *The Edge of Illusion Trilogy* is complete. Preparations for publishing ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Era of Great Transformation*** in the next few months are underway. The tentative publication date is January 10, 2024, maybe sooner. Traditional publishers take from eighteen months to two years, sometimes even more, from signing a contract to an actual publication date. By publishing the book independently, we can do it in 6 months or less.

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The price will soon go to normal. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, do so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book's Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

**Note:** Past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

## ***LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary***

**The Decline and Fall of American Culture, or Not.** The blatant disregard for the humanity of Fulton County election workers Shaye Moss and her mother Ruby Freeman by Trump's henchmen attempting to finagle some evidence of election fraud in Georgia was direct torture of these two election volunteers by public demonization. The MAGAlytes were compelled to find someone to blame for the 'election fraud' they claimed in contradiction to overwhelming evidence that there was no significant fraud in the 2020 presidential election. The damage they caused to the lives of these two ladies is incalculable. Only sociopaths devoid of any empathy could do such a thing. Why, then, do so many Americans almost casually call in death threats to judges and members of a grand jury? Or, are they only Russian bots?

Okay, Giuliani and his co-conspirators are despicable characters capable of anything they think they can get away with—they *are* sociopaths. But the sociopathy runs much deeper than that. The whole MAGA thing with its cult leader reflects not just the charisma of a man whose brazen personal and political acts have triggered more than just the delusions of blind acolytes following their leader. Deep fear and hatred pervade the culture of political antipathy.

From rape to cheating on taxes, to stiffing contractors for payments due by daring them to go broke suing him for what he owes them, to rhetoric encouraging death threats to any public servant doing their job in prosecuting the maximal leader's crimes—any behavior is forgiven or ignored by the majority of the Republican Party. Beyond all that, the MAGA phenomenon has revealed that American culture has within it a deep vein of violence that runs through everyday life, not just politics. Just watch the local evening news...

Maybe 'decline and fall' is not quite accurate, since the violent dominator cultural element was always there. From the earliest settlers in the thirteen colonies through the conquering of native peoples across the entire western territories by means of massacre, occupation, and concentration in 'reservations' for those not killed, American expansionism through violence never stopped. Nearly a thousand military bases around the world today, not counting the clandestine 'black sites,' reflect the same culture of 'might makes right.' At the same time, we do face the imperial ambitions of Putin and Xi Jinping. No easy answers.

However, another strain in American culture is just the opposite of the violent dominator compulsion. It may not have been as central to the history of expansionism, but it was always there in the background of predatory expansion and extraction of value from *The Others* and their land. It is the culture of compassion, of cooperation, and of mutual aid. It is the natural tendency of humans to help one another, especially in times of tragedy and need.

We have seen it most recently in *Lahaina*, the historical center of Hawaiian culture, in response to the extreme devastation wrought by a complex convergence of climate chaos with industrial monoculture, invasive species, and failed emergency warning systems. The people naturally

and immediately turned out to help rescue neighbors, often risking their own lives. The powerful tropical storm that hit Southern California on Monday will require even more mutual aid, which is playing out in a more complex way. Can that really happen in the vast urban territory with its giant bureaucratic jurisdictions?

The tendency toward cooperation and mutual aid, one might argue, runs deeper in human history than the penchant to deploy violent means to achieve goals. That evolutionary advantage resulted in survival of small human groups over eons. Certainly, the relative roles of violent power versus mutual support in human evolution could be debated, and is, but why not just recognize the power of compassion and mutual aid for their potential as extremely valuable human traits?

Here's why. In the coming months and years, a level of human cooperation will be, and already is, needed to overcome the worst of the converging catastrophic crises we face. Regarding climate, I hear constant intonations to 'just do better at recycling your plastic,' or 'buy an electric vehicle,' or 'don't overconsume.' The list could be much longer of course, but you get the point (I hope). We CANNOT resolve the crises that confront us by merely pleading for more responsible individual actions. It is so much more complicated and of massively greater scope than that. First, the idea that somehow 'we' can get everyone to act in ecologically responsible ways, somehow thereby reducing carbon emissions to near (not net) zero in the next few years, is clearly impossible. It ignores the deep and pervasive infrastructure of the global petro-economy of growth.

Transforming the global corporate industrial-consumer political economy into a benign ecological civilization in a decade or two (or even in a much longer timeframe) will require massive organizational change at every level. That is where the American culture of individual consumerism displays its uselessness. It is organized around exactly opposite notions from what is needed. Massive global social mobilization far beyond what Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future, the Sunrise Movement, or the Extinction Rebellion have so far accomplished, is needed now. How the people can overcome corporate and government inertia may be the biggest question, and test of humanity, in our lifetimes.

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of these and related matters, go to various blog posts at:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

### ***Today's Featured Image:***

***Complex Systems are where we live. Yet we 'moderns' have deviated from living in harmony with our Earth-System habitats and the result is destruction and destabilization. The Schumacher Institute is all about studying the complex ecosystems of the Earth and our proper role in them.***



The purpose of the modern global economy is to drive unending economic growth, the sole purpose of which is to generate more wealth in the hands of the super-rich without the slightest interest (beyond using the idea in propaganda) in the wellbeing of humanity or the planet. After all, the metaphorical “invisible hand” pilfered from Adam Smith’s moral philosophy, as applied amorally, presumed that individual greed would result in the greatest good for the greatest number. The old ‘trickle down’ economic ideology never worked and it never will. When it fails to alleviate poverty, the ideologues of neoliberal economics proclaim that we need more growth and all will be well on our finite planet (where we have already overshoot the Earth System’s capacity to carry the load of human extraction, production, consumption, and waste). The 1999 edition includes sidebar comments by environmentalists just before the turn of the twenty-first century, when concern for ‘global warming’ was becoming serious among climate scientists and ecologists.

### *Quotable Quotes*

Hierarchy is a system of control and domination; democracy is its antidote, government for and by the people. However, the standard depiction of democracy as electoral politics—which today is controlled by the corporatocracy in most industrialized nations—no longer works. Instead, a much more effective form of people’s democracy would ground itself in and integrate with an economy founded on human needs and compassion—a situation exactly opposite of what hierarchies of control and domination create, whether or not they tout ‘democratic’ ideals. In contrast, Inez Aponte proposes “Human Scale Development” (HSD), which is founded in achieving the actualization of human needs.

*Our attempts to meet our needs through systems of control and domination are leading to multiple poverties and even collective pathologies.*

*~ Inez Aponte*

HSD has a lot in common with what others call the ‘wellbeing economy,’ the ‘circular economy,’ and the method of economic ‘degrowth.’ It is clear now that the global corporate autocracy some call ‘globalization’ works only for the financial elites who operate it, and their agents and political lackeys. An [HSD approach](#) should be an integral part of the New Great Transformation that we must undertake to regenerate what we can from the wreckage of plunder capital and disaster capitalism. It all gets down to re-establishing local ecological community as the primary form of social organization.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](#) and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).