

The Historical and Ideological Roots of US Voter Exclusion: An Integral Examination of the Myth of US Democracy

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Abstract: This article examines voter rights, voter exclusion, and democracy in the US from historical and ideological perspectives. The contention is that voter exclusion is not the issue but a symptom of larger problems of the anti-democratic institutions of separation (dominator hierarchies), including nationalism (e.g., white supremacy and Christian nationalism), militarism, imperialism, and imperial capitalism. Voter exclusion, particularly aimed at Black and other non-white people, and their allies, and the suppression of democracy are traced through four eras: the establishment of the US 1600s-1850s), emancipation and Jim Crow (1865-1930s), protest movements (late 1940s-1990s), and Trumpism (21st Century-present). A continuity in extensive voter exclusion and anti-democratic policies and practices, and the rise the US as the dominant imperial power is demonstrated. Problems are both systemic and ontological. Thus, a multi-pronged integral approach for democratizing US society is proposed. Essential to this approach is ideological paradigm shifts in politics, economics, philosophy, science, and spirituality.

Keywords: Democratic myths, equity, heterarchies, institutions of separation, paradigm shifts, voter exclusion.

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Introduction

This article examines the history and evolution of voting rights, voter exclusion, and the establishment of democracy in the US as underlaid by the ideologies of the institutions of separation (dominator hierarchies). Institutional white supremacy is not the only link to voter exclusion but is the primary one and is used as the exemplar to address larger issues. In this article, separation refers to the rank ordering of people along a line of superior to inferior resulting in advantages for some and injustices for others and is anti-democratic. Rank-ordering is ubiquitous, excessive, and obsessive in US culture but cannot and should not be completely eliminated as explained in this article. Separation is an ontological force in human evolution. But in the manifest world of duality, there are also uniting evolutionary forces at work. There are many models of

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participatory democracy, theoretical and actual and there are organizations and movements that help enact and promote them.

Yet today institutions of separation are more prevalent, more stable, and less understood, and unacknowledged because “America denies its night side until it breaks right through” (West, 2018). It is the night side that this article casts light on because individual and collective shadows can be integrated when brought to our awareness without judgment (Wilber, 2017). As Eckhart Tolle (2006) noted: “Awareness is the greatest agent for change.” Such transparency is essential for democracy. Paradoxically, challenges can be opportunities for advancement through perseverance and resilience (Duckworth, 2016; Malebranche, 2022; Masten, 2014). Thus, this article’s message is not one of condemnation, fear, guilt, nor despair but one of honesty, awareness, reconciliation, love, and hope.

Voting rights, voter exclusion, and democracy were prominent topics for the forefathers writing the US constitution and remain so today. Suffrage is touted as a hallmark of US democracy and voter exclusion is seen as unfortunate but justified. The right to vote is an important aspect of democracy. Thus, being excluded from voting denies a basic right. However, how *decision-making* is distributed at all levels of society and in all institutions, not just political, is *the* major determinant of a democratic society. Therefore, voter exclusion is not the primary issue, rather it is a symptom of broader, deeper, and more systemic issues. Exclusion here means the exclusion from voting opportunity, from diverse voting choices, and from participating in decision making that impacts everyone. At the same time, rights and freedoms must be balanced with responsibility and accountability, along with fair and equitable laws and enforcement mechanisms. While more people today have the right to vote, democratic decision making is in other ways more suppressed and denied. Governance and political decisions have become increasingly in the hands of the wealthy and powerful elite (Gautney, 2022).

This article maps out how voting rights and voter exclusion have evolved through periods in US history: from its founding (1600s-1850s) to emancipation and Jim Crow (1865-1930s), the protest movements (late 1940-1990s), and Trumpism (2000s-present). Despite some advances in political participation, the exclusion of certain citizens – especially non-white people and those living in poverty – remains mostly unchanged. The article also examines the structures of separation that have enabled this exclusion and the myths of US democracy that have perpetuated them. The inescapable conclusion is that the political system and all structures of inequality are beyond repair. Replacing them begins with an understanding of how and why these institutions – that oppose people’s own best interests – persist. Elucidating the meanings of equality and the obsession of rank ordering is also necessary. These analyses lead to an outline of a multi-pronged integral approach for democratizing US society. Essential to this approach is ideological paradigm shifts in politics, economics, philosophy, science, and spirituality.

Establishment of the United States (1600s-1850s)

Two major world events largely shaped the first 300 years leading to the establishment of the US. First as of 1807, four out of every five people who came from the Old World to the New came from Africa (ten million), chained in the belly of ships, not free on the decks (Baptist, 2014, p. 41). The huddled masses of Ireland, Italy, and Russia came later. Second, was the death of millions of

the hemisphere's indigenous population. From enslavement and genocide emerged the dominant empires: Spain, France, Portugal, and Britain. After extracting the gold and silver, they found even greater wealth by building plantation colonies of sugar and cotton – many small in size but huge in economic and political significance (Baptist, 2014). Without these events, the US may never have risen as an economic power nor later as the predominant global military hegemon. The US won its political freedom from British control but not from its imperial influence. The Revolutionary War allowed the US to continue its territorial expansion and maintain slavery. The Spanish-American War of 1898 resulted in the acquisition of Islands from the Atlantic (Cuba) to the far reaches of the Pacific Ocean (The Philippines).

Political scientist and Constitutional scholar Robert Ovetz (2022, p. 1; see also Fresia, 1988 for a clear explanation) details how the 39 wealthy white men who signed the US Constitution designed “a virtual unchangeable system:” a republic based upon anti-democratic capitalism of elite property owners, making “majority rule the exception not the rule.” Ovetz states (2022):

The electoral college, our bicameral Congress, supremacy power, executive veto, the Interstate commerce clause, the President, treaty making, and the high threshold to amend the Constitution, among many other features, are all part of the reason why the Constitution impedes political democracy and prevents economic democracy. (p. 2)

The US Constitution has the appearance of participation but leaves final control in the few elite white male capitalists, i.e., men not unlike themselves. So, why would they devise anything else? All of the founding fathers supported enslavement, and most were themselves enslavers. Some served in the British Imperial Government. Thus, at the very beginning only a small minority of the population had voting rights in the Republic.

Voting rights in this era were only granted to white male landowners, as they were seen as the ones to have responsibility and control of their household and family – both as a political and religious duty. White men owning properties were expected to maintain order and ensure that the existing social systems and institutions were not challenged. On the other hand, white men without land, who had to labor for others, were deemed unworthy of the same rights.

The right to vote posed a dilemma: while it was essential to the republic, it was to be limited to a select few. This ran counter to the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence, which declared that “all men [sic] are created equal.” Despite this, the writers of the document supported and engaged in slavery, thereby contradicting the ideals of equality that they espoused.

Rather than take responsibility for voting requirements, power was delegated to the states. Most of the states restricted the right to vote to property-owning or tax-paying white men (about 6% of the population). Some states, however, allowed Black men to vote, and New Jersey also included unmarried and widowed women, regardless of color. Still, by 1777, all the states had passed laws that revoked women's right to vote. Over time, the laws changed due to the men's and later the women's suffrage movements. The 1828 presidential election was the first one in which non-property-holding white men could vote in most of the states. The last state to abolish property qualifications was North Carolina in 1856 (see the 400 Year Timeline).

Contrary to other nation-states, the status of someone born in the US depended on that of their mother. This was a departure from English tradition, which dictated that a child's status followed that of the father. This law had dire implications for Black women, as it incentivized their white enslavers to rape them. In 1682, a law was enacted that made interracial marriage punishable by imprisonment, and similar laws in other colonies prohibited or limited marriage between white and Black people (Hanna-Jones, et al., 2021, p. 41).

