

DEMOCRACY
WHERE
AND THE
PROSPERITY
NEXT AMERICAN
MEETS JUSTICE
ECONOMY



HENRY A. J. RAMOS

Foreword by Anthony D. Romero, Executive Director, the American Civil Liberties Union

Praise for *Democracy and the Next American Economy*

“Ramos’ work is impressive for its breadth and refreshing for its focus on tangible solutions and opportunities at a time that is dominated by expressions of concern about the growing litany of problems we all see before us.”

—Anthony D. Romero, Executive Director,
American Civil Liberties Union

“Henry Ramos doesn’t merely envision a new, more equitable, inclusive economy, supported by truly representative democracy. He shows us how to get there.”

—Jared Bernstein, Ph.D. and former Chief Economist
and Economic Advisor to Vice President Joe Biden

“Ramos offers a compelling vision of how we can create a more equitable and inclusive economy by building on real life examples and proven practices that are showing us the way; in doing so, he reveals that the future we wish for is already here—should we choose to act.”

—Deborah Frieze, Founder and President, Boston Impact Initiative

“This book is necessary reading for all seeking to live in a world infused with equity and justice. Getting there requires work. Fortunately, Henry A. J. Ramos has provided us with the blueprint for action.”

—Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder in Residence, PolicyLink

“Every now and then a book appears that gives us a new perspective on our situation and flips a switch so we see new possibilities for our future. *Democracy and the Next American Economy* is one of those works.”

—Susan Henderson, Executive Director,
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

“Ramos offers a strong case for a new and different kind of way to advance democracy and prosperity-sharing based on real life examples from all across the nation.”

—Saru Jayaraman, Co-Founder and Co-Director,
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“Henry A. J. Ramos has assembled a must-read book for all people who want a more inclusive and sustainable political economy that is better for people and the planet.”

—Cristina Jiménez, Co-Founder and
Executive Director, United We Dream

“Democracy and the Next American Economy should be required reading for all Americans who are troubled by our current path and seeking tangible alternatives.”

—Zachary Norris, Executive Director, Ella Baker Center

“Inspiration is important—but so is a roadmap. With this book, Ramos offers a practical pathway to a better way forward, using proven and promising innovations from regions and cities across the land to connect the dots.”

—Manuel Pastor, Director, Program on Environmental
and Regional Equity, University of Southern California

“Henry Ramos approaches his research like any good organizer: he gathers people and ideas and creates a synthesis that is greater than the individual parts.”

—Felicia J. Wong, President and CEO, Roosevelt Institute

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This book is dedicated to the everyday men, women, and young people of America who have struggled and sacrificed over the centuries to advance freedom, democracy, opportunity, justice, community, kindness, joy, and beauty.

Contents

Preface	xiii
Foreword by Anthony D. Romero	xxiii
Introduction	xxvii
Chapter 1	
It Doesn't Have to Be This Way!	1
Chapter 2	
The Recent Decline of American Democratic Integrity and the Case for Promoting New Models in Civic Engagement	45
Chapter 3	
Next Stage Strategies for Restoring Our Democracy and Civic Vitality	65
Chapter 4	
The Limits of Hyper-capitalism and Material Accumulation for the Few	133
Chapter 5	
New Pathways Towards a Sustainable Social Economy	167
Chapter 6	
Democratic Renewal, Shared Prosperity, and a New Social Contract for Twenty-first-century America	215
Conclusion	251
Appendix	
Advisors and Expert Informants	255

*Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every
person a potential activist, every minute a
chance to change the world.*

—Dolores Huerta

Preface

We must trust our own thinking. Trust where we're going.
And get the job done.

—Wilma Mankiller

In the pages that follow, I offer both a critique of current trends in American political economy as well as a call to action and a peek into a select sampling of alternative emerging practices that, properly attended to and scaled, would do much to put America and the world on a more just and sustainable path. Presently, the topics covered here are of interest across the US political and intellectual landscape. There is no shortage of loud and enthusiastic voices entering the fray with varying ideas and opinions about what is happening in the current moment. There are fewer pundits offering more concrete and proven (or at least highly promising) alternatives. This book is my humble attempt to contribute to the discourse from a progressive perspective through analysis of the issues, but also with an eye to lifting up models of innovation that are showing us the way to a future of living democracy, economic restoration and environmental sustainability.

