

# Defining Democracy

## Procedural *and* Authentic

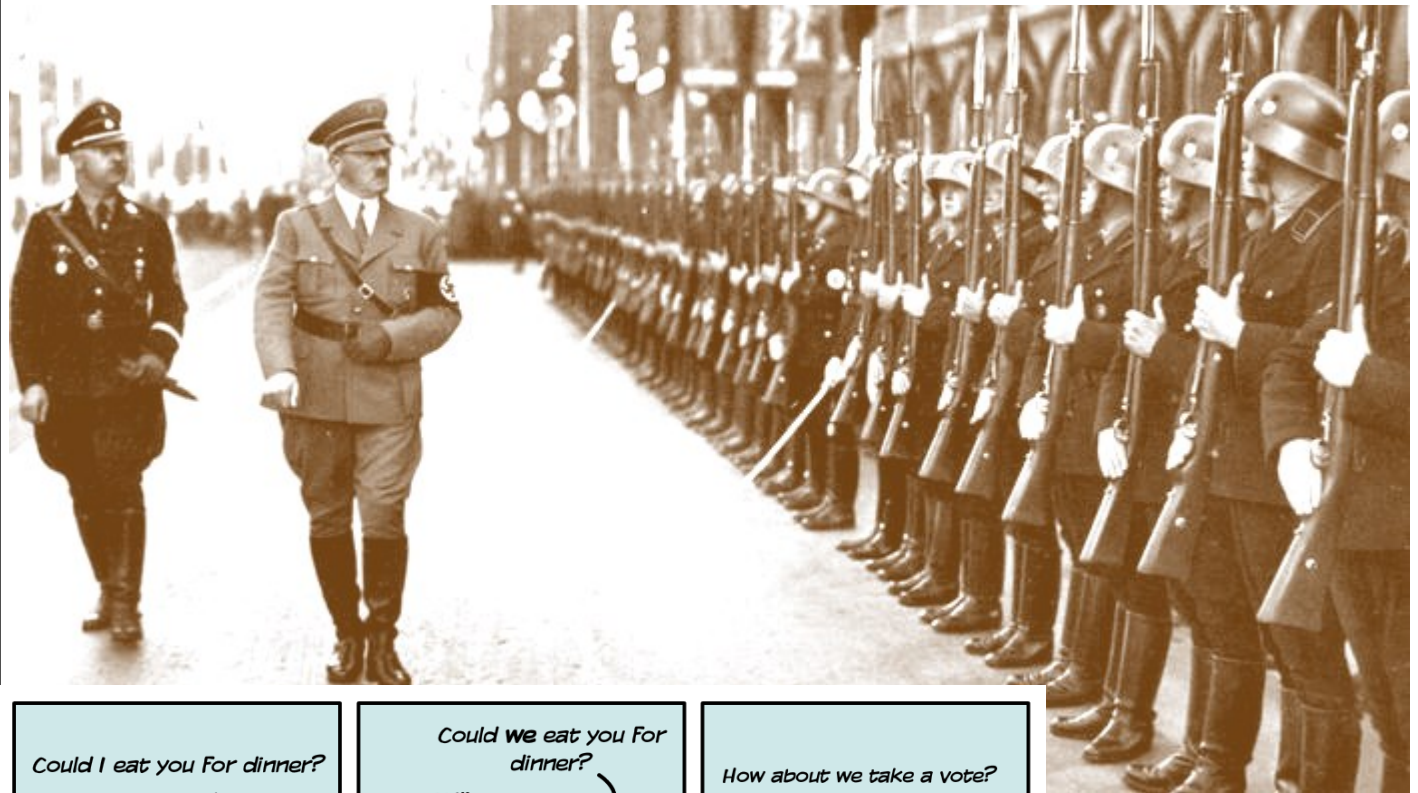
**“WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all [Persons] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”**

*Preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence*

# DEFINING DEMOCRACY

## Procedural AND Authentic

Democracy, in its true sense, has two related halves: the *procedural* and the *authentic* (or substantive) where the former is the means to the latter. In a capitalist democracy, like this one, the tendency is to emphasize the procedural at the expense of the authentic because it serves the interests of the capitalist class (as will be evident shortly). However, one without the other simply reduces democracy to a well-meaning but empty slogan. The first half refers to majority rule (but qualified by a bill of rights that protects minorities) and the accompanying institutional processes of voting, elections, term-limits, legislative representation, and so on. This



