The deepening divide between America's people and its mainstream politics and media

Richard Eckersley

Bundanoon
NSW 2578
AUSTRALIA

Email: richard@richardeckersley.com.au

Biographical note

Richard Eckersley is an independent researcher and writer on human progress and wellbeing, including topics such as models and measures of progress, the psychosocial dynamics of modernization, social determinants of health, sustainability, attitudes to the future, and young people's world and wellbeing. He has published extensively in leading international scientific journals in a range of different disciplines, and has also popularised this work in many newspapers and online magazines and blogs. Details of his work are available on his website: www.richardeckersley.com.au.

Abstract

A dangerous gulf exists between Americans' concerns about their lives, their country and their future, and the priorities, proclivities and pre-occupations of the country's mainstream politics and media. This is, to varying extents, also the predicament of other Western democracies. The paper focuses on the US because of its dominant global position, and because its situation is arguably more dire. It draws on several decades of research and synthesis on human progress, health and wellbeing to argue America's political and journalistic cultures are too 'short-sighted' and 'narrow-minded' to address the nation's challenges and problems. These are 'existential' in that they both materially and physically threaten human existence, and also undermine people's sense of confidence and certainty about life. We need to change the 'idea' of progress, and to do that we must change the 'idea' of politics and journalism. Political debate needs to incorporate and reflect all the complexity and depth of today's challenges, to encourage the conceptual space for a transformation in our worldview, beliefs and values as profound as any in human history.

An American story

This is a story about America, an America that, even today, exists largely beyond the serious attention of mainstream politics and media. Rather, these institutions ignore or marginalize the story's deeper significance, at a great cost to the country. In other words, the story is not about the usual things that are said to have caused the crisis in American democracy: policy gridlock, electoral fraud, political corruption, even insurrection. Nor is it about the competition between the ideologies of capitalism and socialism, nor the threat of various threats to democracy, such as autocracy, plutocracy, and kleptocracy.

The story offers a different perspective on politics, based on different evidence, from that offered by most political analysis. It draws on people's profound disquiet, not so much about their personal lives, but life in America, and on the existential challenges America faces, both biophysical and psychosocial. This is also true, to differing degrees, of other liberal democracies, and beyond.

In 2013 I collaborated in a survey that investigated the perceived probability of future threats to humanity in four Western nations: the US, UK, Canada and Australia.[1] Across the four countries, over a half (54%, US 57%) of people rated the risk of 'our way of life ending' within the next 100 years at 50% or greater, and almost three-quarters (73%) rated the risk at 30% or greater. A quarter (24%) rated the risk of 'humans being wiped out' in this time at 50% or greater.

The US stood out from the other three countries in several respects. It had the highest percentage (30%) who thought humans might be wiped out (19-24% in the other countries). It had a much higher level of agreement with fundamentalist responses to global threats, with 47% agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'we are facing a final conflict between good and evil in the world', and 46% that 'we need to return to traditional religious teachings and values to solve global problems and challenges'. (The results presumably reflect the strength of religion in the US, especially 'end time' thinking among Christian fundamentalists.) In the other three countries only 30-33% agreed with these two statements.

The survey also included questions about how concerned people were about a range of personal and societal issues.[2] The US stood out here too, with higher levels of concern about many societal issues, especially political and economic. Two thirds (65%) were moderately or seriously concerned about 'the state of politics in my country', compared to 42-53% for the other three countries; 64% were concerned about 'corruption of politicians/officials', compared to 39-47% in the other countries.

Other surveys around that time told a similar story. In 2011, *Time* magazine reported a poll showing that the US was going through 'one of its longest sustained periods of unhappiness and pessimism ever', adding that it was 'hard to overstate what a fundamental change this represents'.[3] Two-thirds of Americans believed the past decade was one of decline, not progress, for the US (68%), and that the greatest threat to the long-term stability of the US came from within, not from outside, the country (66%).

