

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

Debt, Delusion, and Deceit. The occasional ritual of facing the so-called ‘debt ceiling’ is upon us again—this time in MAGA spades. The sequence: first, Congress passes a new debt ceiling, ostensibly to allow previously incurred debts that are about to exceed the previous debt ceiling to be paid, thereby avoiding default. Then a year or two passes, the Congress legislates the spending of money on various things with both regular revenue and debt incurred by the treasury issuing bonds. Eventually, new debt comes close to catching up with the last ‘ceiling’ passed. So, a new debt-ceiling crisis occurs, which requires that a new debt-ceiling be set, in order to avoid the federal government defaulting on its obligations, which by the way, is prohibited by the fourteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

What’s the point? Well, there isn’t one really. The Congress regularly sets itself up for symbolic failure by setting limits that it cannot sustain. Depending on which party is in the majority, this may or may not result in another congressional game of ‘Chicken.’

The U.S. had no debt ceiling before 1917, and not much debt. The debt ceiling was routinely raised for many years to resolve current imbalances between revenue and disbursements. From March 1962 to May 2011, Congress elevated the debt ceiling 74 times (18 times under Ronald Reagan, whose policies buried the nation in new debt, eight times under Bill Clinton, seven times under George W. Bush, and five times under Barack Obama, according to Wikipedia).

Under Trump, the national debt ceiling rose by almost \$7.8 TRILLION dollars. About \$2.3 trillion of that was directly due to his gigantic tax cuts for the super-rich and mega corporations. Republican Senate leader Mitch “McConnell has voted to increase or suspend the debt limit 32 times, including thrice under Trump, who added \$7.8 trillion to the debt...” according to the Washington Post.

Now, the self-righteous MAGA Republicans in the House are trying to extort massive cuts to the programs that President Biden was able to pass in his first two years of office, as if all that debt accumulated over decades was entirely the fault of the Democrats now in Congress. Under Trump, the super-rich got a windfall and the rest of us (the nation) got to take on more debt.

Bottom line: The debt limit has nothing to do with future spending. The debt ceiling has become a scam, increasingly used to terrorize Democratic presidents like Obama and Biden. It is perpetuated by the forces in Congress who are dedicated to shrinking the government in all areas that do not directly contribute to the corporate and personal wealth of their mega-donors. Section 4 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states:

“The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned.”

I fail to see how an after-the-fact-of-debt “ceiling” on previously incurred U.S. debt can be legitimate in this context. The debt ceiling is a political mechanism that corporate agents in Congress use to leverage against “government spending” of any kind not in their interests. They play it, of course, as a way to instill ‘fiscal responsibility’ and avoid ‘wasteful spending,’ even as they continue to pitch the idea of further massive cuts to the taxes that corporations and wealthiest people in the nation like to avoid, cuts they claim are ‘necessary’ to stimulate economic growth. The trickle-down theory of financial hierarchy has never worked and never will. The plutocrats simply pocket the money, buy back stock to drive up share value, and hide their excessive bounty in secret foreign accounts.

Whose Debt and Whose Wealth. Here are a few results of some recent fact checking:

- * U.S. Wage Growth Fails To Keep Up With Rising Prices For 17 Consecutive Months (forbes.com)
- * America is Becoming a Nation of Renters | 37th Parallel (37parallel.com) Private equity funds now own nearly 40% of residential housing.
- * Housing affordability collapses at fastest clip on record (axios.com)
- * Household debt soars at fastest pace in 15 years as credit card use surges, Fed report says (cnbc.com)

The list goes on... These are just some of the indicators of the severe concentration of wealth in the world today and the resulting debt for ordinary people. The so-called [Davos Men](#), the richest (mostly old white) men in the world, the hedge fund operators and owners of the largest private equity funds and corporations, and their economic and political agents, meet at the elite resort of Davos, Switzerland, as members of the World Economic Forum. The WEF presents the super-rich as noble benefactors of humanity. In fact, most are modern day pirates without the swashbuckling, devouring the world for fun and profit.

These titans of finance bought up vast amounts of housing around the world during the 2008-9 global financial collapse and during the COVID-19 pandemic, drove up rents, foreclosed on mortgages, and generally leveraged their wealth to bleed the public to the breaking point. The concentration of wealth in the hands of self-serving financial elites today is greater than it was

just before the Great Depression of 1929. The center cannot hold. All this is directly related to the growth in disconnection, mistrust, desperation, discord, and political violence in society.