The 8th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed in 1789 outlawing cruel and unusual punishment. However, this has often been violated, particularly when it comes to the treatment of Blacks and other non-whites, such as with minor offenses and voting rights during the height of Jim Crow (Lofgren, 2014; Woodfox, 2019). As in all master-slave relationships, both sides were filled with fear: slave rebellions only increased the fear of white enslavers, leading to violent reactions and further oppression. These rebellions, which began during this time, have continued into subsequent eras (see Baptist, 2014; Bloom & Martin, 2016; Kivel, 2017; Maher, 2022).

Emancipation and Jim Crow Era (1865-1930s)

Three events highlighted this time in US history: the Civil War, Federal Civil rights followed by State Jim Crow Laws and lynching, mass violence, and new forms of enslavement. For many politicians the primary purpose of the Civil War was to hold the union together and not for giving full citizenship rights to the enslaved Blacks. This was the attitude of Abraham Lincoln and even more so for Andrew Johnson, his successor (Anderson, 2017). They favored sending former slaves out of the country or at least segregating them. In a careful reading of history, Anderson (2017) and others make it clear that the struggle for full citizenship and freedom for the enslaved and others gave way to the welcoming back of those who fought to succeed. The ideology supporting acts of enslavement remained not only in the south but in much of the north as well. Political power remained in the hands of the states versus the Federal Government as shown by the ineffectiveness of the newly enacted Amendments to the Constitution.

Three Amendment were passed: the 13th (1865) outlawed slavery (except as a punishment for a crime), the 14th (1868) established citizenship for all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and the 15th declared that “the rights of citizens of the US to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude.” To ensure their implementation, laws under the Force Act were passed in 1871 giving the federal government sweeping authorization, including the use of the military against groups in violation of the laws. With the passage of these Amendments some progress towards granting civil rights to the formerly enslaved was made, yet Southern states still implemented literacy tests, poll taxes, and other laws known as Black Codes, designed to keep newly freed people from exercising their rights and to prevent Blacks and poor whites from voting. Further, in the contested election in 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes become President in exchange for withdrawing the federal troops from the South effectively ending Reconstruction. What arose was a new era of mob violence, systemic segregation, and exclusion (Anderson, 2017; Balko, 2013; Hannah-Jones, 2021).

Acts of voter exclusion continued when in 1876 the US Supreme Court ruled that Native Americans were ineligible to vote as they were non-citizens, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 did the same for Chinese Americans. Then in 1896, in *Plessy vs Ferguson* the Supreme Court

ruled that “separate but equal” facilities were considered sufficient to satisfy the 14th Amendment. It was not until 1920 that the 19th Amendment was passed granting women the right to vote.

Yet the biggest threat to the establishment of democracy for all citizens was the emergence of white supremacist groups who resorted to violence and intimidation when Blacks began exercising their full rights and political power, thereby threatening the white power structure. Numerous massacres have been documented for example, the Opelousas Massacre in Louisiana in 1868 saw nearly 250 Blacks killed for protesting the Black Codes, and the Wilmington Massacre of 1898 in North Carolina, when a mob of 2000 white supremacists vandalized businesses and homes, murdered Black citizens, and forced the mayor and police to resign in an attempt to reduce the influence of biracial alliances and reclaim a white majority (Lee, T., 2021). Perhaps the most gruesome massacre took place in Rosewood, Georgia, in 1923 with the lynching of Blacks, including a pregnant woman who was also set on fire. These acts started the “great migration” of freed Blacks to the north. However, racial violence was not limited to the south but occurred in several major segregated northern cities as well (Anderson, 2017). White supremacy ideology was national.

During this period, the Ku Klux Klan was rapidly gaining members in both the north and south, reaching its peak membership of four million people. In 1920, July Perry, who had been leading a voter registration campaign for the Black residents of Ocoee, Florida, attempted to cast his ballot, but was met with a white mob comprising of law enforcement personnel who lynched him, drove all of the Black residents out of town, and burned their homes, churches, businesses, and farmland to the ground. No Black person voted again in Ocoee for at least fifty years (Ocoee Massacre²) Voter exclusion was not the only reason for white violence, Black economic success was an affront to white supremacy ideology as demonstrated in the 1921 Tulsa Massacre. The Greenwood district of Tulsa, known as Back Wall Street, was completely destroyed.

The effects of the trauma and terror caused by public lynching and massacres cannot be overstated regarding the exclusion of Blacks from their civil rights and their everyday lives as outlined in *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*.³ The US National Museum for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama honors over 5,000 known victims of lynching that occurred between 1877 and 1950.

Other widespread movements occurred prior to WWI, such as labor, socialist, and communist advocating for worker rights and democratic reforms (Hedges, 2021; Hochschild, 2022). These groups fought for rights but were often segregated. Moreover, during WWI, US nationalism fully emerged. The Espionage Act⁴ of 1917 and the Sedition act of 1918 were enacted allowing Woodrow Wilson to crush nearly all progressive movements. These acts criminalized any “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” about the US government or military, or any speech intended to “incite insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty.” These acts were written in an environment of wartime panic and resulted in the arrest, prosecution, and assassination of its own citizens, rather than German spies. The US subsequently “built the most

² <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors/121>

³ <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/>

⁴ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-congress-passes-espionage-act>

sophisticated security and surveillance apparatus in history and used judicial fiat to strip citizens of their civil liberties” (Hedges, 2021).

Protest Movements: Civil Rights, Peace, Alt-Right and Others (late 1940s - 1990s)

After WWII, the US established itself as the dominant economic and military power. It entered the war in the wake of the devastation of much of Europe and the Soviet Union and put its military industrial complex to work in defeating the axis alliance including dropping atomic bombs on Japan. Then the US took corporate control over a significant amount of wealth and property by installing military bases around the globe. It promoted itself as the leader of democracy and the “free world” at the same time it engaged in endless wars of aggression. Since WW II, the US has waged outright and proxy wars against over 20 countries from Afghanistan to Yugoslavia (Roy, 2002, p. 128). In addition, the US participated in political coups and applied devastating economic sanctions against former colonized nation-states. Through its domination of NATO, the US fortified its economic and military power in the guise of global peace keeping (for details see Gautney, 2022; McCoy, 2017). However, wars of aggression have always been about economic power at its core for the aggressor, not peacekeeping (Moosa, 2019).

Protest movement during this era took place in urban areas in reaction to police violence and other oppressive forces. They were labeled “race riots” without pretext. Commissions were formed to study those in Chicago (1919), Harlem (1935, 1943), and later in Los Angeles (1965) after Rodney King’s beating by the police. After protests in Detroit and Newark in 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorders. But its Kerner Commission report *resulted in no actions*. The conservatives pressured Johnson to look at the riots as violence separate from white supremacy and living conditions. This was followed by Nixon and Reagan’s “law-and-order policies,” Clinton’s harsher sentencing, and Trump’s overt racism. Thus, the exclusion of voters through incarceration remains a persistent reality.

The rapid economic growth and expanded welfare state brought advances in jobs, education, and health. But they were short lived as wealth inequity expanded and jobs with meaning and security declined. These events helped bring about protest movements, which achieved hard-won democratic gains in civil rights, feminism, secularism, and gay liberation followed by white backlash and losses (see Bloom & Martin, 2016; Hedges, 2021; Maher, 2022; Robinson, 2022; Rothstein, 2017).

The 1970s began a significant new trend in the white power movement as historian Kathleen Belew (2018) thoroughly documents. The new white power movement unified a variety of militant groups, including Klansmen, neo-Nazis, skinheads, radical tax protestors, and white separatists that intersected with the CIA’s covert anti-democratic paramilitary combatants and mercenaries who had fought in Vietnam and other wars. Belew (2018) described the groups this way:

While white power featured a diversity of views and an array of competing leaders, all corners of the movement were inspired by feelings of defeat, emasculation, and betrayal after the Vietnam War and by social and economic changes that seemed to threaten and victimize white men. (p. 10)

These groups created a culture of enhanced violence aimed not just at non-whites but included the elite establishment and the US government itself. This movement shared many of the conservative racist beliefs and policies, but the leaders believed political change was insufficient to achieve their goals of having an Aryan nation-state and Aryan global domination. Such goals demanded a violent revolution including a race war in a battle for America's soul.