Democracy

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narrowly defined understanding of democracy can be labeled as procedural democracy. Democracy, however, also has a broader substan-

tive meaning (second half), as captured, for example, by the preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence. To quote the key paragraph: "WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all [Persons] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." (Of course, even as one turns to that document, one cannot help but imagine how great that document could have really been if only its architects had at the same time not refused to consider other peo-

ples, such as the enslaved African Americans and the Aboriginal Americans, worthy of these same rights; instead they even went on to label the latter as “merciless Indian Savages,” and made them the source of one more grievance among the many listed by the document against the British Crown.) Authentic democracy then, in essence, is about equitably securing access for all human beings to the four fundamental needs: food, shelter, health, and security. (See Development for further elaboration on these needs.)

One cannot be certain whether President Abraham Lincoln had authentic democracy or procedural democracy in mind when he concluded his short but powerful speech (which we have come to know as *The Gettysburg Address* and fittingly reproduced on the Lincoln Monument in Wash-



ington, D.C.) that he delivered several months following the culmination of one of the most horrific battles of the U.S. Civil War, at Gettysburg—where in this small rural town in south central Pennsylvania over a period of just three days, July 1 through 3, 1863, General George G. Meade's Union Army and General Robert E. Lee's Confederate forces fought an unplanned battle that consumed perhaps seven thousand lives but with thousands upon thousands more wounded, captured, or missing—with the words “...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” but they certainly capture what a truly democratic government, which, remember, is constituted from and funded by a vast majority of ordinary tax payers, should be concerned with uppermost: the promotion of, both, procedural and authentic democracy.

In practice, authentic democracy finds expression, along two fronts: First, in all those tax-payer funded expenditures designed to improve the lives and working conditions of all in society. These range from the social safety net to transportation infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, and airports), on to social amenities and services (e.g. the postal system, schools, colleges, libraries, and parks)—and which may all be collectively referred to as public wages. Second, it finds expression in all those legislative measures enacted, in spite of politically myopic opposition from the bourgeoisie, at the behest of the lower classes at opportune historical moments—the appropriate people are in Congress and the appropriate person is in the White House—for the purpose of curtailing the excesses of capitalism (constituting a form of class-struggle aimed at resisting the class warfare of the bourgeoisie); such as: the creation of safe working conditions; giving worker's the right to organize (trade unions) and pursue collective bargaining; protection of the biosphere to ensure access to clean air and water, maintain bio-



logical diversity, etc.; creation of agencies to monitor safety in food supply, medicines, health care, air-travel; consumer rights, etc.; establishment of the minimum wage; enactment of child labor laws; the creation of a social safety net (see below); and so on. In other words, authentic democracy constitutes a form of redistributive justice. Viewed differently, all these are measures that via the so-called "big government" (that bogey man of the capitalist class) severely interfere with that capitalist mandate to maximize profits without regard to the wellbeing of the citizenry or the planet; that is, they help to "humanize" or tame capitalism—and thereby eliminate the potential for its revolutionary overthrow, benefiting, ironically, the entire capitalist class in the process.

Folks, it is important to emphasize that both kinds of democracy are essential for a society to function as a democratic society because both procedural democracy and substantive

democracy are dialectically intertwined—one without the other renders both a sham. Of course, as implied here, the very idea of democracy in a capitalist society is problematic. The issue is not only one of the inherent contradictions of the capitalist production system in which the nature of exploitation is rarely if ever transparent (leaving aside the more obvious forms of exploitation rang-



ing from slave labor to underpayment of wages). The problem is that even within the confines of a narrower definition of what authentic democracy implies (one that leaves the basic parameters of the capitalist order unchallenged) the relatively more simpler and accessible matter of making the apparatus of procedural democracy (elections, legislation, etc.) responsive to the agenda of the objective interests of the mass of the citizenry

is constantly (and often flagrantly) subjected to subversion by capital and its allies by constantly waging class warfare. In other words, authentic democracy also concerns, as noted above, public wages (includes the social safety net), and champions of public wages will be, more often than not, the masses—at least the self-enlightened among them—and not the cap-