Publishing Plan Updated Update. As previously mentioned, my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, is taking a new more accessible form; the first volume of the Edge of Illusion Trilogy, is now complete. ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Era of Great Transformation***, will be published in the next few months.

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

Trust and Connection in a Disintegrating Society. It has been going on for a very long time. The difference now is that we are approaching a level of societal disintegration that is far more extreme than we might have imagined just a decade or two ago.

One could recite countless instances of dehumanized behavior toward others and the general lack of genuine connection between people in the culture of industrial modernism. Just the other night came a news report of a homeless man who was having mental issues being strangled to death via a choke-hold by a former Marine, as the other passengers on the subway car looked on and did nothing. Later, the attorney for the victim's family pleaded to the public that when they see someone who seems disturbed, to ask him/her if there is anything they can do to help. I am afraid that fear and 'othering'—maybe even loathing—will be stronger in most cases than will be compassion.

Fear and loathing seem to go together. Hunter Thompson's wild metaphor applied to both the 1972 presidential [campaign](#) and a drug-addled road trip to [Las Vegas](#), reflected a deep cultural malady that pervades the American experience and has for many decades. The difference is that today it has reached its peak expression in a general detachment from anyone who is not part of one's immediate group. On top of that, the consumer culture tells us all that we are personally entitled to everything the marketers can talk us into wanting, and that we have no responsibility other than to keep consuming. The unfortunate result is that personal identity is too closely dependent on the external economy and not on one's personal relationships with significant others.

Who do you trust? Most likely, only those who are part of your immediate circle of persons with whom you regularly interact—and probably not all of them. And, that close personal contact itself had become much more rare. After all, who trusts all the people they have contact with on their job? And, who in your ‘community’ do you have deep enough relations with to fully trust?

The recent wave of assaults on school board members and election poll workers all over the country reflects the growing distrust of almost everyone by growing extremist segments of society. The overall level of trust in any society directly reflects how well people are connected to each other with trust in their everyday lives, and the extent to which those connections exist in political opposition to other groups in society.

One of the most important implications of the weakening of the relations of trust and connection involves how we are or are not capable of coordinating and cooperating in all of our interests in surviving the end of the industrial era. The rise of the Anthropocene epoch is not in the forefront of most people’s minds.

After all, everyone alive today has lived our entire lives in the relatively stable climate conditions of the eleven thousand years or so of the Holocene epoch, which provided the environmental stability that was so conducive to the growth and development of humans from a small insignificant species to *the* dominant force on the planet.

First, of course, most folks have no idea that the industrial era is nearing its end. But all the signs are there. A destabilizing climate and disintegrating ecosystems around the world confront us now, not just in the distant future as some still feel compelled to believe. Severe impacts of climate instability are already causing major disruptions in crop production in various parts of the world, typically in areas where people have contributed the least to the carbon emissions that have heated the planet and caused those disruptions.

Second, the governments of the world have for a long time primarily served the interests of economic growth and capital accumulation by the investor class. The culture of the corporate state is so wired to economic growth for capital accumulation that it is oblivious to the obvious and unequivocal evidence of the damage to the Earth System that economic growth has already caused. Its leaders seem incapable of adjusting their worldview to account for the emerging climate-ecological emergency. To rely on ‘global leaders’ to avoid climate catastrophe is a fool’s game characterized by their frequent dissembling and delay. The Earth System cannot take much more damage without experiencing catastrophic collapse. We cannot wait for our so-called leaders.