The leaders needed a strategy for uniting disparate groups of the militant right without being detected by the government as being connected, despite having a common ideology of race purity. So, they established "leaderless resistance" with an independent cell-style organization, giving the appearance of people acting alone (e.g., the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995). Computer networking and later social media was used to spread their ideology, recruit, train, and coordinate the step-by-step operations outlined in the racist utopian novel, *Turner Diaries* (Belew, 2018). The white power movement reached its peak of mainstream appeal in the mid-1990s with five million members and sympathizers. The movement later declined but has been revitalized during the Trump era.

Added to this narrative are the contrasting reactions to the protest movements of white power vs Black power. For example, the Black Panther Party started in Oakland in the 1960s as Bobby Seal and Huey Newton took up arms and declared themselves a part of the global anti-imperialist movement. They saw Black communities as part of the US colonies and the police as an occupying army. J. Edgar Hoover declared them "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country" (Bloom & Martin, 2016, p. 2). The FBI's Counterintelligence Program was used to infiltrate, spy on, and put a quick end to their movement by jailing and assassinating their leaders (Churchill & Vander Wall, 1990). By the early 1980s their movement was over at the same time the far-right militant groups began to rise. Unlike the Black Panthers, members of the white power movement who committed violent acts against non-whites were usually not charged or were acquitted by all-white juries. This was true of the mass shooting of communist protesters in Greensboro, the fourteen white power leaders charged with sedition in 1988, iconic Klansman leader Louis Beam, and several others (Belew, 2018).

While gains in housing and school integration occurred during the Civil Rights era, white flight from the cities soon followed leaving the US more segregated today than in the 1970s (Rothstein, 2017). Furthermore, operatives of the Military Industrial Complex put pressure on President Lydon Johnson to cut the "Great Society" programs in favor of funding the Vietnam War. Another telling feature of the US political landscape was the corporate takeover of the judiciary and the relinquishing of elite accountability. "There is something wrong in this country; the judicial net is so adjusted as to catch minnows and to let the whales slip away" (Eugene V. Debs in 1985, cited in Lofgren, 2016). Today we have "Mafia" justice where the Don's go free, and the underlings pay the prices, as seems to be the case of Donald Trump and congressional leaders in the failed insurrection on January 6th, 2021.

It also became understood in this era that you could not talk about white supremacy directly. For example, GOP strategist Lee Atwater⁵ explained the true meaning of Nixon's "Southern Strategy" (highlights in the original):

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Atwater

*Y'all don't quote me on this. You start out in 1954 by saying, "N****r, n****r, n****r". By 1968 you can't say "n****r" – that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, **states' rights** and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about **cutting taxes**, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] **blacks get hurt worse than whites**.*

This white supremacist strategy is more than a diversion; it is a false claim of “violence” being committed by the peaceful protesters in the Black Lives Matter Movement. In the words of Paulo Freire (1968): “With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun. Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed.” This clearly delineates the false equivalent often made between protesting injustice versus white power insurrections.

In the three eras just outlined, a remarkable continuity amid notable changes was demonstrated. There were periods of conquest mixed with resistance and some advances in democratic freedoms followed by backlash (DeGruy, 2017). The next era is similar as it follows from the previous ones. It is appropriately labeled “Trumpism” from an extensive literature around this term since 2015 when Donald Trump entered politics. The era goes beyond its namesake, who is a creation and a symbol of the phenomena.

Trumpism (21st Century – Present)

Trump’s political rise should not have been a shock because the signs were there following the demise of the New Deal and the creation of the two party (democratic and republican) system of neoliberalism (Porter, 2020). Neoliberals support wealthy political donors at the demise of the working class both white and black as has been thoroughly documented by numerous writers – including C. Wright Mills (1956), G. W. Domhoff (1990), and most recently Heather Gautney (2022). The neoliberal democrats offer real support for capitalism and slogans and performative changes for voting rights, democracy and an end to the injustices that keep the “American Dream” at a distance for an increasing number. Black women, the most loyal voting bloc of the democratic party, receive tokenism rather than the systemic changes they demand. Republicans have abandoned policy platforms for a pure power grab. Since the time of the New Deal,⁶ neo-liberals joined with conservatives in catering to the desires of their corporate donors and lobbyists and have increasingly neglected the rest of the citizens (Harvey, 2007, 2016). This negligence resulted in cynicism across the spectrum of US voters as seen by low voter turnouts.⁷

Trump took advantage of this discontentment and fear by making anti-elitism, anti-Black racism, and xenophobia more overt and explicit, which emboldened the believers. It became a full savvy social media mass movement starting with the Tea Party in what Gervais and Morris (2018) called *reactionary republicanism*. Politically what emerged is polarity, dysfunction, disillusionment, neo-fascism, apathy, and rebellion (e.g., Johnston, 2017; 2019). Although both political parties owe allegiance to traditional power structures over policy, there is no equivalency

⁶ The New Deal measures were intended for and benefited white America (Espinoza, 2023).

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voter_turnout_in_United_States_presidential_elections

in all aspects. Democrats in the 118th congress⁸ are 43% female (109) and more than half are women of color. By contrast the GOP has only 16% women (44) and only five of color.

Nearly 62 million people voted for Trump in 2016 and 10 million more people voted for him in 2020 (though still seven million fewer⁹ than voted for Joe Biden) partly because his charismatic appeal is visceral, which matters more than rationality and ethics. “The press take him [Trump] literally but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally” (Salena Zito, *The Atlanta*, 2016¹⁰). In the era of Trumpism, racial disparities have exacerbated (Gautney, 2022; Magwood, 2020a; 2020b). There are more Black people under carceral control today than there were slaves in 1850 (Alexander, 2020). In the year 2000, the median white family owned ten times the assets of the median Black family. Today this disparity has doubled (Bloom & Martin, 2016).

The “great displacement theory” is the belief that whites are becoming a demographic minority in the US,¹¹ implying a loss of power and advantages that frightens white people across the class and political spectrums. It is currently being pushed in politics to gain white votes, since it seemed to work in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. White men voted 62% for Trump and 32% for Hilary Clinton and white women 47% to 45% in 2016 (Porter, 2020, p. 6). White men voted 60% for Trump, only 19% of Black men did in 2020. White women more than any other identity group voted for Trump. White women are the largest voting demographic and half of them are republicans (Filiopovic, 2020). Also, the rank and file of Trump followers “turned out to be more concerned about race and immigration than they were about debt and fiscal constraint” (Bessire & Bond, 2017). Trump supporters versus anti-Trumpers are more opposed to social justice, express more overt race, class and gender bias and are “rugged meritocratists,” i.e., believing US society is already fair, or if anything biased against white men (Cech, 2017).

White fear continues to fuel the white-power movement, and acts of violence have escalated both in record numbers of mass killings and in the number of people killed in ones and twos. In white-power ideology, mass violence is seen as a tool rather than an end point (Belew, 2018). Spivey (2022b) pointed out that leaders and followers have different agendas. The leaders are driven by the desire for power and the followers are motivated by grievances, resentment, and hate. Leaders mobilize the masses by stroking those fears. Once you establish an enemy you create the notion of victimhood, giving reason for revolt and when coupled with anger leads to violence. Trump is quoted at a rally¹² saying, “*We’re all victims. Everybody here, all these thousands of people here tonight, they’re all victims. Every one of you.*” Black people are seen as the enemy and white supremacist leaders as heroes. Fearful people follow authoritarianism if they believe it protects them. But this violence represents is only half of the urgent threat. The other half of white nationalism abides in the halls of government (Belew, 2018).