A story in *The Atlantic* in 2012 reported on a survey showing that Americans believed their country was heading in the wrong direction, that their generation was worse off than their parents' generation, and that their children would be still worse off:[4]

> Americans believe that political corruption, too much focus on material things, and the influence of money in politics are weakening our values and standing in the world. They believe elected officials reflect and represent mainly the values of the wealthy and think the economic system is unfair to middle- and working-class Americans. And they believe that Wall Street is more like a cancer than an engine for economic growth.

US life expectancy stalled from about 2010, then fell between 2014 and 2017, the first three-year fall since World War I and the Spanish flu pandemic one hundred earlier.[5] Contributing to the trend has been rising mortality among those in the prime of life, including from drug overdoses, alcohol use and suicides.[6] The decline in life expectancy revealed a broad erosion in health, with no single 'smoking gun', a health policy expert said.[7] 'There's something more fundamental.... People are feeling worse about themselves and their futures, and that's leading them to do things that are self-destructive and not promoting health.'

This was Barack Obama's America. Yet Obama failed to see it. For him, progress was still progress: life was continuing to get better; climate change and other environmental issues were being solved through orthodox policy initiatives.[8] As he often avowed, the arc of history was long, but it bent towards justice. Obama's faith in progress provided the foundation of his ideological commitment to incremental, rather than radical, political change. As he said in a 2016 BBC interview:[9]

> My view of human progress has stayed surprisingly constant throughout my presidency. The world today, with all its pain and all its sorrow, is more just, more democratic, more free, more tolerant, healthier, wealthier, better educated, more connected, more empathetic than ever before. If you didn't know ahead of time what your social status would be, what your race was, what your gender was, or your sexual orientation was, what country you were living in, and you asked what moment in human history you would like to be born, you'd choose right now.

However, the surveys cited above show many Americans did not view their lives in this light - a situation that continues to this day.[10]

Trump's America and the dominance of race

Enter Donald Trump. A political outsider, Trump did see the America I have described; he acknowledged people's anger and anxiety, most notably in the deindustrialized heartland of America that became his base. Writing this essay has made me very aware it is almost impossible to get people to see Trump in any other way than they are predisposed to see him, to see past him to my main message. So let me be clear: it is only in his awareness of people's mood, and in his shock to the political status quo, that I want to consider Trump's

impact. It is what interested me in applying my work to US politics. What follows is not an attempt to give a full account of his presidency, policies and behavior.

A recent study, *Bowling with Trump,* says researchers have attributed Trump's success largely to 'racialized economics', where economic hardships are seen in racial terms, not personal; they are blamed on 'other groups'.[11] But the study suggests that more fundamental to Trump's support has been heightened anxiety and a lack of social attachment or belonging. This increased racial and national identification, which, importantly, was politicized as racial prejudice and nationalism. This is how the authors of the study describe their findings:

> We find that the oft-observed positive relationship between racial animus (prejudice) and Trump's vote share is eliminated by introducing an interaction between racial animus and a measure of the basic psychological need for relatedness. We also find that rates of worry have a strong and significant positive association with Trump's vote share, but this is offset by high levels of relatedness. Together, these two results imply that racial voting behavior in 2016 was driven by a desire for in-group affiliation as a way of buffering against economic and cultural anxiety. ….This suggests that the economic roots of Trump's success may be overstated and that the need for relatedness is a key underlying driver of contemporary political trends in the US.

When societies come under increasing pressure and strain, as America has, they tend to fracture along traditional fault lines such as class, religion, ethnicity or race. Those in power promote and exploit these fractures. Profound disquiet is easily manipulated, and expressed as more obvious or tangible grievances. America is particularly susceptible to a political focus on racial divisions and antagonism.[12] This tactic is obvious in recent politics, especially with Trump and the far-right. However, the Democrats also played on these fractures in the sense of using them for political leverage or gain - as revealed in Hillary Clinton's infamous 'basket of deplorables' remark.

