

LOOK UP! 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 Latest Word on Words and Things...

It has been, well, a crazy year...again. Suddenly, out of nowhere, everything “drops.” I hear the word displace all manner of other words. “The DOJ *dropped* only a small portion of the ‘Epstein files.’” “The new unemployment report was *dropped* yesterday.” I started a list of these recent word replacements, but why? There are so many. AI “slop” is apparently the ‘word of the year,’ but its origin is clear: AI is not as ‘smart’ as many would assume—powerful yes, smart not so much. Of course, plenty of humans produce verbal slop too. AI is supposed to be totally objective and fact-based. But, the old programming saw, “Garbage in, garbage out!” still applies. I’m not so sure of Moore’s Law anymore though... AI may be at the center of a new Silicon Valley bubble.

What can we learn from this phenomenon? ***Contagion***. So called ‘modern’ people consider themselves rational, grounded in reason and not influenced by the madness of crowds in their personal individualism, with the likely exception of their own ‘tribe.’ They buy clothes that they think make them stand out as a fashion leader. But, oh, everyone else has jumped on the same bandwagon. The ‘dropped’ contagion is just one silly example of how easily many people can be mentally manipulated and are subject to all manner of trivial and also extremely dangerous fads, fashions, and conspiracy theories. Whence this word-fad? Media-talk fashion surge, I suspect.

But contagion goes much further than word-fads or conspiracy theories, which have their own special trajectories and causes. In the U.S., major cultural trends that bear on the future of the nation’s security and safety, in both the near and long term, are created, maintained, and manipulated by those who control the public communications, and especially social media. Now that the American political class and its public media agents have abandoned the climate crisis, we have “[Greenlash](#),” the word *Grist* chose to sum up climate politics for the year 2025. After years of unwarranted climate optimism, now we have Trump’s “all-out assault on his predecessor’s policies, unraveling environmental protections and canceling climate research.” The new trope is “energy dominance,” to reflect the return to fossil-fuel domination of the energy sector. Sadly, it seems to be catching on... Of course, that suggests some piracy on the high seas if Venezuelan oil tankers are spotted. Ahrrr...

We are also led to believe all sorts of stories about our nation's origins and past 'glories,' if not its morally reprehensible forms of destruction, dehumanization, and violence. A few years ago, I wondered about our wars and researched them. It turns out that in the nation's entire history, only a few years passed without our being engaged in some form of war. The 'winning of the West' was a bloody campaign of forced displacement, imprisonment and massacres of the peoples of the first nations. The fascist tendencies of some sectors of American society are not new. The "America First" slogan originated among the American Nazi sympathizers leading up to World War II.

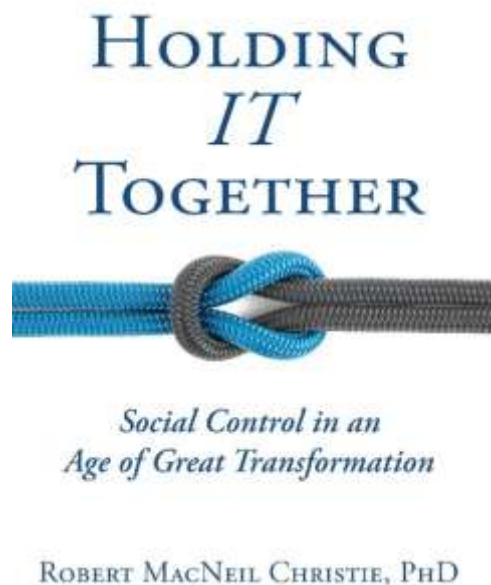
Today, lots of word are being banned from government documents and websites; librarians are being pressured to ban a wide range of books, even some major classics of literature, because they mention or are about homosexuality, the facts of slavery in American history or its implications for continuing racism today, or anything deemed "woke," or may advocate or even discuss diversity, equity, or inclusion ("DEI"). The list goes on, of course. When people are afraid and insecure, either mentally or economically or both, their social skills tend to dissipate and their anger becomes easily manipulated by hucksters and demagogues—output: rage and violence.

The societal utility of diversity, equity, and inclusion, is easily demonstrated of course. Diversity is essential in evolution. Equity and inclusion are at the heart of social solidarity, which is what makes a people strong. But the mongers of fear and hatred will have none of that. Like invoking various other stereotypes, slogans, and buzzwords, ridiculing these values aids in the dehumanization of scapegoats, used in the manipulation of insecure sectors of the population, DEI denigration is infused with racist overtones. Empathy in the minds of sociopaths like Elon Musk, is a sign of weakness, not the strength of character from which it results. Denigration is a political weapon used to turn the people against each other as the demagogue runs off with the loot.

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I know that putting the advert below for ***Holding IT Together*** in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing. I don't charge myself a penny. So, it is a free reminder to buy and read the book. How could I turn that down?