I come to the conversation with a healthy degree of reluctance and regret. Frankly, I wish it were not necessary to offer this contribution to the present discourse. I would have much preferred for national and global events over the past several years to take us in another, better direction, one that would have inspired a greater sense of purpose and continuing progress from a human and ecological point of view. But with the Fall 2016 election of Donald J. Trump to serve as the United

States' 45th president, and subsequent events, it has proven impossible for me not to make an impassioned plea for another pathway to the future. In the current context, it is vital for all forward-looking American civic leaders, intellectuals, artists, workers, youth, immigrants and others with strong opposition to the path we are on as a nation to actively express their concerns and proposals for a better way. What follows is my personal response to this imperative, first and foremost as a progressive American and, second, as a Latino American. On both fronts, the impulse to pen this work came during the very early stages of the 2016 Republican presidential primary, following Donald Trump's announcement of his intention to seek the presidency.

In Trump's very first statement as a candidate, he disparaged Mexican immigrants as drug dealers, criminals and rapists. Soon thereafter he had one of North America's most prestigious Latino journalists, Jorge Ramos of the Univision Television Network, a naturalized US citizen from Mexico, physically removed from an Iowa press conference for asking uncomfortable questions about the candidate's positions on immigration issues. Soon after that, Trump went on record arguing that a California federal district court judge, Gonzalo P. Curiel, a Mexican American who was slated to hear cases related to alleged wrongdoing by Trump University and the Trump administration's authority to build a new wall separating the US and Mexico, was unsuited to preside over these cases owing to his Mexican heritage. Trump later went on to publicly chastise San Juan, Puerto Rico's mayor, Carmen Yulín Cruz Soto, after Hurricane Maria, accusing her of "poor leadership" (following her criticism of Trump's lackluster response to the crisis) and implying that the people of the devastated island were not doing enough to help themselves. And, most recently, in May 2018, he used the word "animals" to refer to the undocumented individuals being repatriated along the US southern border by ICE under the administration's crack down on immigrants. These irresponsible assertions and actions were sadly matched by comparably objectionable and inappropriate comments made by Trump during his first two years in office, relating to African Americans, Muslim Americans, Native Americans, disabled Americans, women, African countries and others.

Trump's public bigotry has been complemented in many instances by reckless policy decisions and proposals, such as withdrawing American support for the Paris Agreement on Global Climate Change, imposing significant new tariffs on China (risking a global trade war), and proposing that we combat mass public school shootings by arming school teachers and administrators. Such irresponsible positions have been met with international concern and a high degree of dismay on the part of Americans all across our nation. Indeed, the entire Trump phenomenon has put all people of conscience and goodwill in a troubled state of mind. And for good reason. The fact that someone like Trump could win the presidency at all suggests something fundamentally new and dangerous has transpired in modern American political and civic culture. Indeed, the kind of vile and divisive behavior exemplified by Trump is entirely unprecedented in American presidential history. To any rational, responsible and reasonable observer, current circumstances underscore that a certain unhinging has taken hold in relation to our national identity and psyche. This is not a safe or necessary situation for America or the world. Rather, it is one that calls for an extremely heightened sense of concern and a redoubling of organized efforts to resist Trumpism's further degradation of American politics and culture.

But the problem is much bigger than merely Trump and the ideology of selfishness and division that his brand of leadership represents. Even more than that, the very nature of our political economy and civic culture has been transformed to such a degree in recent decades that our systems are simply no longer working for most people. Not only are too many of our people being exploited, abused and otherwise left behind in the swirl of trying to achieve or maintain cultural and economic security, but also the expanding machinations of America's modern economy and consumption culture have left growing numbers of Americans feeling vacant and deeply unhappy. With rates of depression, substance abuse and suicide reaching unprecedented levels in recent years, it is hard to deny that all is not well on the home front. Indeed, if asked what they would want the country's social, political and economic agreements to look like if we could start over

from scratch, few Americans would support the idea of re-creating our current system. Rather, they would conclude that we badly need a change in course.

This book offers thoughts, ideas and suggestions specifically intended to help advance organized resistance to the misguided trends we currently see in our politics and economic practices, based on the work and thinking of progressive activists and innovators of many diverse backgrounds from all across America. To those who are in the vanguard of change advocacy and thus closest to the work and thinking highlighted here, there will be relatively few headlines in this reading. But for the many progressive Americans across the land, and others, who are deeply concerned and want change but are not situated at the center of gravity in politics and civic decision-making, this book will provide a valuable survey of the issues and a guide to the many ways their voices can be heard in the coming stages of our national journey. This is my main audience and intention in advancing the observations and perspectives that follow. Although the book is extensively researched and referenced throughout (building on highly credible information sources in each instance), there is no pretense that this is a scientific or scholarly work. Nor is there any representation that the leaders and groups included here are the only ones making meaningful change possible in contemporary America. Rather, the work that follows—largely journalistic in approach—offers a broad survey of proven and promising practices in democratic engagement and prosperity-sharing. These models in turn are emblematic of the range of innovative approaches progressive Americans need to champion in order to help make our national political economy more inclusive and responsive to common people.