The danger in this fraying and fragmentation of public debate and discussion is that we lose sight of the bigger picture, and its more fundamental elements, with the result that we are caught up in perpetual conflicts over what are, at least in part, derivative or secondary causes and consequences. Improving the lot of the marginalized and disadvantaged, however legitimate and however much it may help them, will not solve the deeper challenges facing humankind. Climate change provides a useful example of, and metaphor for, this perspective: the poor will suffer most its consequences, and this disparity demands attention, but climate change must be studied and addressed, first and foremost, as a planetary crisis that affects all of us.

The standpoint of 'we are all in this together' offers the advantage of creating more generous and tolerant ways of understanding America, encouraging people to look past the rancour and conflict promoted by its politicians and media, their obsession with 'identity' and 'issue' politics and protest. For example, the *Bowling with Trump* study notes that Trump's supporters have been said to be 'in mourning for a lost way of life'.[13] The liberal media interpreted this nostalgia in terms of historic, white, male privilege. However, this is

not the only possible meaning or interpretation: there have been many social, cultural, economic, environmental and technological changes since the 1950s (the oft-cited, historic benchmark) - in work, education, mainstream and social media, relationships, and the family, for example - that have increased a shared sense of isolation, insecurity, uncertainty, risk, and precarity.

Shaping and coloring this situation has been the impact of the social media, especially Twitter, which captured the political agenda in Trump's time. There has also been the growing political influence of postmodernism, with its multiple narratives, relative truths, ambiguities, pluralism, fragmentation and complex paradoxes. One consequence has been a flourishing of conspiracy theories. These developments all served to fragment and divide American society.

For all his faults and failings - and there were many - Trump achieved something the US needed: he rocked the political establishment to its core. And while he tried to subvert democracy, he also re-invigorated democracy: the 2020 voter turnout was the highest in 120 years.[14] In doing this, however negatively, Trump offered at least a small chance of triggering systemic change. However, the elite liberal media spurned this chance for a deeper, wider inquiry, and instead devoted four years to trying to remove Trump from office. This was also largely true of the Democrats (with the exception of a progressive minority's adoption of a more radical policy package, a Green New Deal). Trump's relationship with the liberal media became one of mutual loathing and goading; it was hugely destructive. In showing such contempt for Trump, the liberal media also derided his supporters, deepening the national division they accused Trump himself of provoking.

It was only later in his term, when the Covid-19 pandemic was devastating the country, and Trump himself looked unlikely to win re-election, that some commentators in the mainstream liberal media began to acknowledge the need to look beyond Trump to understand America's troubles.[15] But these occasional pieces did not reflect, or challenge, the editorial tone of these media outlets.

Generally speaking, during Trump's term, liberal commentary took as a benchmark, a frame of reference, the old political status quo. It was as if they had forgotten the legitimate grievances that took him into office, and believed the task was to restore politics to what it had been before his election, even though everything had changed and needs to change. Much of the coverage implied that there was little wrong with the US that removing Trump would not fix. This focus distracted attention from the country's systemic failings.[16]

The liberal media embraced Joe Biden's election victory with sighs of relief over his centrist policies and a return to political normalcy. 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man', *The Guardian* proclaimed.[17] But the story does not end with Trump's eviction from the White House. The liberal media's celebration of Biden's victory is another aspect of their failure to understand how profoundly things are changing.

Nothing had been settled, as has become clear since. For example, the Republicans' strong showing in the November 2021 US state and local elections, especially winning the governorship of Virginia, a state Biden won handily last year, has several lessons for the

Democrats, according to media commentators, including that they were mistaken in campaigning on anti-Trump sentiments, and they need 'to go big and bold'.[18] This is consistent with my analysis.

With Trump, politics and the media 'zeroed in' on him, when they should have also 'drawn back' to consider the larger social context. I have targeted the liberal media here because their stand-off with Trump provides a striking example of my thesis about the failure of the cultures of politics and journalism to reflect and address people's concerns about life. This broader analysis, to which I return below, is not partisan, but applies across the political spectrum.

