

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

Everything Everywhere All At Once? Well, okay, I haven't seen the movie yet, just the trailer and Christiane Amanpour's interview with Michelle Yeoh, a very smart seasoned actor whose performance has gotten her some rave reviews. It seems well worth the genre-bending experience it portends.

The title came to mind as I reflected on the global, regional, and local happenings in the past couple of weeks, and months too. It seems as if everything is coming at us from everywhere all at the same time. That makes it hard to focus and hold onto a sense of a relatively stable world in which to live. But, of course, the instability of the world we live in grows daily.

The other day, Russian "authorities" arrested another brave Russian opposition politician, Vladimir Kara-Murza, found him guilty of treason and sentenced him to 25 years in prison for speaking critically about the tyrant Vladimir Putin's criminal war on Ukraine. (I put "authorities" in quotes because authority is defined as *legitimate* power, and how can I consider Putin's autocratic power-by-force legitimate? That notion applies to many other political authorities as well.)

Royalty is an archaic form of authority, some of which survives today. The show where Steven Colbert interviewed Prince Harry aired last Friday night; I guess he was on a book tour for his tell-all memoir, *Spare*, the title of which refers to his secondary status in the royal family of England, among other things, told from exile in Santa Barbara. Of course, an honest expose of the royal family from within was unheard of until this prodigal son and his mixed-race former-actress wife Meghan Markle were driven out of the palace by those arcane insular rules of family secrecy, insular elitism, tabloid press manipulation, prejudice, and psychological ostracism of anyone who dares to deviate. Harry was quite insightful—some would say embarrassingly honest. After years of struggle after the death of his mother, Diana, Princess of Wales—another outsider within the palace—when he was only twelve, followed by his escape into the camaraderie of warfare, where he could find a place of his own, he faced royal

rejection of his wife and a major falling out with his brother. The whole idea of royalty and all its pretenses in the twenty-first century seems so bizarre. It's archaic culture is truly perverse today.

I have no problem with prosecuting former presidents, or incumbents for that matter, as long as the wheels of justice turn on the evidence and the law. That, of course, is hard to accomplish in this toxic political climate where the MAGA extremists treat every action that does not conform to their twisted ideology as the weaponization of whatever to 'get them'—the paranoid style of American politics lives on. If anything is a case of weaponization, it is a federal politician (Jim Jordan) turning a supposed legislative investigation into a, dare I say, a witch hunt attacking a local New York attorney general for prosecuting a case where a grand jury found probable cause for an indictment. Of course, they didn't complain when Trump's fixer-agent, who rolled over for the prosecution, was convicted of the same crime.

Then there is poor Merrick Garland, trying to re-establish the Department of Justice as an independent law enforcement institution amid all the MAGA craziness and plethora of prosecutorial opportunities, which inevitably makes him look weak as he bends over backward assigning special prosecutors to demonstrate DOJ independence from politics. He will continue being demonized no matter what he does, just like Anthony Fauci and the CDC.

Then, of course, the latest report from the IPCC, [*AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023*](#), was devastating in its implications, if decades late... *“Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people (high confidence). Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected (high confidence).”* Well, anyone who has followed the field has known all this for quite a while. Certainty is as strong as it gets, as new data comes in and scientists factor it into forecasts of near-term conditions. Yet it is not a primary topic for political discussion, especially in the nations causing most of the carbon emissions.

Now, it is likely that we will fail to meet the limit of keeping average global temperatures below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. That will mean widespread climate chaos, starvation and resource wars. *“Global GHG emissions in 2030 implied by nationally determined contributions (NDCs) announced by October 2021 make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century and make it harder to limit warming below 2°C.”*

Remember, for decades the IPCC estimates have undershot the actual changes shown by later data. They have also factored into their forecasts unproven capital-intensive, energy-intensive technologies like 'direct air carbon capture' devices that would, even if feasible and deployed in very large numbers, make a tiny dent in the atmospheric CO₂, and take decades to develop, manufacture, and deploy. That would be far too little much too late. Yet it would be a welcome

distraction for the delusional ‘eco-modernists.’ Only massive social-economic transformation will stave off societal collapse.

Meanwhile, the MAGA-extremists in Congress try to extort the reversal of Biden’s modest climate mitigation and adaptation legislation in the Inflation Reduction Act by refusing to pass a debt-ceiling increase without those draconian steps.