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Published July 26, 2024, and the product of decades of research and reflection, [Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#) explains the global changes that have resulted in the catastrophic convergence of the crises of climate, ecosystems, economies, and politics, and the societal chaos, which we now see intensifying every day. In it, I also describe the deep changes that are necessary in order to effectively head off societal collapse so we can more comfortably shape the New Great Transformation of our institutions and our ways of living necessary in a world of less intensive energy consumption. We *will* transition away from fossil fuels, like it or not, and the sooner and more intentionally the better. Later would be catastrophic. Petroleum products provided great affluence for some for a while, yet are already causing chaos and environmental destruction for everyone.

[“Buy it!”](#) says the author.

Here are excerpts from some prominent editorial reviews:

A dense and sweeping call to change the direction of human society before it’s too late. Still, his core message is strikingly direct and forceful. It’s hard to imagine any reader not being convinced that just such a massive change is necessary. ~ **Kirkus Reviews**

Christie embeds history surrounding social deconstruction and construction with the kinds of modern references that readers will relish...[He] offers an unprecedented opportunity for readers to apply the basics of economic understanding to the major issues facing humanity’s survival today... Hope is embedded throughout his approach. ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Both a wake-up call and a guide, this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike. ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

With the publication of [Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#), by Bear Claw Press, I seek a wide span of possible readers. After all, the book’s content has important implications for the lives of everyone.

If you are a researcher or teacher and would be interested in sending me a short review (two or three paragraphs), or would consider it for use in a class you teach, please go to the [BearClawPress.com](#) website, click on the [Review/Exam Copies](#) tab (upper right) fill in the information, and I will send you a [pdf](#) or [ePub](#) copy free. Also, copies can be bought at a nice discount from the list price at Bear Claw Press.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer rating-review for ***Holding IT Together*** on [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) or Amazon.com. Without a significant number of customer reviews, good or bad, the Amazon algorithm will ignore a book into oblivion, regardless of its quality.

Some have estimated that Amazon.com sells around seventy percent of all books sold. Nevertheless, I hope many who buy ***Holding IT Together*** will do so at their local independent bookstore. Of course, both paper and eBook versions are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) as well as from independent bookstores via [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org). It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, [BearClawPress.com](https://www.bearclawpress.com)

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](https://www.kindleunlimited.com). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com). Or, review and rate *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. You can 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: As always, 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

What Price Liberty?

The American nation is often characterized simply as being composed of individuals who love their liberty above all, and that government taxation is a form of oppression that they hate. As today's featured book, by [Vanessa S. Williamson](https://www.vanessawilliamson.com) demonstrates, the relationship between freedom, democracy, and taxation is far more complicated than that. The form of individualism forced upon American 'consumers' by corporate interests, which control most public and social media, denigrates and discourages social cohesion, the very fabric of a healthy society. In fact, the nation is composed of interacting persons in families, communities, and regions, in which the good of all is intricately tied up with the wellbeing of each member.

But that is not good for corporate sales. Socially isolated insecure fearful individuals make the most prolific consumers. That is one of the corporate benefits of social media. It helps isolate individuals by giving them false online relations with 'like-minded' individuals and bots, encouraging further insecurity and alienation by amplifying fear and hatred. *Alone* is now one of the most concerning conditions of people who spend too much time on their screens. In the 1950s, children spent most of their time outdoors with other children, learning to interact and form friendships in everyday life. Today's kids engage with imaginary others in the form of avatars and illusions of comrades in opposition to what they are caused to fear and hate. That is what generates clicks and enriches 'the Zuck,' and his tech-Bro peers.

When we got our new [Vizsla](#) puppy twelve years ago, we took her with us on a trip to Baja del Sur. We found a deserted beach and she showed us what it means to run (and swim as if she had done it for years). That is when we decided that a daily walk around the block would not do. After all, Vizslas are an ancient Hungarian hunting dog, bred for speed, strength, and stamina. So, I began taking her to the local dog park, where we found many other puppies for her to play with. Now, Vizslas are high energy dogs. ‘Copper’ played with great energy and enthusiasm. She chased and was chased by the other dogs. The only dogs who could outrun her were our friends’ Russian Borzois.

That is when I became aware of the process of canine socialization. As descendants of wolves, dogs ‘play-fight,’ a remnant of the hunt-kill-eat social process in the wild. Our puppies wrestle and try to gain the advantage. The one who ends up on top will often engage in gestures such as wrapping its big jaws around the ‘opponent’s’ throat—a mock kill strike. Well, when I first saw that happen, it became clear that the two dogs had grown to **trust** each other with the fact that this was play, not mortal combat. Dogs have an entire repertoire of signals and behaviors that reflect their evolved social relations. Back when we kids were running around the neighborhood in the 1950s, climbing over back fences, etc., playing hide-and-seek or other ad hoc games, including “war,” we were learning to be social beings too. Pranks and all, we trusted each other. You just can’t accomplish that kind of social process on an Android or iPhone.

Real freedom is all about ‘to,’ more than ‘from.’ Freedom entails collective responsibility to each other, grounded in trust. Americans have always favored ‘taxing ourselves’ to achieve collective goals and social wellbeing. That is what the revolution was about. Self-rule requires self-taxation; the founders understood that.