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/03/118th-congress-has-a-record-number-of-women/>

⁹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/12/04/politics/biden-popular-vote-margin-7-million/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/trump-makes-his-case-in-pittsburgh/501335/>

¹¹ It is a false narrative because there is no scientific basis for dividing people into two “races.” It requires the “one drop rule” (Alba, Levy, & Myers, 2021). The US is more ethnically diversified than ever because of intermarriages.

¹² <https://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/maddowblog/we-re-all-victims-trump-pushes-persecution-complex-supporters-n1250206>

Corresponding to the four eras in this article are what Spivey (2022a) calls the four waves of the Ku Klux Klan – the rise of white supremacy violence following advances toward freedom by non-whites. With each wave these groups have become stronger, more open, and more mainstream, but with the same message of hate and violence, which now extends to Jews, Catholics, and immigrants. These groups are often led by people with law and business degrees and the organizations are often generously funded by anonymous sources. The original Klan members in 1865 covered their shame and guilt with hoods. While the Patriot Front members today wear masks, they all were advised by Steve Bannon to: *“Let them call you racist. Let them call you xenophobes. Let them call you nativists. Wear it as a badge of honor. Because every day, we get stronger and they get weaker”* (cited in Spivey, 2022a). These groups are an important part of Trumpism.

Today the calls for a “race war” are all too real. The SPLC documented 940 hate groups¹³ in 2019, most of them bunched in states led by Republicans. Many of them came together in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, chanting, “our blood, our soil,” and, “Jews will not replace us.” President Trump said there were, “very fine people on both sides.” Charlottesville was the precursor to what occurred in Pittsburg (2018), El Paso (2019), and Buffalo (2022), as well as on January 6, 2021, at the Capitol. To be clear, fear, anger, and aggression have risen to the surface on both the right and left, but it is far from equivalent. Domestic terrorism has skyrocketed in the last 25-years according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies,¹⁴ and most of it comes from the Alt-Right. In 2020 alone, far-right extremists committed 73 domestic terrorist acts, an all-time high record with 25 for the left. According to USA Today,¹⁵ there have been 71 mass shootings in 2023 as of 02/15/23.

As in the previous era, defendants often face all-white juries, biased judges, and incompetent lawyers and law enforcement officers (Magwood, 2020a). For example, teenager Kyle Rittenhouse traveled across state lines to patrol the streets with an assault rifle to “protect property” not his own. The Trial Judge did not allow the prosecution to refer to those he shot as victims, but the defense was allowed to call them rioters or looters even though there was no evidence that they did. He was acquitted by an all-white jury (except for one of the twenty). White supremacy bias is also seen in the fact that lynching was not made a hate crime until the Emmett Till Antilynching Act passed in 2022 after being discussed for over a century and after hundreds of proposals were made.

Despite passage of landmark legislation, including the Economic Opportunity Act, the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the Voting Rights Act (1965), no real institutional changes have been realized. In 2013 the Supreme Court failed to uphold various provisions in the Voting Rights Act (Shelby County vs Holder) and the Senate failed to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act in 2021, which would have updated several provisions. Tracey (2022) noted that since 2013, “states and counties have used the loss of the Voting Rights Act protections to pass laws whose enforcement, if not intent, is to increase Black voter disenfranchisement” (see also, Combs, 2022). The recent

¹³ <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>

¹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/domestic-terrorism-data/?tid=a_classic-iphone&no_nav=true&itid=sf_national-investigations

¹⁵ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/02/15/mass-shootings-us-2023/11262414002/>

voting laws passed mostly reduce voting. The Brennan Center for Justice¹⁶ reported, “At least 19 states passed 34 laws restricting access to voting in 2021.”

Economic inequity skyrocketed during Trumpism: the ultra-rich 1% hold more wealth than the entire middle class and the gap grew by 9% annually under Trump – faster than in previous periods (Kucik, 2021). The amount of money going into partisan politics also increased. The first quarter of 2022 shows a record \$1 billion spent on lobbying.¹⁷

The next sections begin an effort to elucidate these phenomena, including the fact that many people who identify as white and English-speaking feel threatened by changes in the political and economic demographics. These and other fears are expressed as nationalism, militarism, imperialism, propaganda, and capitalism – referred to as “institutions of separation.”

Institutions of Separation

Institutions are major (have vertical depth and geographical breadth) pre-existing social structures or worldviews upon which individual and collective actions depend and which simultaneously, depend upon the actions of the individual and collective agents for their reproduction (Bhaskar, 2016; Bourdieu, 2005; Giddens, 1984; Martin, 2009). Social structures guide one’s actions but are often subconscious (Wilber, 2016; 2017). It is proposed that everyone incarnates into two core dichotomous belief systems from which all other belief systems arise: (1) a belief in separations from Source, all others, and the world, leading to a sense of fragmentation, lack, and fear; and (2) a belief in oneness with Source, all others, and the world, leading to a sense of wholeness, unity, and love. These belief systems express the human egoic side and the divine side or in secular terms, the selfish and the altruistic sides.

Six major institutions have arisen over the course of evolution as humans formed into larger societies, nation-states, and empires: (1) national identity – means of forming collectives (2) military – means of security and expansion; (3) politics – means of governance and control; (4) economics – means of producing and exchanging goods and services; (5) religion – means of connecting to a deity or the sacred and (6) information – means of communication and the discovery and dissemination of knowledge (e.g., media, science and education). While these institutions are necessary, their style of organization can take different forms (e.g., hierarchies, networks or heterarchies – see Stephenson, 2009; 2016). In a true democracy, each institution would promote a balance between freedom, rights, authority, responsibility, and accountability. In short, they would be heterarchial. Yet, all extant US institutions have evolved into one sided dominator hierarchies featuring authoritarian rule, hegemony, subordination, and oppression. Each of these institutions are briefly described highlighting their entanglement.

¹⁶ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-december-2021>

¹⁷ <https://truthout.org/articles/first-quarter-of-2022-sees-record-1-billion-spent-on-lobbying/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=c6b341cf-71a4-42c3-9f64-a600aa323765>

Nationalism: Nation-State, Christian Nationalism, Patriarchy, and White Supremacy

Nationalism is a powerful ideology defined as one collective believing itself superior to all other collectives in the same class. The driving forces behind achieving superiority are fear of self-inadequacies and the desire to gain and maintain power and privilege. Classes are identified as: (a) nation-states and empires, e.g., US exceptionalism; (b) religion, e.g., Christian nationalism; (c) racial identity, e.g., white identity above all others; (d) sexual identity, e.g., patriarchy; and (e) gender identity (e.g., cisgender vs other); and (f) physical appearance and ability (e.g., beauty vs ugly and ableism). For brevity, only the first four are described.

Hedges (2021) described US state-nationalism as a prime drawback to advancing democracy. Nationalism as with militarism requires enemies, real or imagined, against whom to compete and defend. Wealth and power then become the goals over peace and cooperation. State-nationalism forces people who are historically and systematically marginalized by its institutions (e.g., Blacks, women etc.) into choiceless choices—wherein it appears they stand for the US over their identity group when a need to defend it arises. For example, in WWI, 12,000 Native Americans served in the military and in WWII, 33% of the Native American men served even though they were still not recognized as US citizens. The Harlem 369 Infantry Regiment served with the French in WWI – with whom they experienced more safety and less harm – as opposed to the US armed forces, who expressed anti-black racism and did not accept them as equals. The Germans called them “Hellfighters” because they never lost a man through capture nor lost a trench or a foot of ground to the enemy (Rossi & Lewis, 2021).