Politics and the media define quite arbitrarily what warrants debate and discussion; much that is important is excluded. Hallin, writing about the Vietnam War, distinguished between three spheres of political debate: the sphere of consensus, the sphere of legitimate controversy, and the sphere of deviance.[19] Only matters falling within the second sphere, the sphere of legitimate controversy, gained attention. However, the boundaries between the spheres shift as public opinion change, and can differ between media. My argument is that existing boundaries are lagging far behind - and so distorting - public opinion about life today. The forces reshaping America mean that debate needs to expand the sphere of legitimate debate to encompass more of the sphere of consensus - what is understood to be broadly agreed and accepted - and the sphere of deviance - what is judged to be unworthy, ridiculous or dangerous.

Politics and progress

I am not American, but Australian, living on the far side of the world, so I have no direct experience of American life. I am not a political scientist or policy analyst, steeped in political history and policy detail, but a social researcher into human progress and wellbeing, and the future. But perhaps both these attributes allow me to see more clearly - or at least differently - the bigger picture of American life. As I said, this picture is also true, but mostly to lesser degrees, of other developed nations, including my own.

My research and writing address questions about whether life is getting better or worse.[20] It includes how we conceptualize and measure progress, its sustainability, its impacts on people's health and wellbeing, and how these might shape our future. In a nutshell, the scientific evidence shows that there is a widening gap between the science and politics of human progress and development.[21] Progress as it is pursued politically in the US and the rest of the developed world is environmentally, socially and economically unsustainable, and is undermining quality of life. It cannot last, and it is harming us. This predicament is not reflected in the dominant indicators we use to measure progress, and which inform our politics.

The theory and methodology behind my work is transdisciplinary synthesis, which is under-valued in research.[22] While empirical research seeks to improve understanding of the world by creating new knowledge, synthesis creates new understanding by integrating existing knowledge from across a range of fields, disciplines and sciences. It aims to develop new, common frameworks of understanding, striving for coherence in the overall conceptual

picture rather than precision in the empirical detail. It dispenses with expectations of scientific certainty and exactness, including with respect to cause and effect; everything is provisional, and relationships are often reciprocal.

Science favors depth of knowledge, but breadth also has its place: synthesis adds value to existing specialized knowledge; reduces disciplinary biases; transcends interdisciplinary tensions; improves researchers' knowledge outside their specialization; generates new research questions; and enhances the application of knowledge. Synthesis is particularly appropriate for addressing the increasing scale, complexity and interconnectedness of human problems, and suits the complex, diffuse processes of social change.

My work has focused especially on the 'psychosocial dynamics' of progress, notably the social and personal relationships that shape our way of life, and the worldviews, cultural stories, myths and symbols that define reality and give meaning to our lives. My 'American story' illustrates the importance of these dynamics. This has given me a perspective that differs radically from most other analysis, on both left and right.

Take, as an example, materialism and individualism, two defining qualities of modern Western culture.[23] The research literature suggests that, when taken together and too far, they reduce social integration, self-worth, moral clarity and existential confidence and certainty. There is a shift from intrinsic to extrinsic values and goals; from self-transcendence to self-enhancement; from doing things for their own sake to doing things in the hope or expectation of other rewards, such as status, money and recognition. The result is an increasing focus on our own lives and an unrelenting need to make the most of life. Frustration, disappointment and failure become more likely; loneliness, anger, depression and anxiety are a greater risk.

Consumer culture has shifted its relentless messaging beyond what we have to who we are and what we do, from the acquisition of things to the enhancement of the self. It both fosters and exploits the restless, insatiable expectation that there must be more to life. It has created a self that is socially and historically disconnected, discontented, and insecure; pursuing constant gratification and external affirmation; at risk of addiction, obsession and excess. It has become harder to answer the fundamental questions of existence: Who am I? Where have I come from? Why am I here? Nietzsche said that 'he who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*'.[24] Western consumer culture over-emphasises the 'how', at the expense of the 'why'.