To achieve these ends, however, will require progressive Americans to pursue and wield political power in unprecedented ways during the coming years. This is an inherent challenge for many on our side of the political spectrum. Often, both liberal leaders and progressive activists have demonstrated their discomfort with acquiring and using power in ways conservatives have not. For example, with only technical electoral college victories after losing the national popular votes in

both the elections of 2000 and 2016, Republican presidents have subsequently acted in office as though they were elected with large mandates to enact far-reaching legislative and regulatory changes. In each instance, the resulting policies and actions have compromised our national strength and standing. By contrast, liberals elected to the presidency in 1992-2000 and then again in 2008-2016 have won handily at the polls, only subsequently to act with extreme caution once in office in ways that failed to maximize the advance of more progressive policies.

Given all that is presently at stake in our national political context, progressives simply have to develop a new relationship with power, one that is more enabling than disabling and one that is more suited to winning than losing. At the end of the day, this all boils down to being a matter of faith: faith in our ideas, faith in our positions and faith in each other. It is as the late, great former chief of the Cherokee Nation, Wilma Mankiller once said: “We must trust our own thinking. Trust where we’re going. And get the job done.” Once we adopt that imperative, once we are able to align our efforts and resources in service to it, and once we cast aside our doubts and differences in ways that harness the full breadth of our humanity and vision, progressive Americans will be able to change the course of our nation, and in the process to change our world. Indeed, this is what it will take to get the job done in the future that awaits us.

In many respects, I am precisely the sort of reporter that conservatives will roundly discount and criticize for my analysis and proposals in this volume. I am a native Californian and a graduate of two of our nation’s most prestigious liberal centers of higher learning: the University of California at Berkeley and Harvard University. During my formative studies at these institutions, I was mentored or otherwise taught by the likes of Laura D’Andrea Tyson (dean of the U.C. Berkeley Haas School of Business and former chief economic advisor to President Bill Clinton), Robert Reich (currently a U.C. Berkeley professor of public policy and a former secretary of labor during the Clinton presidency) and John Rawls (the late Harvard professor considered by many to be the most important liberal political philosopher

of the twentieth century). I am also a former professional of leading social justice philanthropies, including the Ford Foundation in New York and the charitable grant-making foundation of Levi Strauss & Company in San Francisco. In addition, I am a longstanding member of the ACLU, an activist artist and immigrant rights advocate and a proud former board member of various progressive advocacy organizations, including the Women's Foundation of California and Asian Americans Advancing Justice. All of these markers of my journey place me squarely left of center on the political and ideological spectrum.

However, despite these “credentials,” I am otherwise an unlikely individual to advance the perspective and arguments that I do throughout this work. In fact, I was raised in Los Angeles in a solidly conservative Republican household. My family owned a small business and enthusiastically supported Governor Ronald Reagan and other conservative politicians, such as Barry Goldwater, Jr. and John H. Rousselot, with whom my WWII-veteran father worked closely. My first real job was representing Latino armed forces veterans through the American GI Forum, whose leadership was then largely Republican. I was raised—and still pray—in the traditions of the Catholic Church. I live on a ten-acre ranch in a largely conservative rural community. I drive a 1993 Ford F-150 pickup truck and own a shotgun that I am occasionally called to use in order to protect my livestock from encroaching predators. In all of these respects, I simply am not the “liberal” stereotype conservative detractors may want to characterize me as because of the views expressed here.

Their potential attacks and rejoinders are of little consequence to me, because I present my case for needed fundamental change in America not to them but to progressives and to people who believe in the democratic promise. My aim here is precisely to “preach to the choir” in ways that will help those of us on the progressive left to better harmonize our efforts to achieve the change we seek, and that our nation and world badly need. I try to achieve that in part by offering a critique of everything that is not working in our democracy and economy today as a result of the last four decades of conservative-inspired gerrymandering, tax cutting, deregulation and trickle-down econom-

ics. But I also attempt to make the case for new and different approaches to solving public problems from a decidedly progressive perspective by providing examples of programs for building power and expressing our voices in order to restore the vitality of our waning democracy and our increasingly unequal economy.