Christian nationalism calls forth “*a defense of mythological narratives about America’s distinctively Christian heritage and future*” (Whitehead, Perry & Baker, 2018, p. 147). This form of nationalism was present at the founding of the US republic and its rise to power (Corbin, 2019; Stewart; 2020; Wilder, 2013). Its main goal is to establish the US as a Christian Theocracy without separation of Church and State, coming at the demise of democracy. Thus, US laws and policies are to be aligned with the far-right Christian belief system: a social and political order rooted in “biblical law,” institutionalizing voluntary slavery, patriarchy, and hierarchy as naturally accepted practices (Stewart, 2020). Christianity has always been connected to economic and political power since the days of the Roman empire (Friedman, 2021). Moreover, the primary paradox of [all] religious fundamentalism is that it has been used to promote violence as much as it has been used to resist it (Rike, 2000, p. 148). This contention is supported by the fact of the Christian Crusades, Islamic Jihads, and the Spanish Inquisition.

All the Aramaic religions – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – arose in a culture of patriarchy, which started long before Christianity and white supremacy, but its history is less clear and more controversial. Archeological studies and historical writings suggest that in ancient times there were periods of matriarchal societies, and somewhat egalitarian ones, and some still exist today (e.g., Graeber & Wengrow, 2021; Narvaez, 2013; Sudarkasa, 1986). However, patriarchy is particularly evident in the very long history of the rise and fall of empires, during which only a few women ascended to the pinnacles of power (Chua, 2009). While recent feminist movements in the US helped bring more people to power in government, business, and even in the military, they have mostly come at the cost of fitting into the power structure rather than transforming it.

White supremacy has no basis in biology. Rather, it is founded upon skin color politicized to establish hierarchies of power, which originated in the fifteenth century at the start of European colonialism (Lindquist, 1996; Menakem, 2017). A deeper cultural understanding of race comes from Birt (2004, p. 55), answering an essential question:

“Of course, our primary concern is not with “physical” whiteness or skin color. Rather, our concern is with a structure of values, a worldview and way of life. Whiteness is a chosen (though socially conditioned) way of being-in-the world. But can one *live* whiteness authentically? . . . As a form of identity and consciousness, whiteness is a species of bad faith. There is no authentic existence in the kingdom of whiteness.

Yet, seeing and devaluing Black Africans as “others” was required by Europeans to justify their enslavement (Arendt, 1951). Genocide and enslavement require a belief that the “other” is less than human and the “extermination of all the brutes” is in service of species evolution (Lindquist, 1996). This documented history of European and US enslavement of African people establishes it as the most extreme of all acts of human cruelty. And in the US, white supremacy is the most enduring, most debilitating, as well as the most denied political culture (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Baldwin, 1993; Rothstein, 2017; Yancy, 2018).

The ideology of white supremacy supports patriarchy as acts of domination and oppression by white males over all others. Enslavement of Africans, and the genocide and stealing of land from Indigenous people were the dominant forces arising from capitalism, Christian nationalism, and imperialism creating the US as the preeminent global empire (Baptist, 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Maher, 2022; McCoy, 2017; Scott, 2011).

Militarism

Militarism is the belief in and the implementation of military force for purposes of establishing and maintaining social order, and for expanding and protecting both political power and material wealth (Donovan, 1970; Gillis, 1989; Hedges, 2021; Karsten, 1998; McCoy, 2017). Militarism goes beyond self-defense and the simple winning of wars, it is the glorification of war and violence, legitimized by a gendered and racialized ideology of imperialism, protecting the elite class, and establishing who is civilized and who is not. Militarism demands loyalty and nationalism (Parenti, 1995), and requires permanent war (cold or hot), where there is always an enemy to combat, whether imagined, created or real. War is a masculinized enterprise of domination and violence, and women are often its spoils. Rape is the province of the male and is heightened during war, reinforcing the ideology that women are to be victims and not the soldiers of war. Rape is a weapon of war and not its effect. Aggression and competition and take-over of material wealth and power initiates all wars. War is deeply embedded in US culture and institutionalizes sexual, gender, and racial differences at the same time it undermines some essential differences. War is a penetrating cultural metaphor: war on poverty, war on drugs, war on viruses etc. Charles Eisenstein stated the mantra as “find the enemy and kill it.”

The US celebrates and ritualizes this ideology through the display of statues, flags, the pledge of allegiance, and the national anthem, and it honors the military personnel as heroes. These symbols maintain and propagate a militaristic worldview and perpetuate the violent history of

nationalism. The pledge of allegiance recited in public schools (e.g., Mazzarino, 2023) and the national anthem sung at most sporting events are done by children and adults mostly unaware of the full truth of this history they celebrate. Patriotism, loyalty, cooperation, and masculinity are all necessary to convince young people to band together to fight and kill an enemy in a duty to serve the greater good. Most important is to establish a belief in the “other” as a threat to the safety of oneself and nation-state. The strong resistance to understanding this deeply entrenched collective belief in militarism is fueled by an unmatched US gun culture.

Today, militarism is evident in the imperial war in Ukraine and in the white nationalist movements (Belew, 2018; Spivey, 2022a). But it is not limited to the armed forces; it has been part of modern policing since the start of the 20th-century (Balko, 2013; Lepore, 2020). The militarization of the police includes military-style training, attitudes, and military equipment including weapons and tanks. The history of policing began with the lessons of the Roman Empire, through the Dark Ages, and into European colonialism, and with the slave patrols in the southern states all of which preceded the national institutionalization of police enforcement in the US. A militarized police force coupled with the mandates of “law and order” and “war on drugs” have resulted in the massive and disproportionate incarceration of Black, Indigenous, and other non-whites (Gautney, 2022, p. 34). Balko (2013) noted:

. . . it isn't just drugs. Aggressive, SWAT-style tactics are now used to raid neighborhood poker games, doctor's offices, bars and restaurants, and head shops, despite the fact that the targets of these raids pose little threat to anyone (p. 50).

The data and evidence of police militarism, violence, and immunity tied to capitalism and aimed against class and racial identity are overwhelming (e.g., Nembhard, & Robin, 2021). The US incarcerates far more people than any other nation-state, including China, which has four times the population (Lofgren, 2016). Mass incarceration is mass exclusion.

Imperialism/Neofascism/Neoliberalism

The US is an empire in denial by every measure of what constitute an empire (Ferguson, 2003). Empires have existed for more than 4,000 years and are described by McCoy (2017) as “the most elusive, complex, and paradoxical of all forms of governance – strong yet often surprisingly fragile.” (p. 42). From the time of ancient empires through to the classical and modern empires, imperialism remains the dominant style of governance and international relations aimed at competition for wealth and power. McCoy (2017, p. 39) states that modern empires such as the US are “not an epithet but a form of global governance in which a dominant power exercises control over the destiny of others, either through direct control over territorial rule (colonies) or indirect influence (military, economic, and cultural).”

The metropolis – the heart of a modern empire – was described by Mumford (1970) as the “megamachine,” what in the US is the military-industrial-scientific complex or national security state or deep state (e.g., Friedman, 2017; Lofgren, 2016; Rohde, 2020). The label megamachine draws attention to Ellul's (1967) technological imperative underlying this partnership and their development and use of real machines (computers and weapons of mass-destruction) and the use of a machine metaphor (closed system) in creating the US empire (Davis, 1998; Edwards, 1966).

Imperialism is not addressed at any level of public education in the US, except as a brief glorification of the past or a condemnation its enemies. However, the data and evidence reveal that the US is perhaps the most extensive empire and the greatest perpetrator of violence on humans and the environment in history (Cook, 1962; Blum, 1995; Gerson & Birchard, 1991; Knusten, 1999; Parenti, 1995; Roy, 2020; Smith, 1994). The US wars of aggression and proxy wars continue today in Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. The US has over 800 military installations in more than 70 countries and territories abroad, while Britain, France, and Russia have 30 combined, and China has only one (Koshgarian, 2021; Vine, 2015). US imperialism and the other hierarchical institutions of separation are created and maintained through propaganda.