As Bauman has observed, social ills have their source in today's 'individualised society of consumers', with consuming more being the 'sole road to inclusion', and 'existential uncertainty' now a universal human condition.[25] Single-issue solutions might bring temporary and partial relief, he says, but short of reforming the individualistic way of life, they will not remove the cause.

This situation not only erodes social capital and diminishes our wellbeing, contributing to people's dismay about life and politics, as discussed above; the overconsumption it promotes is also a major driver of climate change and other environmental crises that confront America and the world, which I discuss below. Everything is linked.

The demise of the official future

In the four-nation survey cited above, three-quarters of Americans (75%) agreed that 'we need to transform our worldview and way of life if we are to create a better future for the world'; two thirds (65%) agreed that 'hope for the future rests with a growing global movement that wants to create a more peaceful, fair and sustainable world'.[26] (Percentages were similar in the other countries, unlike those to for fundamentalist responses reported above.)

In other words, the public is aware of the risks we face and the need for a radical change of course, a new paradigm of progress. Yet our journalistic and political cultures remain stuck in a paradigm that constrains electoral choice and is crippling democracy. The mutually reinforcing cultures of journalism and politics are outdated and dysfunctional, defined by conflict and contest rather than cooperation and consensus, deepening our difficulties rather helping to solve them.

These cultural flaws are both peculiar to politics and journalism - a product of their level of engagement with the world, notably political manoeuvring and policy detail - and also a reflection of their roles in promoting and maintaining more widely a modern Western culture that is itself increasingly outdated and dysfunctional.

It is this failure that lies behind the unease, mistrust, and disenchantment in the electorate, not just political corruption and incompetence and policy mistakes.[27] It is part of a layered political complexity, resulting in what I have described as the 'demise of the official future': a loss of faith in the future that governments promise, and on which they base their policies.

Put simply, the official future is one constructed around notions of continuing material progress and economic growth, and scientific and technological advances, with the aim of providing an ever-rising standard of living. It is increasingly being opposed by sustainable development as a framework for thinking about human betterment. (Authentic) sustainable development does not give economic growth overriding priority. Instead, it seeks a better balance and integration of social, environmental and economic goals and objectives to produce a high, equitable and enduring quality of life. The concept of sustainability is gaining ground in politics, but it still falls far short of what is required.

The demise of the official future is causing a cascade of consequences, including to the 'psychosocial dynamics' of progress that I mentioned earlier. Our visions of the future are woven into the stories we create to make sense and meaning of our lives. This 'storying' is important in linking individuals to a broader social or collective narrative, and affects both our own personal wellbeing (by enhancing our sense of belonging, identity and agency, for example), and societal functioning (by engaging us in the shared task of working for a better future).

The extent to which Obama's politics and policies reflected his worldview, his continuing belief in the 'official future', shows why we need to place these fundamental frameworks of how we understand the world at the centre of political debate. Such a debate would be very

different from today's emphasis on 'issue' and 'identity' politics, whose elements are kept firmly within the conventional model of progress. The interconnected risks facing humanity cannot be solved by focusing only on the discrete, specific issues that characterize and define today's politics, however legitimate the concerns are in themselves.

In science, paradigms change when they are confronted by a growing body of anomalous and contradictory evidence that they cannot explain or resolve. So it is with politics, which also confronts a growing array of policy failures, unsolvable problems, and bitter divisions - but is struggling to understand or resolve them. We need a new paradigm that better acknowledges and addresses the emerging realities of planetary conditions and limits, and our better understanding of human needs and wellbeing.

There is no reason why political debate cannot be reframed in this way - except for the entrenched cultures of politics and journalism, which are both too 'short-sighted' and too 'narrow minded'. Watching the four-part documentary series, *The Fourth Estate,* about *The New York Times* and Trump, while I worked on this essay drove home to me just how removed from my 'American story' political journalism has become, how absorbed and obsessed with Washington intrigue, tweets, scoops, and the 24/7 news cycle. We need to change the 'idea' of progress, and to do that we must change the 'idea' of politics and journalism.