In taking on this ambitious research and writing project, I knew I would need and benefit from much outside help. So I assembled a group of advisors and informants who are leading progressive activists and thought leaders. In addition, I interviewed a number of allied leaders and innovators in civic activism and social investment for their ideas and perspectives. Altogether, more than sixty such individuals were my consultants, all of whom are referenced in the Appendix at the end of this volume. Several of the experts interviewed and/or consulted provided especially helpful editorial review and suggestions warranting special recognition here. These include Darrick Hamilton, Scott Nielsen, Carl Palmer, Kathi Pugh, C. M. Samala and Susan Phinney Silver. The collective input and guidance provided by these many diverse sources proved to be essential. But while the inputs and counsel of these leading Americans were essential to the book's completion in its final form, I alone am responsible for any and all conclusions herein that readers may find objectionable or otherwise questionable.

In addition, I have other friends and allies to recognize for their invaluable assistance with the completion of this volume. This includes my publisher, Dr. Nicolás Kanellos of Arte Público Press and his able team of editors and staff, including especially Marina Tristán, Dr. Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Nellie González Robledo and Beatriz Verónica Romero. For some forty years, Arte Público Press has served as the nation's leading producer of Latino-related literary and art publications, as well as educational textbooks and contemporary nonfiction works covering issues of importance to Latino communities, the United States and the Americas in general. It has been my great privilege to be affiliated with the Arte Público Press for now half that time as an author, senior editor and special projects coordinator. I also owe heartfelt gratitude to Frank de Jesús Acosta, my valued research associate

for the project and past collaborator on the Arte Público Press Latino Young Men & Boys book series, and Marsha Caldwell, my executive assistant. Both of these individuals have been longtime partners and supporters of my work.

I also wish to recognize the inspiration and example of various leaders and thinkers I once had the honor of collaborating with and learning from, who are no longer with us but whose life works have influenced my thinking and priorities over the years. These include, among others: Evelio Grillo, the long-revered Afro-Cuban Bay Area social worker, activist and writer; Tom Hayden, the late renowned peace activist and California state senator; Dr. Antonia Pantoja, founder of the education and youth empowerment organization ASPI-RA; Russell Sakaguchi, the former director of ARCO/BP Foundation; Willie Velásquez, the legendary founder of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project; and Lynn Walker-Huntley, my late former colleague and mentor at the Ford Foundation who led the organization's civil rights work in the 1980s and 1990s. Leaders and thinkers like these committed their lives and sacrificed greatly for justice in all of its forms over many decades. Their experiences, and the grace and courage with which they faced a lifetime of challenge, should never be forgotten by those who continue to fight now.

Finally, I am particularly indebted to my deceased Mexican grandparents, Jesús and Carmen Rodríguez and Enrique and Josefina Ramos, whose vision and many sacrifices brought them to a successful life in the United States one hundred years ago, making possible all the many gifts that have been bestowed upon their progeny, and especially me. Their hard work, their devout commitment to the teachings and ways of the Catholic Church, and their selflessness in building for the future generations made a lasting impact on my own values and choices, for which I will be forever grateful. Most of all, I am indebted to my beloved wife, Claudia Lenschen Ramos, who for the better part of thirty years has endured my restless pursuit of justice and harmony in our otherwise troubled world, and who has always been there to support me throughout the journey. Without her

unwavering and unequivocal support throughout my research and writing, this volume simply would not have been possible.

Henry A. J. Ramos

June 1, 2018

Foreword

These are challenging times for people who believe in democracy, the rule of law, and responsible government in America. They are also challenging times for people and families that are struggling to survive under increasingly unfair and unequal economic circumstances.

America as we know and understand it is a nation based on the ideals of equality, fairness and opportunity. But for a variety of reasons, those ideals remain out of reach for many. We live in an era of growing civic dysfunction, barriers to access, disparities in wealth and public discord. It is a time of heightened intergroup tension, racism and xenophobia, as well as expanding departures from established democratic traditions and growing class divisions.

Somewhat similar circumstances gave rise to the formation of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) nearly 100 years ago, in 1920. At that time, such leading American figures as Roger Baldwin, Helen Keller, Felix Frankfurter and Jane Addams came together to establish the ACLU as a bulwark against arbitrary and unjust overreach by government leaders and agencies relative to the constitutionally guaranteed rights and liberties of the American people.

At the time of the ACLU's formation, just as today, rights and justice in America were being severely denied to many American workers, immigrants, women, and racial and other minority populations. Subsequent eras posed new challenges, including the Japanese American Internment policies of the 1940s, the McCarthy era communist witch hunts of the 1950s, the Vietnam War and Watergate-informed White House excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, "tough on crime" poli-

cies of the 1980s and 1990s that led to mass incarceration, and the Patriot Act of 2001 and other post-911 encroachments on civil liberties in the name of national security.