italist class and its allies. In fact, on the contrary, high on the legislative agenda of the capitalist class in all democracies is the reduction of the public wage, in opposition to what true democracy is supposed to be about. Seen from this standpoint, the function of democracy (in both its senses) in capitalist democratic societies is to mitigate the predatory and destructive tendencies of capitalism (here, see also negative externality) by “humanizing” it. Note: Whatever the merits of capitalism as a system of economic production, at the most fundamental level, it is about unsustainable exploitation (of human beings, of the environment, and so on); it is NOT about doing good, regardless of what capitalists will tell you. (Reminder: capitalism is not about philanthropy—nor is it primarily about creating jobs (there would be no unemployment, if that was the case)—it is simply about making money, for the sake of making money, in whatever way possible.) One solution that societies have found to the inherently exploitative/destructive tendencies of capitalism is to regulate it so that it does not completely destroy society. Note, however, that from the perspective of capitalism itself, it is possible, up to a point, to engage in capitalist entrepreneurial activity that at the same time does as much as possible to minimize the exploitative/destructive consequences of that activity. This kind of capitalism is usually referred to as “socially responsible capitalism” or sometimes “ethical capitalism.”



In my classes, I also talk about *interpersonal democracy*, by which I mean interpersonal relations among individuals in a society that are governed by the principle of equality of opportunity for respect, acceptance, and non-discrimination—regardless of age, class, color, ethnicity, gender, and other similar social structural markers.

To provide you with an illustration of what is meant by procedural in contrast to authentic democracy in practice (from a U.S. perspective), in the pages below is a legislative timeline of key tax-payer funded programs and services, as well as democratic rights, by year of enabling legislation. As you go through this listing of key legislative examples of procedural versus authentic democracy, please note that the legislative authority indicated refers to the initial legislation and not the subsequent modifications most such legislation have undergone since their original enactment, for good or ill, across various U.S. administrations. Notice also, that, not coincidentally, the original legislation was passed, with rare exception, when Democrats occupied the White House and/or were the majority in the U.S. Congress. In fact, astounding as it may appear today, the enabling legislation for many of these programs and services were enacted during a one-term presidency (technically) of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the architect of the War on Poverty and the Great Society programs. Note: asterisked items (dark brown) concern procedural democracy and the rest relate to authentic democra-



cy, while the letters in brackets after a president's name refer to either Democrat [D] or Republican [R]).

**Additional notes:**

1. There is another definition of procedural versus substantive (or authentic) democracy available in the literature on political theory. However, for our purposes it

remains a narrow definition, compared to the one presented here, in that it does not consider the end goal of procedural democracy, namely, authentic democracy as defined here (and captured by that magnificent phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"). Its focus still remains simply the one half of democracy: procedural democracy, as defined here (in other words, it does not deal with means versus ends).

2. Here is the full text of the President Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* (November 19, 1863):

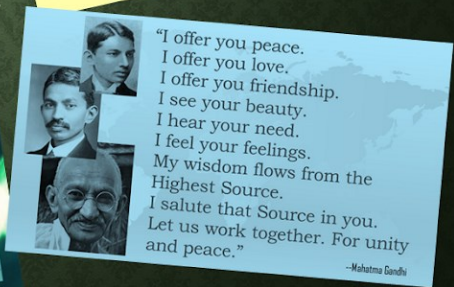
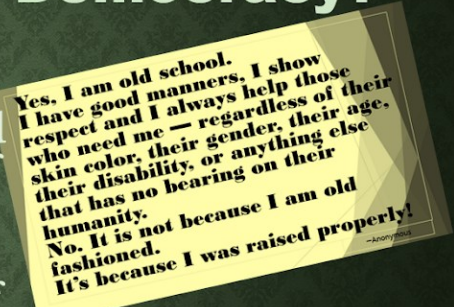
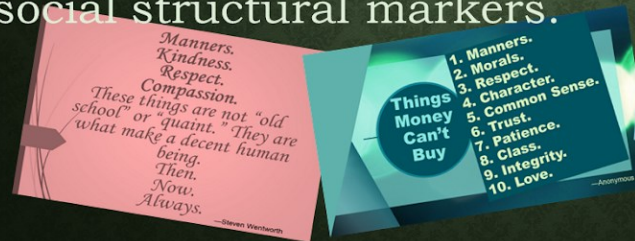
Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

## What is Interpersonal Democracy?

It refers to interpersonal relations among individuals in a society that are governed by the principle of equality of opportunity for respect, acceptance, and non-discrimination—regardless of age, class, color, ethnicity, gender, and other similar social structural markers.



# AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY

## A TIMELINE OF SELECT U.S. LEGISLATION

**NOTE:** In this timeline, [R]=Republican Party, and [D]=Democratic Party. Asterisked items lean more towards *procedural* democracy rather than *authentic* democracy. They are included here because they are crucial in facilitating authentic democracy.

**1900: Lacey Act** (named after its principal champion, Representative John Lacey of Iowa). (William McKinley [R]); established:

- civil and criminal penalties for violation of laws protecting flora and fauna. Today, with successive amendments over the years, the Act serves as the principal legislative mechanism for the protection of plants, fish, and wildlife from illegal procurement, or possession, or transportation, or sale. The Act also covers plants, fish, and wildlife obtained from abroad.

**1906: Federal Food and Drugs Act** (also known as the *Wiley Act* after its principal champion, Harvey Washington Wiley, the chief government chemist) (Theodore Roosevelt [Progressive Party]); established:

- The Food and Drug Administration to protect the public from the production and marketing of unsafe and dangerous foods, medicines, medical equipment, and so on.

**1914: Federal Trade Commission Act** (Woodrow Wilson [D]); established:

- Federal Trade Commission to protect the public from anticompetitive and deceptive acts and practices of businesses that the same Act outlawed.

**1916: National Park Service Act** (Woodrow Wilson); established:

- a formal and more coherent national park system out of existing parks for recreation-

## War of Independence

¶ The U.S. War of Independence was a revolution led from above (by the bourgeoisie) not from below (by the masses); consequently it was an unfinished business because it left out the masses—racial minorities, women, and the working classes in general. As a result, further struggles were necessary to expand the democratic project; they included: the *Abolitionist Movement* and the U.S. Civil War that led to the abolition of slavery; the *suffragette movement* that led to the women's right to vote; the *labor movement* that led to worker's rights; the *Civil Rights Movement* that led to civil rights for racial minorities and other marginalized groups; and the *feminist movement* that led to civil and human rights for women.

## Bourgeoisie

¶ The term **bourgeoisie** is a French word popularized by Karl Marx that refers to the wealthy class that emerges as a result of the development of industrial capitalism: the modern capitalist “aristocracy.” This term can be used interchangeably with such other terms as the “capitalist class.” Note that the bourgeoisie also includes the minions of corporate capital who sit at the top of corporate hierarchies, as well as its apologists (the ignorantsia, that is, the pseudo-intellectuals who are commonly found in universities and who people right wing think tanks). In capitalist societies, political interests and economic interests are often different; they are rarely unitary because of the divergent objectives of the masses—here, meaning the working class (proletariat) and the peasantry—on one hand and the bourgeoisie on the other imposed on them by the dictates of the capitalist economic system. For example, when it comes to democracy the bourgeoisie tends to be more concerned with the procedural part of it rather than the authentic part, whereas the masses are interested in both. In other words, in general, though not always, on almost all major societal issues the objective interests of the bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie are diametrically different from those of the masses.

## Social Safety Net

¶ The *social safety net* is an insurance policy for the capitalist system against the possibility of ordinary class-struggles (e.g. trade-union activity) spiraling out of control into revolutionary upheav-



al, health, educational, etc. use by the public. Unfortunately, this is an element of the social safety net that the public, and many within the U.S. Congress, fail to realize is so essential for the well-being of not only those who visit the system but also the health of the *biosphere* (the sum total of all ecosystems) that is critically important for all forms of life, including of course human life.

**1935: Social Security Act** (Franklin D. Roosevelt [D]); established, as part of the *social safety net*:

- Unemployment insurance;
- Social security (retirement insurance for the retired; financial support for the disabled; etc.);
- Medicare: health insurance for the retired; and
- Medicaid: health insurance for the very poor.

**\*1935: National Labor Relations Act** (Franklin D. Roosevelt); established:

- Workers' right to organize trade unions; and
- Workers' right to strike to improve their working conditions, including pay.

**\*1938: Fair Labor Standards Act** (Franklin D. Roosevelt); established:

- prohibition of employment of children under 18 in most *non-agricultural* occupations;
- National minimum wage; and
- Overtime pay.