I am acutely conscious of how radical, even fanciful and improbable, my position is. But it is based on a wide range of scientific evidence, however much we choose to ignore that evidence. It is a long shot, but hope for the future now rests on long shots. Cultures are so ingrained that they appear to be the natural and right way to look at the world.[28] They tend to be 'transparent' or 'invisible' to those living within them because they comprise deeply internalized assumptions and beliefs, making their effects hard to discern, or study. It is all but impossible to see beyond them to allow for other, fresh perspectives. Yet this is what we must do.

I might add that this is also true of the cultures of scientific disciplines: different disciplines see things differently; they develop different models for explaining and studying the world, which generate different research questions, produce different results and lead to different interpretations of reality. Transcending disciplinary boundaries and perspectives is not easy. But this, also, is what we must do.

Existential threats

The study of future threats cited at the beginning of the essay is about perceptions, not realities.[29] Nor do those perceptions necessarily reflect an informed understanding of the risks. Rather, they are likely to be an expression of a more general uncertainty and fear about the future, as discussed in the previous section. Nonetheless, the science validates these perceptions.

Early in 2021 I took part in an online discussion of existential threats to humanity. The global risks include the decline of key natural resources; the collapse of ecosystems that support life, and the mass extinction of species; human population growth and demand beyond

earth's carrying capacity; global warming, sea-level rise and change in the earth's climate affecting all human activity; widespread chemical pollution of earth systems; rising food insecurity and failing nutritional quality; nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction; pandemics of new and untreatable disease; advent of powerful and uncontrolled new technologies; and widespread human failure to understand and act preventatively on these risks.[30]

Participants agreed that solutions exist to all these threats - except a solution to our inability to get political traction on the solutions. We confront a huge scale anomaly, or reality gap, between the challenges and our responses. From the 1970s onward, we have declared each decade to be a decade of reckoning for Earth's environment, a time when humankind must deal decisively with growing global environmental crises. And as each decade passed without the necessary action, we deferred the reckoning to the next decade. Climate change became a focal issue, scientifically and politically. Now, it is the 2020s that we claim to be the last chance to avert catastrophic consequences. We are in the sixth decade of 'The Reckoning'.

This repeated 'kicking the can down the road' means we have already missed critical chances, at least with some hazards. It is not that nothing worthwhile has been done, but that not enough has been done, with the result that the gulf between what we are doing, and what we now know we need to do, continues to widen. In an email exchange after the online discussion, a leading climate-change scientist said of the latest research on the 2015 Paris Agreement goals: 'The sober message is that 1.5^{o}C is gone and a reasonable chance to cap temperature rise at 2°C will vanish quickly without a truly emergency approach to the challenge' (Will Steffen, 2021, personal communication). He and other climate-change experts who participated agreed that achieving 'net zero carbon emissions by 2050', the current political objective, would not be enough.

It will take time to gauge the success or failure of the Glasgow COP 26 climate-change meeting; judgments have been mixed.[31] From a political perspective, we advanced on Paris; from a scientific one, we failed to close the gap between the reality of climate change and our response. As one journalist summed it up: 'Whatever its outcome, it will be too little too late, but far better than nothing'.[32] Politics continues to produce incremental change, while science demands urgent, radical action. Perhaps the central lesson from COP 26 is that the pressure on the political status quo is clearly increasing, but has yet to crack it open; we are still 'kicking the can down the road'.

Whatever the truth about what Glasgow did or did not achieve, it is important to remember climate change is not the only physical challenge humanity faces; and there is also the need to address the psychosocial deficits, which are jeopardising our health and wellbeing and playing out in our precarious politics.