For nearly one hundred years, in these and other contexts, the ACLU has sought to advance American constitutional ideals through a combination of strategic litigation, lobbying, public education and civic activism. We have mobilized our members and allies across the country to defend and expand civil liberties at every opportunity. And we have made a meaningful difference in preserving and protecting the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the United States of America.

Today, those who support the ACLU's aims, and progressive Americans more generally, are faced with a prevalent policy and power mindset among the nation's ruling elite that is patently antithetical to our core values and beliefs. With each passing day, we see growing evidence that the very nature of the social contract that has successfully guided generation after generation of Americans is being tattered. And it is increasingly self-evident that this shift in national culture and practice is leading us to places that are inconsistent with our essential identity and standing in the world.

While it is true that our nation has always faced the impulse of high-ranking public officials and agencies to abuse their power, our nation has rarely seen a challenge as frontal to our civic integrity as what we have before us today. All of this raises the bar for Americans to challenge and contest our current direction, to organize and join forces with an eye to regaining the best of what we stand for, and to use the courts and other public offices to advocate for the change we seek.

It also compels those of us who share a more progressive view of America's best possibilities to help scale and otherwise accelerate emerging new models in democratic self-governance and economic opportunity that can show us the way to a better future. Henry A. J. Ramos' book, *Democracy and the Next American Economy: Where Prosperity Meets Justice*, is an important contribution to this endeavor. It offers a compelling analysis of our present circumstances and a roadmap to a more promising future based on nascent civic and economic innovations that simultaneously honor the spirit of our nation's

founding principles, while portending wholly new modalities for realizing our best potential going forward. Ramos' work is impressive for its breadth and refreshing for its focus on tangible solutions and opportunities at a time that is dominated by expressions of concern about the growing litany of problems we all see before us. His research is heavily informed by extensive inputs from an impressive array of more than fifty leading community, organizational and thought leaders whose work is helping to drive much of progressive America's evolving thinking and action on the issues. Perhaps most compelling about Ramos' offerings is his emphasis on the need for new efforts by progressive leaders to join forces in more lasting and impactful ways than ever before, which he sees as an essential strategy for change at a pivotal moment in history.

Faced with so many extraordinary challenges to our fundamental values, now is not a time to become paralyzed or driven to small thinking or inaction. Ramos does not advocate for change on the margins or in increments. Rather, he is calling for a significant reordering of American politics and economy to meet the imperatives of our nation's formative promises in new and unprecedented ways during the coming generation. The pages that follow are essential reading for our times.

Anthony D. Romero
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union
June 2018

Introduction

When people are lost in the wilderness, they move through predictable stages. The first reaction is to deny they are lost.

—Margaret J. (“Meg”) Wheatley
*So Far From Home*¹

This book is about encouraging a new and better way forward for America based on emerging innovations in progressive political and economic thought, policy and practice. It is intended to help us find our way forward in a political climate that suggests our nation has lost its way as the result of pursuing now nearly forty years of policies designed to put privilege and profit before people and the planet. Where once our nation was the envy of the world for its robust democracy and institutional stability, scientific leadership, quality schools, growing egalitarianism and purposeful global leadership, today we find ourselves in a notable decline on many of these fronts.²

Large US-based global corporations, their board leaders and executives, and those who benefit most directly from their decisions and power have done well enough in recent years; indeed, the wealthy and the powerful today have accumulated more for themselves than any generation of past Americans, save perhaps for those who prevailed in the prime years of American industrialization, some one hundred years ago. Yet rather than directing the remarkable wealth our nation has produced in recent times to improvements in the average American’s quality of life, the opposite is taking place. It really should not be so.

Despite the current order and direction of things, there are exciting emerging alternatives available to us. These include whole new modalities in responsible development and investment, sustainable

energy, workplace quality, education, voting, civic participation, and social justice. If properly supported and scaled, they could offer us all a far better way forward. But to realize that potentiality, Americans who care most about our national integrity and future success will have to organize and fight as never before. Indeed, we can and we must do so if our nation is to remain a beacon of hope, opportunity and leadership for its own people and others around the world.

A Nation at Risk

There can be no doubt, much is at stake. All around us there are growing signs that America has lost its moorings. The world's once mightiest democracy and economy finds itself today in a state of domestic upheaval and global decline. Recent growing ideological and political divisions, income and wealth inequality and public violence (often racially, religiously or politically motivated) have marked the most dramatic and challenging moments in the American journey since the late 1960s and early 1970s.³

Particularly disturbing have been the renewal of intense racial and religious divisions over a multi-year spate of shootings of unarmed African American citizens by white Americans (mainly police officers), a notable spike in carnage stemming from the mass shootings of innocent civilians in places ranging from concert halls and dance clubs to schools and churches, and a corresponding national increase in anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and anti-abortion violence (or threats of violence).