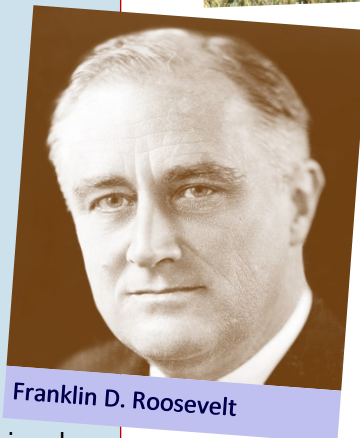
**1944: Public Health Service Act** (Franklin D. Roosevelt); established:

- Office of the Surgeon General; and the
- National Institute of Health.

**1939: The Reorganization Act** (Franklin D. Roosevelt); established:

- the Federal Security Agency that would later, in 1942, establish the Office of National Defense Malaria Control Activities which after going through various incarnations in sub-

als that will cripple the system or destroys it altogether. In other words, the social safety net is one of the key hallmarks of a democratic-capitalist society (respect for the rule of law, human rights, civil rights, etc. being among others). The term comes from the fact that it is analogous to the safety net that hangs below

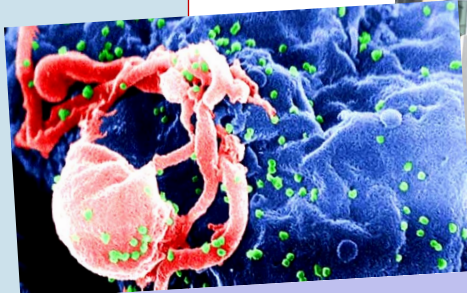


Franklin D. Roosevelt

a high-wire act in, say, a circus. However, neither the bourgeoisie nor most of the beneficiaries of the social safety net appear to comprehend this fact. (Consider this: it is not a coincidence that in every country in the world today—repeat, every country—where political chaos and mayhem reigns, there is an absence of either any kind of a social safety net or a social safety net that only exists, for the most part, on paper; that is, it does not work in practice for a number of reasons.) So, what is a social safety-net? It is wages, both mone-



sequent years would eventually become today's *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*—though still popularly known by the abbreviation of its predecessor, Centers for Disease Control, as the CDC.



HIV-1 virus on a cell surface—photo

tary and in kind, paid out to the public by society—hence it's a form of “public wages”—that come out of taxes paid by the citizenry in order to ensure that the weak and the vulnerable are protected from the negative consequences of capitalism for the quality of life of the citizenry. In other words, the social safety net is not a charity as some ultra-right wing conservatives would like you to believe; rather, it is a tax-payer funded mechanism for ameliorating (albeit in the mildest way possible) the socially deleterious consequences of that axiom of capitalism: “profits before people.” Taking the example of the United States, the key components of the social safety net (which for the most part has

been, for obvious reasons, the handiwork of Democrats, not Republicans)—depending upon in which state you reside (some states have

weaker social safety nets than others, especially those in the U.S. South)—include: the minimum wage; social security, food stamps, unemployment insurance, disability insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, personal bankruptcy; welfare; tuition assistance; Head Start Program; Veterans Affairs Healthcare System; public libraries; and so on. It should not be surprising that the social-safety net is always—repeat, always—among the key permanent component of class struggles in any capitalist democracy. (Folks, no; prisons are not part of the social safety net.) Incidentally, a social safety-net also exists for the bourgeoisie (even though they don't need one); though, of course, it's never portrayed as such. What are some of the elements of the social safety net for the bourgeoisie? They include: financial bail-outs; tax-breaks; bonuses; stock options; so-called “right-to-work” (anti-collective bargaining) legislation;

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**1963: *Clean Air Act*** (Lyndon B. Johnson [D]); established:

- funding for research in-to air pollution;
- enjoined states to establish agencies for controlling air pollution; and
- a legislative avenue for federal involvement in matters of inter-state air pollution.

**1963: *Equal Pay Act*** (John F. Kennedy [D]); established:

- Equal pay for men and women.