Communication, Discovery, and Dissemination of Knowledge, and Propaganda

Voting rights and participation in decision making, along with open and honest communication (individual and collective), and a free press are essential to a democratic society. Conversely, as Zhu & Fu (2023, p. 2) noted, “Propaganda effectiveness is critical to authoritarian resilience. In absence of righteous instruments of direct and indirect democracy, authoritarian regimes rely heavily on propaganda to uphold its legitimacy.” Education is an essential instrument for all communication, including propaganda. For example, the enslavement of Africans and the genocide of Native American through settler colonialism required the ideology of white supremacy and manifest destiny – “whitening of the promise land” in Wilder’s (2013, p. 10) terms. From Wilder (2013):

The founding, financing, and development of higher education in the colonies were thoroughly intertwined with the economic and social forces that transformed West and Central Africa through the slave trade and devastated indigenous nations in the Americas. The academy was a beneficiary and defender of these processes. (p. 1-2)

The science of race was the province of the universities, which were intimately tied to both the churches and the governance of the early colonies. Secularism gained hold in the US in the 20th century, but Christian nationalism is on the rise in the era of Trumpism.

Propaganda is created and spread by academia and private think tanks and by corporate and social media supported by government and corporate wealth (Aronowitz, 1988; Mandery, 2022; Stanley, 2015; Wilder, 2013). The lack of truth and its denial have the same effects. For example, Adam Hochschild (2022) writes about what is not included in the mass media or US history books, not even in most university classes:

It is a story of mass imprisonments, torture, vigilante violence, censorship, killings of Black Americans, and far more that is not marked by commemorative plaques, museum exhibits, or Ken Burns documentaries. It is a story of how a war [WWI] supposedly fought to make the world safe for democracy became the excuse for a war against democracy at home. (p. 2)

While higher education is essential for liberation and the major provider for the discovery and dissemination of knowledge it has always followed the hierarchical structure of corporations

including the rank ordering of administrators, faculty, students, and staff (Barrow, 1990; Davis & Chandler, 1998). Wilder (2013, p. 12) describes how “The academy never stood apart from American slavery – in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage.” Academics helped sanitized the stories of the universities and colonies’ rise to power and riches through enslavement and Native conquests. Paradoxically, academics were also a major part of the abolitionist movements of the mid-nineteenth century.

Today for-profit colleges and elite universities rarely challenge market imperatives and instead “preserves the status quo of race, class, and gender inequities in education and work” (Cottom, 2017, p. 12). Public schools are just as separate and unequal today as they were before *Brown vs The Board of Education*. Dark money funds the privatization of schools. Neither learning nor practicing democratic principles have been the purpose of schooling (Gatto, 1993).

Currently communication and a free press are in crises as language has been politicized and weaponized for political and economic gain (Bilge & Marino, 2018). It is a crisis of confidence that has resulted in polarization, an increase rejection of rationality, science and truth, and an acceptance of alternative facts, deliberate falsity, incivility, conspiracy theories, euphemisms, coded language, and memes. Both mass media and social media are driven by profits over people. An NPR/Ipsos poll¹⁸ taken in early 2022 finds that 64% of respondents agree that American democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing.

Imperial Capitalism

Profit driven economics is a motivational glue binding all institutions of separation. Capitalism is the antithesis of democracy, and its development is historically inseparable from racism (Robinson, 1983). It is maintained through ideological myths and survives in some relatively democratic nation-states (e.g., Nordic) because of substantial welfare systems (Freinacht, 2017). Welfare provides a buffer against imperial capitalism and aids in citizen survival, but it is not democratic, nor does it support participatory democracy. An authoritarian state and its leaders are readily accepted if they provide at least some of what citizens want. Moreover, most European countries have “stakeholder capitalism” whereby corporations receive their charter from the federal government, which requires them to serve the public good. In contrast, the US has “shareholder capitalism,” bypassing the public for the relatively few shareholders. Its chartering authority is at the state level, so states and municipalities compete to attract companies and a major incentive is tax breaks – meaning taxpayers help finance companies including the building of sports stadiums for teams owned by billionaires (Adler, 2019).

Late-stage capitalism has added an economic sector exempt from producing goods and services: “financialization” where profit making is the only outcome. It is achieved in many ways including “technological and financial innovation; structural adjustment; predatory lending; high-risk speculation; and the financial engineering of corporations to extract value by plundering workforces and assets” (Gautney, 2022, p. 123).

¹⁸ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/seven-ten-americans-say-country-crisis-risk-failing>

Material wealth disparities have always existed in human history, with a few exceptions. Today, the wealth gap is narrowed through taxes and welfare in Europe and Japan. However, in the US, wealth inequity has been increasing exponentially and today it is a glaring outlier among wealthy nations (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). While income inequities are significant, it is wealth disparities that separate whites from non-whites. Wealth disparity comes from home ownership and other kinds of economic advantages (Baker, 2016; Elmes, 2018). Wealth inequity has an incalculably large impact on voting rights, political power, and all dimensions of living.

Historically, Native American societies regarded the land as sacred and a common resource for all – one that required stewardship as a natural responsibility. Contrastingly, during the Roman empire three forms of land ownership were traditional: common land, state land, and private land. This led to the Columbus myth of the “Doctrine of Discovery” and the Puritan covenant with God to take the land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). This view of land ownership continues. Private ownership and the commodification of nearly everything is a hallmark of imperial capitalism, the US empire, and white supremacy (Hedges, 2021). Today, the idea of the owning a home is so inculcated into US culture it is taken for granted as natural, necessary, and part of the American dream.

Many people recognize that economics dominate politics in the US, which eventuates in cynicism, dissolution, and despair regarding the voting process (Bello, 2019). Thus, the poor lose their voting privileges when municipal laws for traffic and other minor violations unjustly penalize those who cannot afford the fines causing jail time and missed work (Vera Institute of Justice¹⁹). Chris Hedges noted that the US court system has become owned by corporations. Large corporate and wealthy patrons of parties and policies exist on nearly all sides of the political divisions, but it is not equivalent. Most of those with wealth are conservative and neoliberal rather than progressive, wanting to maintain the control and influence they have rather than promoting change (e.g., Mayer, 2016). But some people devastated by poverty and social, economic, and political exclusion have turned to authoritarian, charismatic leaders such as Putin in Russia, Orban in Hungary, and Trump in the US, rather than to progressives.

Adler (2019) identifies six crises spawned by capitalism: (1) economic irrationality that produces profound inequality and creates financial uncertainty for many, perhaps a majority, of the 99%; (2) workplace disempowerment neither giving voice to employees nor acknowledging their intellectual and creative contributions; (3) unresponsive and, in many countries, authoritarian government at local and national levels; (4) environmental unsustainability; (5) social disintegration while unmet material and emotional needs engender anxiety, disillusionment, and anger; and (6) international conflict. While these crises are global, they are exacerbated in US exceptionalism.

Here are a few consequences of the institutions of separations that impact Black, Indigenous, other non-white, and poor people disproportionately, which directly limit their voting rights: (1) mass incarceration; (2) miseducation, school segregation, underfunding for schools, and lack of free education; (3) police immunity and other practices of unaccountability facilitating police killing of innocent people; (4) lack of access to mental and physical health services, insurance, and treatment and inaccurate health labeling; (5) lack of affordable housing, and segregated housing

¹⁹ <https://www.vera.org/>

through red lining and other unfair real estate and banking laws and practices, which contributes to partisan gerrymandering; (6) increased stress in daily life.

The Myths of Democracy and their Impact on Voter Exclusion

The following quote expresses a common narrative projecting a false assumption. “The Founding Fathers’ ‘American Experiment’ sought to preserve freedom and equality by placing power in the hands of the nation’s citizens.” (newsletter@braverangels.org). The fact is that voting rights have never been, nor are they now based upon placing power in the hands of the people through “one citizen, one vote.” Indeed, all the institutions of separation identified here are anti-democratic by keeping power in the hands of a few.