Meg Wheatley, a social commentator and systems analyst, assessed the situation in her book *So Far From Home* (2012) as a toxic combination of narcissism, polarization and paranoia that has overtaken American culture and politics in recent years—the net result being a nation separated in cultural, economic and ideological camps that are increasingly dislocated and in conflict. National elections over the past decade have reflected the public's deep partisan and ideological divisions and its ambivalence about the leadership needed to right America's course. In effect, voters in recent elections have decided to split the difference in most cycles by dividing power between the executive and the legislative branches of government. But under split

Republican and Democratic leadership, little progress on economic and social policies has been achieved and partisan wrangling, public anger and frustration have intensified across the political spectrum—starting with the short-lived Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements.⁴

Intolerance and Division on the Rise

This toxic combination of factors and forces has unleashed formidable challenges to modern American democracy and global economic leadership, producing a historic lack of public confidence in American institutions⁵ and ultimately making possible the recent unlikely election of controversial Republican businessman and political neophyte Donald J. Trump as president of the United States. Trump ran on an unapologetically nationalistic platform that enthusiastically attacked immigrants and Muslims, while also insulting women, people with disabilities and other groups of Americans along the way.⁶ Advancing his campaign under the tag line “America First,” Trump claimed the essential purpose of his candidacy and presidency would be to “Make America Great Again.”⁷

Now, ironically, in the aftermath of Trump’s victory, for many, the former businessman and television personality’s election and subsequent, chaotic service in office have signaled a possible end to America’s century of global leadership. Only six months into the Trump presidency, record low numbers of Americans expressed confidence in the new executive or the direction of our nation. According to the Gallup Organization, in July 2017 some sixty percent of Americans of all political persuasions already disapproved of Trump’s performance in the White House. No post-World War II American president has ever received such low marks in such a short period of time following his election. And according to Rasmussen’s Summer 2017 polling data, only one-third of likely American voters believed the nation was on the right track.⁸

Americans’ concerns about the nation’s most recently elected chief executive were unprecedented in our modern history and disconcerting. Through a combination of bizarre policy advancements and retreats, public remarks and tweets, Trump spent his first two years in office

defying established presidential decorum and conventional political rules of the road.⁹ While candidate Trump had threatened to do as much during his 2016 campaign, once in office, it quickly became apparent that his views and approach carried real-life and highly troublesome consequences. In August 2017, for example, the Trump presidency sunk to new lows when in the aftermath of several deaths resulting from a violent rally of white supremacists at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville the president asserted that counter-protesters were equally reprehensible and responsible for the violence. Trump's inflammatory remarks on the events in Charlottesville were publicly condemned by Americans of all racial backgrounds, even by members of the president's own Republican Party, as well as by leaders around the world.¹⁰

At a well-attended rally in Alabama in September 2017, Trump mocked the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement's legitimate concerns about increasing incidents of African American deaths at the hands of police and allied authorities during recent years. Challenging the decision taken by many African American professional football players to peacefully protest in solidarity with BLM by kneeling in silence during the national anthem at National Football League (NFL) games, Trump brashly asserted that he would like to encourage NFL franchise owners to disallow such conduct, saying, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!'"¹¹

Also in September 2017, the president moved to rescind former President Obama's executive order allowing nearly 800,000 mainly non-citizen Latino immigrants brought to the United States without documentation as minors to remain in the country to work and study under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program. By all reasonable accounts, DACA status holders have been overwhelming contributors to American society and the economy over recent years.¹² The decision to end DACA thus has posed serious deportation threats to upstanding individuals who have effectively known life in no other country than ours—threats that would materially and detrimentally impact not only the affected individuals, but also their families (many of which include both mixed, citizen and

non-citizen members) and the numerous communities in which they reside. Trump later doubled down on his anti-immigrant proclamations, introducing in Spring 2018 the most heinous US policy since the Japanese American internment of WWII, separating Central American refugees from their children at the US-Mexico border, by isolating the children, toddlers and even infants in prison-like facilities across South Texas in defiance of US obligations under established international law.