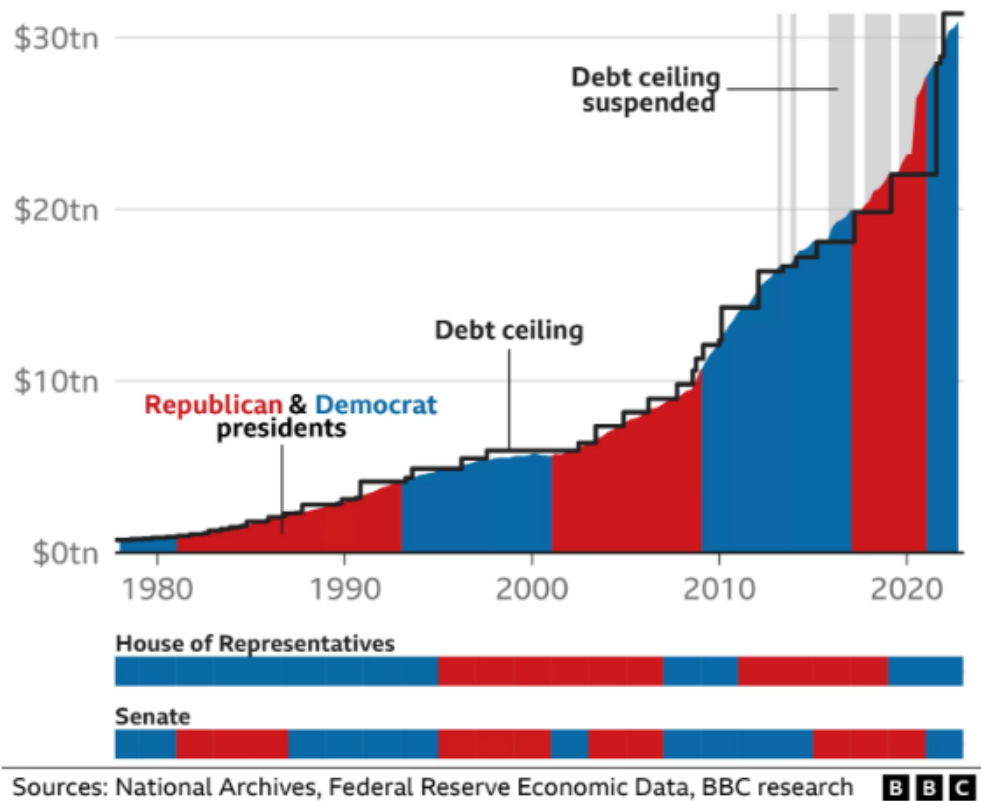
At the same time, the corporate control of mass communications keeps most people on track with the terminal strategy of the political economy of industrial consumerism. In the process, the same trend has forced the growing societal and cultural disintegration that people often express in political discord, increasingly accompanied by armed violence. The seeds of fascism grow daily.

The prospects for humanity are not encouraging, unless 'we the people' organize ourselves to transform the way we live in order to achieve harmony with the very same Earth System that has sustained us for thousands of years before the system of industrial capital produced affluence for many but is sending us all off the ecological rails.

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of this and actually related matters, go to various posts at: <https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today's Featured Image:

US debt has risen regardless of administration



This chart represents the steady rise of the national debt under both Republican and Democratic administrations. All the political posturing means nothing when we look at the facts.

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

When the new report from the U.S. Surgeon General on loneliness in America was released, I read some commentaries on it, then skimmed the report itself. Sure enough, it lacked any discussion of the most important factor. Nevertheless, it was chock full of valuable information about the processes and problems of the increasingly common crisis of loneliness in America.

Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A. 2023. *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

The report discussed a variety of 'proximate causes,' that is, the social, economic, and environmental conditions that seem to produce increased rates of loneliness and disconnection. It talked of civic engagement, community safety, economic prosperity, and a variety of other conditions that lead to more or less loneliness and isolation.

However, what was missing—and what I had not actually expected to find in reviewing such a government report—is any discussion of the larger changes that have occurred in the political economy as our industrial-consumer society drags people further apart. Those forces make people more and more individually dependent on large faceless institutions, from corporations to governmental agencies to schools and prisons. Really, to address loneliness and isolation in America will require that we face the growing disintegration of social relations under industrial modernity.

Quotable Quotes

Terry Tempest Williams is one of the great American naturalists and defenders of the planet's wild places as well as human sanity. Here, she raises the seemingly simple question that almost nobody wants to face. More and more people know at some visceral level that things cannot go on like this for much longer. But we have so little in the way of cultural resources to help us reflect on what is really important for our actual lives.

How then shall we live?"

~ Terry Tempest Williams

The so-called 'lifestyle' of industrial-consumer modernity cannot continue much longer; it was founded on a lie that had for a while the power to look like the truth. We have many choices, far more than we are led to believe. The important choices are not between which consumer products and services to buy; instead, they involve the struggle to find a path to living an authentic life. That means recognizing our own nature and its relation to the natural world of which we are a part, then taking the actions we need to become our authentic selves.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).