The debt ceiling, of course, is a political illusion, a symbolic restriction on “wasteful spending” that if exceeded would force the nation to go into default, causing extreme economic chaos for the nation and the global financial system. Strangely, it is a limit today on debt the same congress obligated itself to in the past—money previously borrowed and already spent.

Now, don’t go thinking that the crumbling American culture has nothing to do with widespread violence and the Great American Gun Fetish. Any time a culture is disintegrating, levels of confusion, chaos, anxiety, fear, and hatred increase. In the fear engendered by the pandemic, gun stores sold out, largely resulting from people who never owned a gun before buying up the inventory; that tells you something about the gun-image penetration of the broader culture. However, the causes of gun violence are twofold: the *necessary* condition is the availability of guns to any and all, regardless of mental or criminal capability; the *sufficient* condition is the mental/moral/behavioral propensities of persons who are compelled to obtain guns in order to use them on other human beings. In that regard, we are in bloody free-fall. Twisted projections of the second amendment to claim absolute license without conditions are merely a reflection of that same cultural disintegration...They have nothing to do with the Constitution. But they do correlate with other oppressive trends such as accelerating organized book banning and the denial of a woman’s control over her body by legislators ignorant of biology and natality, threatening the lives of women experiencing miscarriages and other prenatal complications by making doctors practicing elements of obstetrics a crime.

The list goes on...

Publishing Plan Updated Update. With my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, taking a new more accessible form, the first volume of the Edge of Illusion Trilogy, is complete. I expect to hear from the publisher interested in ***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Era of Great Transformation***, sometime in the first half of May, after they finish reviewing the proposal and sample chapters.

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 Conundrum of a Crumbling Culture. Maybe it is the fact that the United States of American consists of a multiplicity of cultural strains that have evolved from the various waves of immigration since the arrival of the earliest settlers on the Mayflower of our national mythology. Or, maybe it is the multiple forces of chaos and instability that we face today. Either way, the nation experiences a cultural crumbling right when we need nothing more than unity of a coherent worldview and clear purpose in response to the destabilization of the Earth System itself.

We definitely do have regional differences, including significant variation in outlook, attitudes, and practices. Colin Woodard's excellent recounting of the "eleven rival regional cultures of North America," in his book, *American Nations*, makes clear that people who "think they are white"—as Ta-Nehisi Coates and James Baldwin before him put it—do not understand either biological or cultural evolution, or American history either.

It is unfortunate, but understandable given the short memory and constrained education of many Americans, that such simplistic and self-serving notions exist as the racist idea of "real Americans" held by white nationalists, 'preppers,' and self-appointed militiamen. These folks fancy themselves the original Americans, it would seem, just because Europeans conquered the original inhabitants of the continent, the many tribes of Native Americans who the invaders massacred or sequestered in 'reservations.' To them, Patriotism consists of loyalty to the myths that the USA is a 'White Christian Nation,' and that recent and current immigrants have instigated a plot to 'replace us' with the darker skinned 'races' of the global south.

Now, the current cultural disintegration is a very complex matter, and just pointing to one factor does little more than scratch the surface. After all, the current crop of racists, conspiracy theorists, MAGA-Q-anon fanatics, and anti-Semites are all part of a complex of disaffection and disenchantment that has been part of the American cultural landscape for many decades.

Some call this collection of misanthropes 'populists,' but they are mistaken, despite the fact that the term was captured by business elites to become a dominant trope expressing a fear and loathing of popular uprising of groups resisting oppression. The characteristics of the pseudo-populists are precisely opposite of the actual American populists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The worldview of the original populists was inclusive and their ideology focused on education, living wages for all, and resistance to the oppressive rule of the bankers who were manipulating agricultural markets and squeezing farmers with debt and suppressed prices for their crops. As conditions of life for average Americans deteriorate, we need *actual* populists today.

Populists were closely aligned with the Democratic Party before it went corporate as a result of its struggles to find an ideological center at the end of the New Deal response to the Great

Depression. They were, in fact, advocates for the people, the exact opposite of the neo-fascists today's talking heads call populist, even as they serve the interests of financial elites. Thomas Frank makes this clear in his history of American populism and its opponents, *The People, NO: A Brief History of Anti-Populism*, featured in Volume 1, number 11 of this newsletter, which is available in the archive at thehopefulrealist.com.