Here are a few examples of the statues and practices resulting from, and in turn supporting the institutions of separation. (1) the electoral college; (2) gerrymandering; (3) Jim Crow laws; (4) campaign financing laws, including giving corporations personhood status and allowing SuperPACs; (5) lobbying practices; (6) reducing the political independence and equal power of the three branches of government negating the idea of checks and balances (e.g., weakening the oversight processes, and increasing executive power to “stack the judiciary, veto laws, set foreign policy, and execute wars essentially without Congress, [Gautney, 2022, p. 9]); (7) increasing the power of the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the House; (8) lifelong appointment to the Supreme Court and other members of the judiciary based on political views over qualification and without ethical standards); (9) a powerful political system ruled by major corporate monopolies: (a) the Military-Industrial Complex; (b) Oil-Gas-Mining; (c) finance-Insurance-Real Estate; and (d) the tax system (Brown, 2021; Dunn, 2022; Gautney, 2022). The heads of these corporations, government officials and heads of the military and intelligence agencies create the National Security State (Hedges, 2021; Lofgren, 2014; 2016; Mayer, 2016). These anti-democratic statues and practices that primarily impact Blacks and other non-whites and the poor are not accidental (Duggan, 2003; Rothstein, 2017). The ideology that underlies these statues and practices also underlies corporate media and academia and thus is not subjected to *effective* critical inquiry and challenges.

One major myth in the US is that “there are no alternatives;” it is either capitalism or communism. The truth is that numerous examples of democratic economic systems have been presented and applications work (Adler, 2019; Albert, 2021; Beaudry, 2022; Berge, 2019; Brick, 2006; Eisenstein, 2021; Kaufer & Steponaitis, 2021; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2020; Wolff, 2021; Yang, 2016). Another important myth is that the republicans and democrats offer alternative political programs when in fact they have a two-party duopoly of neoliberalism, which has pushed republicans toward neofascism. Congress has a 90% + re-election rate. Thus, preventing progressives such as Ralph Nader (Green Party) and Bernie Sander (Social Democratic Party) from getting elected or getting progressive programs passed in Congress even when programs are popular with the voters. For example, most US citizens support workers’ rights, a guaranteed universal basic income, universal healthcare, free educations, and many other programs while opposing corporate welfare and corporate-led globalization (Sanders, 2016; Yang, 2018).

Neoliberalism is an ideological glue that binds an imperialist capitalism as a form of governance (Gautney, 2022; Reed, 2005). It is described as a political approach that "seeks to transfer the

control of economic factors from the public sector to the private sector" – and strives to "place limits on government spending, government regulation, and public ownership," or more simply as "a vast, systemic, nonstop plunder" (Solomon, 2021).

"On a deeper, intangible level, neoliberalism has essentially disseminated market values to all spheres of human society such that . . . all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality" (Lee, C. T., 2021, p. 99). Solomon (2021, p. 2) noted that as a result:

After four decades of neoliberal momentum, we can see the wreckage all around us: the cumulative effects, destroying uncounted human lives deprived of adequate healthcare, education, housing, economic security and existence free of predatory monetizing. While Republican politicians usually led the wrecking crews, their Democratic counterparts often served as enablers or initiated their own razing projects.

If these schematizations are accurate, how is the US considered a democracy?

In summarizing the neoliberalism literature five major features were identified. Each one has been supported variously by all US presidents since Harry Truman. Trump was the extremist (Gautney, 2022). (1) Supporting capitalism as the insatiable drive for material wealth and power by a few. (2) Allowing the private ownership and commodification of everything – goods, services, land, labor, and bodies. (3) Competing for global imperial domination. (4) Willingness to commit unimaginable torture and cruelty on the "enemies" foreign and domestic under massive secrecy. (5) Failing to address white supremacy and wealth inequities at the systemic level – even supporting them. These are features of all institutions of separation.

The Meanings of Equality Versus Rank Ordering

The declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [sic] are created equal . . ." is rooted in a philosophical/religious ideal (see Stuurman, 2017). Equality is an essential concept in democracy and a counter to separation but requires clarification. Humans are not inherently equal along developmental lines (e.g., cognitive, emotional, physical, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, interpersonal etc.) and types (e.g., gender, body type, disposition). Social and physical context also have innate differences. However, paradoxically, differences are a source of strength and are required for evolutionary advance. The challenge is to simultaneously promote both diversity and equality. Thus, it is not sameness but fairness or equity that is sought.

It is proposed that participatory democracy establishes equity along the lines of basic needs and rights to bring all people from a survival mode to a life of flourishing, which importantly, benefits all (McGhee, 2021; Motesharrei, Rivas, & Kalnay, 2014). It is a relative equity providing, to the extent possible, everyone with basic human needs such as food, shelter, and clothing; and basic human rights such as health care, housing, safety, citizenship, voting, and education; and providing a guaranteed minimum annual income and equity under the law; providing access to informational, cultural, sexual, and spiritual capital. It is an ethical and democratic approach toward multidimensional equity at a relative level according to each person's needs, desires, and capacities (see Freinacht, 2019).

A deeper level of equity recognizes that all human beings have an inherent unconditional equal value simply by virtue of existing as a human being. This allows people to have a *felt sense* of equality; that everyone is of equal *value* or worth at the visceral level. A still deeper level realizes human beings as divine at the absolute level. It is seeing oneself and others as unique expressions of One True Being. It is at the level of equanimity: an unconditional non-judgment that always applies to all people in all circumstances. This awareness negates the deep-seated tendency to compare, judge, evaluate, and see people as good or bad. Nonjudgment doesn't mean giving up discernment; evaluating behaviors, ideas, and actions and circumstances of oneself and others, is needed. Actions require responsibility and accountability but not condemnation.

Inequality, with rare exceptions, is “painful to people and detrimental to societies, whether it originates from people’s inner traits or from unfair collective structures” (Freinacht, 2019, p. 122). Institutions of separation, as described above, work against equity at every level.

Equity is subverted by rank ordering. It is not necessary to give all examples; rank ordering is ubiquitous, excessive, and obsessive in US culture. Suffice it to note that in education, grades, degrees, faculty status, etc. are processes of rank ordering driven by and in turn reproducing competition and value judgments. Rank ordering people according to their value is the definition of separation in this article. Judging, comparing, and competing are inherent in humans as an egoic self. These characteristics are never going to be eliminated nor should they be, but they can be minimized. There are paradoxes beyond discussion here.

Reproducing Institutions of Separation Against One’s Own Best Interests

Questions arise as to why dominator hierarchies are ubiquitous and why so many people reproduce them even when it is against their own best interest. Some of the answers are found in interrelated social and psychological concepts that reveal the essence of what is part of human nature. These concepts point to the fact that, simply stated, people generally seek pleasure and comfort and avoid pain and discomfort both physical and emotional. People want to feel good about themselves and their own groups including their nation-state. Negating these feelings are individual and collective shadows – those parts of oneself and one’s group that are seen as bad or evil – thus they are detested, denied, and projected onto others (Wilber, 2017). The brain’s tendency to avoid unpleasant information is described as an “ostrich effect” (Mandery, 2022). These two related factors lead people to accept dominate belief systems and ideologies of the collectives, with whom they most identify and thus in turn they help to reproduce.

Added to that is the presence and ubiquity of a variety of *belief biases* that affect virtually everyone (Beeghly, Madva, 2020; Kahneman, 2011; Pennycook, 2020). Simply put, each bias in its own way is an adherence to one’s own belief system and/or the belief system of one’s collective at the rejection of any alternatives. For example, implicit bias accepts stereotypes without questioning the evidence against them. Racial stereotypes are of particular concern here and since they relate to a dominant white supremacy ideology, they are not only prominent but also have serious consequences (Payne, Niemi, & Doris, 2018). These biases all support hierarchical institutions because those at the top have greater influence on the narratives.