In December 2017 through early 2018, credible reporting (covered only briefly during the 2016 election cycle) surfaced regarding numerous women who, over the years, have accused the president of sexual misconduct. Such coverage closely followed revelations of major sexual impropriety against women by numerous well known male media and political figures, including Trump's White House Secretary Rob Porter.¹³ Amid growing calls for the president to address the allegations and the general phenomenon of sexual impropriety in society and at the workplace, a tone-deaf Trump tweeted statements that reflected his concern for the men accused of sexual misdeeds, rather than the women subjected to unacceptable encroachments on their physical integrity and feelings.¹⁴ This response, coupled with earlier incidents suggesting related sexual abuse and misconduct involving Trump and/or close allies of the president, fueled a wave of righteous public outrage.¹⁵

In February 2018, following several mass shootings, including the one at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, affected youth and community members initiated one of the most forceful calls ever for new restrictions on the sale and possession of semi-automatic firearms. Key retail vendors responded with surprising swiftness to the resulting #NeverAgain Campaign, changing their sales policies in hopes of preventing future massacres.¹⁶ Walmart and Kroger made significant changes, raising their minimum age for firearms sales from 18 to 21. Dick's Sporting Goods went further, discontinuing its sale of assault weapons and ceasing to do business with companies represented in its non-firearms-related product lines that also manufacture such products. President Trump and Congress, on the other hand, proposed a range of minimum-level policy responses, including almost

everything except the obvious: banning assault weapons altogether for civilian use. Indeed, rather than focusing on reducing the weapons available to cause more school shootings, Trump's main proposal after Parkland was to more fully arm school personnel with hand guns.

The Future of America in the Balance

Trump's actions have set the stage for a dangerous new era of racially and culturally charged conflicts across the nation by reopening old wounds and sensitivities flowing from the US's deep history of racial inequality, violence and injustice. Indeed, one of the central issues the Trump presidency has brought to the surface is the nation's growing multicultural diversity and how white Americans are challenged by its implications for future policy and power-sharing in national governance. It has been well-documented that Trump's core base of supporters include a broad swath of disaffected white Americans, many of them non-college educated and predisposed to notions of white supremacy.¹⁷ Among non-college educated whites, Trump's 2016 election margin of victory over his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton was especially significant. According to the Pew Research Center, ". . . Trump's margin among whites without a college degree [was] the largest among any candidate in exit polls since 1980. Two-thirds (67%) of non-college whites backed Trump, compared with just 28% who supported Clinton, resulting in a 39-point advantage for Trump among this group."¹⁸

In effect, the Trump Presidency has raised the fundamental question: What kind of nation will America be in the future? Will it continue to strive towards being an open and inclusive society that builds constructively on its growing multiculturalism and a robust middle class? Or rather will the United States become an exclusive and closed society that disproportionately benefits a shrinking uber-class of already wealthy and privileged white Americans? As America approached the mid-term elections of 2018, these issues hung in the balance and were increasingly bubbling over into additional public discord and violence.

To be sure, our nation's democracy and economy have faced other major crises and moral challenges that we have successfully over-

come or otherwise reconciled in the past. We can think back to the Civil War, the widespread labor strife of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Japanese American internment of the World War II era, the McCarthy era witch hunts for communists in the 1950s and the Civil Rights movements, the movement to end the war with Vietnam and the Watergate scandal in the 1960s and 1970s; these were comparably violent and transitional chapters in our history that presented similarly daunting challenges to our national political integrity and domestic tranquility. And we can also think back on other hard economic times in our past, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the economic challenges of the late 1970s, the early 1980s and the early 1990s to be reminded that we are not entirely on untraveled terrain.

We made it through those traumas, with a more broadly shared sense of collective purpose, goodwill and optimism. Sadly today, however, something new and different is happening. Americans seem to be increasingly dividing irreconcilably along racial, religious, ideological, economic and regional lines. Indeed the United States is entering its next decade as an angry nation at odds with itself and the world, a nation that is in danger of losing its center.

The evidence suggests that the United States has entered largely uncharted territory—a space in which its inhabitants are effectively lost in the wilderness, unable to acknowledge or accept the depth of their wants. How else would a nation of our many epic past accomplishments and continuing possibilities elect to be led by the likes of Donald Trump and a national administration that appears intent on undermining America's most progressive domestic achievements and global advances? Manifestly, many in America are suffering from collective denial about these realities. However, a new and better course is available and achievable over the coming years if the sane and rational majority of Americans are prepared to organize and join forces to fight for it.