We could cite many individual and group symptoms of the crumbling of American culture, even though the culture varies in content and outlook. A certain level of tension has always existed between the regional variants of American culture, as so clearly described by Woodard in *American Nations*. The very rise of the racist extremism, conspiracy cults, and the amplified "paranoid style" in politics all point to a loss of trust that is almost universal.

The growing ambiguity and confusion over gender identity reflects mistrust of traditional categories of identity as well as the hardening of traditional categories by the fearful. It also engenders fear and hatred aimed at anyone who deviates from 'normal.' The paranoid reaction to LGBTQ+ people reflects the fear and loathing of difference and the 'othering'—essentially dehumanization of the 'other'—that characterize a culture where trust and respect for others have become so scarce. The demonization of all Democrats as pedophiles and 'groomers' arises from the same social malady as does the wave of persecutory legislation in several states attacking gender affirming medical care, and legislative actions—so clearly exposed in Tennessee—denying the voice of the people who are fed up with the political gun-fetish.

The cult of American Individualism has generated immense economic power for a few, while isolating so many from family, community, and a sense of belonging beyond a tenuous attachment to a corporate job. On top of all that, we all now experience massive changes in the world beyond the experience of corporate commodification of our souls. These new changes engulf the whole world in environmental chaos and political, economic, and cultural confusion. Only the reconnection of people in groups with a common interest in shaping community has a chance to fix that.

For more Hopeful Realist discussions of this and actually related matters, go to:

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

Today's Featured Image:

Regional Variants of North America's Crumbling Culture



This map depicts the rough boundaries of North America's diverse cultural regions, based on the patterns of immigration since the original thirteen colonies, culminating in a geography of cultural traits remain largely intact, even as industrial modernism dominates the land.

Source: Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2011

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

I read *American Nations* a couple of years ago. It had a profound effect because it explained so much about 'the American character' and clarified the relations among all its diverse variants. It illuminated so many of today's cultural and political problems by tracing much of their origins to the rivalries of the diverse cultural groups out of which the American nation arose.

Colin Woodard. 2011. *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*. New York: Penguin Books.

I used to hate history; all those names of generals, conquistadors, royalty, and the dates of battles meant nothing to me—I would have rather gone surfing. Then in grad school, for whatever reason, I took a class in pre-revolution Russian literature, having nothing, it would

seem, to do with my field of study: sociology. But that seminar was all about the Russian culture as expressed by some of its earliest writers. Oh, the angst of the Russian soul! That experience changed my outlook on the value of history.

American Nations does not focus on literature; its primary focus is on the evolution of American culture and its sometimes-conflicting regional variants, and the impacts of diverse waves of immigrants from (mostly European) nations. The U.S. expanded from a few British colonies along the East coast to its achievement of an imagined “Manifest Destiny” by conquering all the land west to the Pacific Ocean, then looking beyond to project its power. The diversity of the American population, expressed in its regional cultures, made the US and Canada what they are today. In the process, it produced a great deal of creativity and a significant amount of conflict and suffering as well.

Quotable Quotes

Chris Hedges, the Pulitzer Prize winning former *New York Times* foreign correspondent, who resigned after receiving a reprimand from *The Times* for publicly criticizing the Iraq war in 2003, knows from whence he speaks. And he has been very outspoken about the US imperial adventures around the world as well as the growing fascist tendencies in the ‘homeland.’ His work exposes the social illusions under which Americans struggle.

We refuse to ask the right questions because these questions expose a stark truth—we cannot continue to live as we are living.

~ Chris Hedges

In several books, including *Death of the Liberal Class*, *Empire of Illusion*, and *Days of Destruction and Revolt*, among others, Hedges has railed against the darkest elements of American culture and politics, which perpetuate the illusions of American exceptionalism. He has spoken from the direct experience as a war correspondent and from the perspective of a strong religious education and tradition.

More recently, Hedges has taught college courses in drama, philosophy, and history to prisoners in East Jersey State Prison, drawing out the meaning of inmates’ personal histories in service to their personal transformation. His latest book, *Our Class: Trauma and Transformation in an American Prison*, relates his experience in deep conversation with men, some of whom have graduated from Rutgers University while incarcerated, even those with life sentences. His students have expressed the grief and suffering they and their families have endured, as well as their hopes and dreams, in plays they wrote in his classes and even produced, such as “Caged,” which ran to sold out audiences at Passage Theater in Trenton, NJ, before being published. These are our nation’s discarded souls.

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