**\*1964: *Civil Rights Act*** (Lyndon B. Johnson):

- Prohibition of discrimination based on gender
- Prohibition of discrimination based on race, religion or nationality
- Established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

**\*1964: *Criminal Justice Act*** (Lyndon B. Johnson):

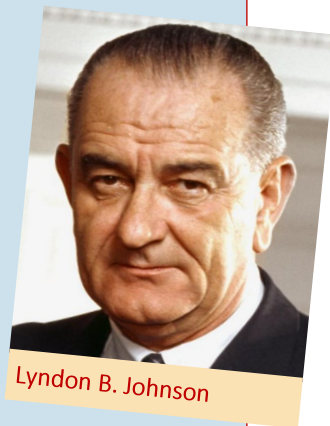
- mandated the establishment of a public defender system to allow legal representation in federal courts for those charged with a crime but who could not afford to pay for legal counsel.

**1964: *Economic Opportunity Act*** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- *Jobs Corps*, a national program that provides post-secondary school vocational training and education to low income youth to enable them to find and keep a good job
- *Head Start*, a national program that promotes school readiness for children from economically disadvantaged families by giving the children from birth to age three access to health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services in order to enhance their cognitive, social, and emotional development;
- *Volunteers in Service to America* (now known as AmeriCorps VISTA); and
- *Upward Bound* to assist low-income students prepare for college.

**1964: Food Stamp Act**  
(Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- a permanent food stamp program (originally initiated in 1939 as a temporary executive mandate during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt) to allow indigent families access to food.



Lyndon B. Johnson

**1964: Library Services and Construction Act**  
(Lyndon B. Johnson):

- increased federal funding for the construction of libraries as well as the services they provided in communities that had poor access to library facilities in both rural and urban areas.



**1964: Wilderness [Protection] Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- the National Wilderness Preservation System and criteria for including lands in this system. This system not only has recreational value (important for human health) but, among other things, is essen-

and so on.

## Meritocracy

¶ The concept of *meritocracy* (see below), and its U.S. variant the “American Dream,” is one of the key *ideological* components of capitalist-democracies today. Most people, including the working classes, who live in capitalist-democracies believe that socio-economic inequality is not only intrinsic to **capitalism** (if all were bosses who will do the work?), but is a desirable condition in itself because inequality, as long as it is not based on one’s inherited social status, is considered a driver of enterprise, achievement, and progress. Socio-economic equality to them is anathema because it is regarded as a condition that rewards idleness and sloth at the expense of what is considered as “merit”—specifically: ambition, integrity, perseverance, and hard work. Following from this logic, taking the U.S. example, they believe that the United States is a class-less society (meaning anyone can rise to the top as long as you are willing to work for it and those who are already at the top are there because they deserve to be there—that is, they worked hard to be there).



Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832-1899)

However, a serious problem arises when inequality is not an outcome of merit but is artificially engineered in favor of the wealthy and the privileged by their misuse of political and/or socio-economic power and thereby undermining meritocracy. See for example, with reference to the U.S. experience, an article by Lauren A. Rivera in [\*The New York Times\*](#) (or the article by Bourree Lam

in [\*The Atlantic\*](#) that looks at how the employment hiring process in the job market is stacked against the working classes). As Rivera says in her book, [\*Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs\*](#) (Princeton University Press, 2015), which expands on her *Times* article in greater detail: “Behind popular narratives of economic positions as entirely earned, there is a well-developed machinery in the United States that passes on economic privilege from one generation to the next. This system



tial for preservation of biodiversity and the protection of watersheds (sources of drinking water for humans) and forests (helps with alleviating global warming).

**1965: Department of Housing and Urban Development Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- the U.S. Housing and Urban Agency as a Cabinet-level agency for the purposes of promoting access to affordable housing for all.

**1965: Elementary and Secondary Education Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson): provided

- federal assistance to K-12 education for low-income schools, communities, and children.