Constructive Protest and Resistance Is Needed

A new and different course, informed by active organizing and innovation, is necessary if our country and the world are to avoid an even more perilous future. Recent years have provided important new

examples of constructive protest and resistance, ranging from the valiant efforts of the Marriage Equality, Black Lives Matter and Dreamer movements to the increasingly successful organizing efforts of workers seeking living wages and improvements in labor conditions across our economy. Comparable efforts have been waged by Native American spiritual and environmental leaders at Standing Rock, North Dakota, as well as by #MeToo gender equality activists during the 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches in cities and towns around our nation. Likewise, people and communities affected by mass gun violence have rallied to say #NeverAgain.¹⁹

In writing this book I hope to inspire more reasoned, purposeful and nonviolent efforts along these lines with an eye to resuscitating the vibrancy of our political democracy and the sustainability, robustness and fairness of our national economy. In doing so, I hope to make the case for fundamentally new ways of thinking about and organizing our national governance and economy. Along the way, I will highlight models of democratic engagement and economic development that are helping to move us in these directions. One of the premises of this work is that there is presently too much public and private discussion about our failing democracy and economy, but not nearly enough corresponding remedial action. We must address the worst manifestations and impacts of recent American decline, such as growing intergroup tension, public violence and international conflict. But so much of our current leadership and public discourse seems to be taking us in the opposite direction. Part of the problem is the proliferation of social media and its tendency to calcify, if not intensify, social and ideological divides.²⁰

More profoundly, there is presently very little leadership addressing the underlying causes of our aforementioned national challenges: systemic poverty and inequality, excessive commodification and resource depletion. Equally, there is too little attention being paid to the many emerging solutions that progressive community-based leaders and residents all across America are advancing in their respective local domains of influence to address our growing societal challenges. Properly supported by enabling public policy and resourcing innova-

tions along these lines could help put our nation on a path that is more consistent with the best of its values and commitments.

These are not new ideas by any stretch of the imagination. Progressive community leaders, such as Angela Glover Blackwell, founder of California-based PolicyLink, and important social investment organizations, such as the New York-based Nonprofit Finance Fund, have increasingly focused on investing in the proven successes of community- and place-based innovators in fields ranging from regional economic development and transportation to human services delivery, education and the arts.²¹ But much more needs to be done by public institutions and leading private actors to normalize this approach to problem solving across various communities, fields and geographies. Even beyond that, what has not been sufficiently seized to date is the opportunity to harmonize efforts along these lines across the increasingly diverse communities that are still largely unaligned. Thus, in the pages of this book, I will emphasize opportunities for coordinating efforts by progressive leaders and institutions in support of new and better courses of action based on the strategic and collective advancement of our most promising policy priorities and models.

To bring to the surface the best of these priorities and models, I enlisted the input of more than sixty leading progressive voices from across the nation via a dynamic group of advisors and experts on the issues (See the Appendix). I interviewed these progressive thought leaders and practitioners across the nation specifically to learn about how their recent work and advocacy might help to lay a better foundation for American democratic action and economic justice. Most of their innovative approaches are featured or referenced throughout the pages that follow.

Marginal and Incremental Change Is Not Enough

One final assertion underlies much of what I have advanced in these pages: the change America needs to right its course is not simply to make existing policies, practices and conventions more tenable or inclusive for people and communities that have been increasingly disconnected from America's centers of power over the past several decades. Instead, I call for fundamentally new approaches to demo-

cratic governance and wealth creation based on a more open and accessible democracy and a far more socially and environmentally responsible economy—that is, an economy focused on the well-being and sustainability of the majority of Americans (especially society’s most vulnerable members) and the natural world upon which our collective survival ultimately depends.

At the end of the day, our core purpose as a society—and all the associated elements of our public policy—cannot just be about making more money and things for a shrinking population of beneficiaries without attention to the larger human, societal and environmental costs. When average people are often forced to work at two or three jobs just to get by, while wealthy elites (many of whom merely inherited, rather than produced, their wealth) get all the breaks and privileges in society, something has gone awry with our national political economy and civic culture. The situation is exacerbated when, increasingly, working and middle-class Americans are pushed to shoulder lower and lower pay, ever more contingent and dangerous working conditions, and greater and greater shares of their health and retirement costs.²²

We Need to Forge a New Social Contract

What is badly needed is a sustainable new social contract for the emerging realities of the twenty-first century, one that helps our working and middle class populations through expanded public investments intended to build their skill sets, household assets and collective bargaining power vis-à-vis the nation’s most privileged interests, while improving their quality of life more broadly. In that context, we need to learn from the work of progressive labor and community organizers, social and environmental justice advocates, social investment and social enterprise leaders and leading progressive scholars and thinkers. All of these actors are advancing important pilot efforts and ideas that encourage the broader inclusion of talent and leadership from historically excluded—or otherwise disconnected—communities in ways that help to responsibly advance our nation’s progress and global economic competitiveness.