Also, rugged individualism and rugged meritocracy are racial identity related, and go beyond overt biases by suggesting that an individual's achievements are based solely upon his/her merits, absent any concern for the effects of social institutions (Cech, 2017; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Young, 2017). It is believed that people who achieve less are simply less meritorious. Such myths help justify the rank ordering of people. However, the question arises of how to equitably determine what is to be meritorious for everyone in a society of innate differences in attributes and values. People's actions are not just determined by individual choice but are constrained by the social systems in which they are embedded. Further, the "Law of Obedience to Authority" shows that people naturally bow to those viewed as being in authority (Milgram, 1973). People are attracted to power and children are taught to respect and obey adults. Role models are helpful in childhood, but when extensive hero and celebrity worship extend into adulthood, rank ordering throughout society is exacerbated.

Moreover, there are habits, addictions, layers of cognition, and subconscious beliefs all of which make letting go of beliefs difficult (see Kastrup, 2016 for details). People are often emotionally attached to their belief systems and when beliefs are challenged it is felt as a personal attack that requires defense. For example, "love it or leave it" is a familiar phrase aimed at marginalized people who, with good intentions, criticize the beloved country. Thus, as noted above, people tend to project their fears onto others as scapegoats. The "other" who is easily distinguishable from oneself is preferred and this makes skin color an obvious choice of where to begin. The attachments required in infancy must eventually be released if one is to advance developmentally and spiritually.

Lastly, *involuntary servitude* was described by Etienne de la Boetie (2015) in the 16th century, as the tendency of oppressed masses to tacitly accept the flawed ideology (propaganda) of elites. And indeed, throughout history those with power and position (e.g., corporate media) have persuaded the masses to maintain the status quo and vote against their own best interests. Clearly democracy, not authoritarianism as it is described here, is in the best interests for all.

Toward Paradigm Shifts: Transforming Society from Authoritarian to Democratic

From the above narratives, the definitive conclusion is that the political system and all institutions of separation are irreparable. Problems are both systemic and ontological. Voting rights require democratic institutions throughout society. In other words, equal rights must extend beyond the idea of "who belongs to the polity." Laws can be changed relatively quickly but are ineffective without supportive worldviews that change immensely more gradual.

And, it is the worldviews, belief systems, and ideologies that underly all social systems and institutions that determine one's life experiences (Kastrup, 2016; McKay & Fanning, 1991). Therefore, it is deep seated beliefs systems that require transforming. This transformation starts with realizing the *essence* as found in the simplicity of the dichotomous core belief systems: unity and wholeness (love, compassion, and peace) versus separation and fragmentation (fear, hatred, and violence). Love and compassion beget love and compassion, fear and hate beget fear and hate. Social justice is love in action (King, 2022). The paradigm shifts required are from hierarchy and authoritarianism to heterarchy and democracy, from competitive ownership capitalism to sacred

cooperative stewardship economics, from individualism to free collectivism, from war to peace, and the list goes on. It is not complicated; but it is not easy. An integral response is all-encompassing and entails a non-judgmental awareness of both the light and dark sides of human existence (individual and collective) for the purpose of integrating them leading to evolutionary advance in human flourishing (Wilber, 2007; 2016). The collective shadow of the US is its white supremacy and other institutions of separation. Examples of the collective and individual repression and denial of these shadows are seen daily in the mass media.

From the understanding of the essence, elucidating the details of the inequities and injustices helps uncover the nuances of the multiple institutions that are supported by a common ideology of separation found in US exceptionalism. This elucidation aids in shifting the ideology of separation. The evolutionary trend has been from small groups of hunter gatherers with some democratic and egalitarian social systems to larger nation states to even larger empires with increasingly more and larger institutions of separation. This same trend is seen developmentally from societies that care for infants and children (Narvaez, 2013; 2014; 2016) to an increased separation of children from parents and the separation and instability within families and within communities (e.g., Soboroff, 2020). Recent mass migration of people is mostly out of necessity to escape violence rather than for adventure and discovery. Reversing these trends is advocated here and there are many organizations and movements with this mission.

System change must be global in scope but local (small scale) in focus and action. Local systems are to be heterarchically structured and globally connected by networks. Heterarchical systems have a size constraint because they increase the degrees of freedom (expand diversity, decision making, and choices), whereas hierarchical systems freeze the degrees of freedom, i.e., limit choices and decision making. Large nation-states cannot exist as an overall heterarchical democratic system therefore formal collectives must be local but with global networking. For this to happen societal goals must change. This would be a process of developmental and evolutionary change in worldviews and values under the teleology of love, peace, and joy (Adler, 2019; Freinacht, 2019; Scharmer, 2020). This means paradigm shifts as follows.

The paradigm shift advocated for philosophy and science is from dualism and materialism toward a nondual consciousness only model (Kastrup, 2018; 2019; Schwartz, G., Woollacott, & Schwartz, S., 2019). This means for one, that science goes beyond the physical or sensory, and the mental or reason and logical ways of knowing and investigating reality, to include and emphasize the transcendental and contemplation of direct experience without the imposition of thoughts. At the same time spirituality shifts from being simply a means of self-transcendence (escapism) to one of collective realization of the One True Being. As Adyashanti (2014, p. 229) emphasized, “When the eternal and the human meet *that’s* where love is born . . . not through escaping humanity or trying to disappear into transcendence, but through finding that place where they come into union.” This suggests that being and doing in the world from love and compassion means having awareness of the simultaneous oneness and uniqueness of all beings. Full awareness includes both the light and dark sides, which evoke compassion for those with different lived experiences. This paradigm shift values trained philosophers and spiritual leaders actively participating in communities that support justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (e.g., Erfan, 2021; Kastrup, 2016; Schlosser, 2017). This participation incentivizes individual and collective shadow work and helps avoid solipsism, and spiritual bypassing; and it exposes individual and collective developmental

stuckness or traces of fear. John Welwood (1984), coined the term “spiritual bypassing” to mean using spiritual ideas or practices to avoid facing, or bypassing relative human needs, feelings, unresolved emotional issues, trauma, and unfinished developmental tasks.

Paradigm shifting promotes the continued evolution of worldviews from egoic to ethnocentric to a kosmocentric: an all-inclusiveness, unity in diversity, and democracy in communities of love (Wilber, 2016). There are many ways of promoting more inclusive beliefs. These include having integrated community spaces, transforming crowded urban spaces, and dialoguing across the intersection of identities (e.g., age, gender, skin color etc.) and lived experiences. Communities of support and belonging that include both groups of like-mindedness and communities of diversity stimulate expanded understanding, growth, and development.

Another setting for paradigm shifting is from schooling to true education. Schooling, not learning is the primary emphasis in much of the US educational system because it still follows the orthodox model of hierarchical governance. Whereas education means that learning and skill development emphasizes cooperation, freedom, openness, and self-reflection and includes all the developmental lines: cognitive, emotional, perceptual, psychosexual, aesthetic, spiritual, ethical etc. Duncan-Andrade (2020, p. 51) stated that, “The primary purpose of *every* school should be to cultivate the well-being of *every* child and Maslow’s hierarchy is a solid framework to that end.” An active participation in learning and skill development requires participating in appropriate physical as well as social and emotional settings. These learning spaces require at least four modalities: (1) being supportive of the child’s expressions of emotions, feelings, imaginations, and aspirations; (2) providing choices, opportunities, and challenges that are empowering; (3) being a role model foremost but also being a facilitator and an instructor; and (4) establishing a transpersonal inner connection – meaning one always checks in with one’s own feelings to become aware of resonance or disconnect with those in one’s care. The brief epilogue is promise and optimism for ideological paradigm shifts with a counsel for patient determination.

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