Conclusion

The evidence shows that the political systems of the United States and other Western liberal democracies are failing, unable to deal with the nature and scale of 21st Century realities. Blinkered by their cultures, most politicians and journalists do not see the extent of this

failure. Without a transformational change in the cultures of politics and journalism, we will not and cannot 'look outward' far enough, and 'look inward' deeply enough, to address the two types of existential threat humankind confronts: the extrinsic, environmental and other tangible problems that pose a threat to human civilization and survival; and the intrinsic, intangible problems of finding meaning and belonging in today's world. This should be the most fundamental layer of political discourse - one which remains largely missing.

To respond effectively to this situation, political debate needs to incorporate and reflect all the complexity and depth of today's challenges, to encourage the conceptual space for a transformation in our worldview, beliefs and values as profound as any in human history.

Notes

[1] Melanie Randle and Richard Eckersley, "Public perceptions of future threats to humanity and different societal responses: A cross-national study," *Futures* 72 (September 2015): 4-16, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.06.004 .

[2] Melanie Randle, Richard Eckersley and Leonie Miller. "Societal and personal concerns, their associations with stress, and the implications for progress and the future," *Futures* 93 (October 2017): 68-79, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2017.07.004 .

[3] Mark J.Penn, "The pessimism index," *Time*, June 30, 2011, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2080607,00.html.

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[6] Prior, "More Americans are dying."

[7] Joel Achenbach, "'There's something terribly wrong': Americans are dying young at alarming rates," *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/theres-something-terribly-wrong-americans-are-dying-young-at-alarming-rates/2019/11/25/d88b28ec-0d6a-11ea-8397-a955cd542d00_story.html.

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[9] BBC, "Inside Obama's White House," Brook Lapping Productions in association with Les Films D'Ici 2 for the BBC, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b074g0gt/episodes/guide.

[10] Eckersley, "Closing the gap".

[11] Mark Fabian, Robert Breunig and Jan-Emmanuel De Neve," Bowling with Trump: Economic Anxiety, Racial Identification, and Well-Being in the 2016 Presidential Election," *ISA Discussion Papers*, No. 13022, (Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics (ISA), 2020), http://hdl.handle.net/10419/216334.

[12] The political focus on race is evident in a recent account of how *The New York Times* set up a project that attempted to understand the forces that led to Trump's election. Rather than digging deep into the 'half of America' that had voted for the president, the author says, the newspaper 'chose to blame the events of 2016 on the country's pervasive racism, not only here and now but everywhere and always'. The project's stated mission was to 'reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the center of our national narrative'; Martin Gurri, "Slouching towards post-journalism," *City Journal,* Winter, 2021, https://www.city-journal.org/journalism-advocacy-over-reporting.

[13] Fabian, Breunig and De Neve, "Bowling with Trump", 4.

[14] Kevin Schaul, Kate Rabinowitz and Ted Mellnik, "2020 turnout is the highest in over a century," *Washington Post*, November 5, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/elections/voter-turnout/

[15] Richard Eckersley, "COVID-19 lays bare the US's deep problems, with some help from Trump," *Resilience*, August 5, 2020, https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-08-05/covid-19-lays-bare-the-uss-deep-problems-with-some-help-from-trump/

[16] More radical environmental and leftist commentators did see Trump as exposing the failings of the entire US political system. For example: Naomi Klein, "Naomi Klein: Now let's fight back against the politics of fear," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/10/naomi-klein-now-fight-back-against-politics-fear-shock-doctrine-trump; Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers, "Trump follows previous presidents who have undermined climate action," *Truthdig*, June 5, 2017. https://www.truthdig.com/articles/trump-follows-previous-presidents-who-have-undermined-climate-action/. Macy expressed succinctly this potential for change: Trump's election was 'a very painful waking up'; if Clinton had won, she said, 'we would have stayed asleep'. Dahr Jamail, "Learning to see in the dark: An interview with deep ecologist Joanna

Macy," *Truthout,* February 13, 2017, https://truthout.org/articles/learning-to-see-in-the-dark-amid-catastrophe-an-interview-with-deep-ecologist-joanna-macy/.

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