It is the billionaire class and their propagandists who assure us that the agents in the government are ‘taking our money’ for their own nefarious purposes. Who needs a National Weather Service anyway? Or FEMA. Or SNAP. Or, even the economic fundamentals of the human social contract—which is the basis of any democracy. They are eliminating as many of the functions of government that support the people as they can in order to cut the already mostly avoided taxes on the hugely disproportional incomes of the ultra-wealthy.

The price of liberty is societal self-taxation, in service to the public good: the wellbeing of our families, communities, and therefore our nation. That requires democracy, which is the road to freedom as well. Freedom is gained by democratic self-taxation to pay for the needs of a complex society to share the costs of education, the risks of illness, the threat of natural disasters, the prospect of an economic crash, and the costs of national security. Tax breaks for mega-billionaires will never get us anything but more poverty, especially when the rest of us are made to pay for their obscene wealth. Nor will the illusions of extreme individualism lead to success in a complex world.

Ever since the clearances of the Scottish Highland commons early in the industrial revolution, the social cohesion of community had been denigrated as well as dissipated in the onslaught of industrialization and the wage labor it demands, in opposition to the mutual aid inherent in the social solidarity of community. It is the same mutual trust that dogs learn at play that binds humans together in the bonds of social cohesion. That mutual trust is being systematically demolished by today’s neo-fascist pretenders to absolute power. The frantic consumerism and

its forced togetherness of ritual profligate buying and 'gifting' (another strange word) belies a hollow commonality we are rapidly losing.

Beneath the political and social chaos, the cultural arm of the technosphere of modern industrial-consumer economies, keeps pressuring humans to remain isolated and alienated from each other in order to keep their attention on their 'duties' as laborers and consumers. As Heather Menzies so eloquently expresses, the human need to [reclaim our commons](#) for the common good, must overcome the very same global political economy that is destroying the bond between us and between us and Nature itself. Our children's lives will depend on whether we choose the radical path to replace the chaos by creating an ecological civilization, or not.

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Today's Featured Image:

Santa is the icon of annual harmony and abundance...



Yet, the public political discourse is filled with fear, hatred, and promotion of violence..

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Together with Ray Madoff's "[Why the Rich Don't pay Taxes](#)," today's featured book portrays the key financial ingredient in the economic soup that tastes so good to neo-fascist pretenders to legitimate power, while blatantly denying our commonality. Vanessa Williamson argues forcefully that self-taxation is the key to democracy. She demonstrates that self-taxation was at the heart of the American Revolution, and that failing taxation systems are a hallmark of totalitarian regimes, which is where we are headed.

[Vanessa S. Williamson. *The Price of Democracy: The Revolutionary Power of Taxation in American History*. New York: Basic Books.](#)

Since in democracies, the people authorize the government to tax them in order to achieve goals set democratically, politicians have an incentive to carry out those goals by spending the revenue received from the public. If they fail to do so, they can be removed from office. Now, that is the ideal; while we see ourselves as a democracy, we are moving further and further from the ideal. Too many factors, like corporate-controlled propaganda and money defined as free speech, interfere with the democratic taxation process. As a result, we currently have what amounts to a totalitarian taxation system that rewards the super-rich, destroys government functions, and taxes the people to pay for the plunder.

Quotable Quotes

I am old enough to remember the 1950s, when we had a serious progressive income tax system. The marginal tax rate (the rate of taxation on additional income above an initial very high income) was as high as **91%** for most of the decade, for incomes above \$200,000- for individuals and \$400,000- for couples filing jointly. Of course, \$200,000- then was equivalent to about \$2,409,000- in today's dollars. Nobody needs more than two million dollars to live extremely well. That nearly two and a half million was and is received in large part because of the availability of deep national infrastructure required for modern income production—paid for by 'tax-payer dollars.' It is **our** East Wing that the tyrant destroyed at our expense.

Free countries are high-tax countries. Why? Governments that are dependent on taxation have reason to listen to their Citizens... Progressive taxation can directly reduce inequality.

~ Vanessa S. Williamson

Back in the 1950s, when the political debates did not worry over the progressive tax system, the government had the revenue to pay for the programs that democracy called for. While far from perfect, the political system had not yet imposed most of the many loopholes that today allow billionaires to manipulate most of their income to be defined as non-taxable. This has resulted in ever increasing inequality as billionaires garnered the vast majority of new income. The level of inequality is now about where it was in 1929 as the Great Depression was just beginning. Combined with the elimination of progressive tax rates, of course we have a huge national debt, consistent with an extremely distorted system of taxation. As [Madoff](#) points out, resolving the problem is far too complicated to be effectively subjected to a 'quick fix' like a wealth tax. We need to eliminate all those exceptions that the super-rich had their congressional lackeys enter into the tax code over decades of ascending to ultimate power.

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See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, say hello to a neighbor or stranger, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](https://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [*Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*](#).