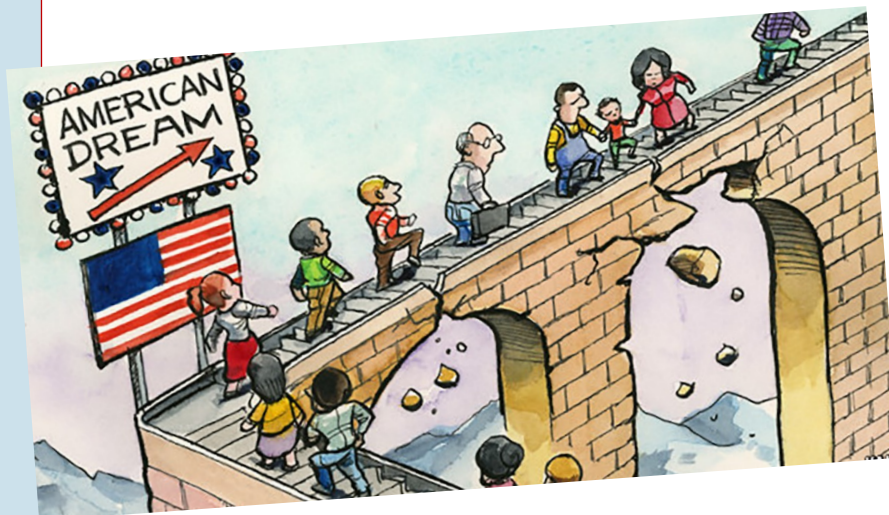
**\*1965: Executive Order 11246 on Affirmative Action** (amended 1967) (Lyndon B. Johnson):

- a presidential order that mandated government contractors to be proactive ("take affirmative action") in hiring practices with regard to race, and from 1967, gender. The underlying rationale for this order was described by President Johnson in a powerful commencement address that he delivered at Howard University on June 4, 1965 wherein he stated: "But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to

first channels affluent children into bumper-sticker colleges, as prior research has shown, and then, as my results have revealed, steers them into blue-chip firms and the highest income brackets." (p. 267) (Note: another book worth looking at that complements Rivera's book well is [\*The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy\*](#) by Nicholas Lemann (Macmillan, 2000).) The truth, however, is that despite what the masses believe there is no real remedy to this "corruption" of meritocracy by the **bourgeoisie** and its representatives. The capitalist system, by its very nature, is not a meritocratic system (except in a very limited sense, as will be explained below) because its functioning depends on limiting upward *socio-economic mobility*—which is what meritocracy is really about—so as to ensure

what is called **class reproduction**. The capitalist system cannot exist without a hierarchic class-based social structure comprising the bourgeoisie at the very top who own and/or control the means of production (and its attendant services, such as finance capital, transportation, insurance, etc.), and the rest below them who do the actual work.

Generically speaking, *meritocracy* is a concept that sees the allocation of material rewards in a capitalist-democratic



society as resting entirely on "merit," which itself is assumed to be based on such qualities of an individual as intelligence, effort, and ambition and not on membership of preordained social groups—whatever their definitional criteria: class, gen-

walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”

**1965: Higher Education Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- student financial aid for higher education—*Pell Grants*; *Stafford Loans*; *Federal Perkins Loans*; *Work Study*;
- the TRIO programs (*Upward Bound* [originally established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964], *Talent Search*, and *Student Support Services*, all aimed at assisting economically disadvantaged students enroll and succeed in higher education institutions).

**1965: Land and Water Conservation Fund Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- a funding mechanism for acquisition, preservation, and maintenance of land and water resources for “recreation and to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States.”

**1965: Medical Library Assistance Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson):

- established programs to provide assistance to medical libraries including the development of a network of regional medical libraries that would connect with the government’s National Library of Medicine

**1965: National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established

- *National Endowment for the Humanities*; and
- *National Endowment for the Arts* (Note: the rationale for this act was, characteristic of much of the *Great Society* legislation championed by President Johnson, most eloquently stated. Hence, it read in part: “(1) The arts and the hu-

der, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, and so on. In other

words, from the meritocratic point of view, one’s class status in society is based solely on social achievement, not *social ascription*.

However, there is a fundamental flaw here; consider: one of the most widely used and accepted measurements of social achievement in modern societies today is educational qualifications or academic achievement. Now, in a meritocratic society academic achieve-

ment is presumed to rest on equality of educational opportunity. However, equality of educational opportunity itself is supposedly governed by the principle of meritocracy: namely that academic achievement is a function of one’s individual qualities of intelligence, effort and ambition in school, and not on one’s social background, be it in terms of class, race, sex, ethnicity, and so on. It follows from all this that if there is a slippage in academic achievement then explanation for it must be sought in flaws in the individual’s personal qualities (perhaps there is limited intelligence, perhaps there is insufficient effort, perhaps ambition is lacking, and so on). And if this slippage is consistent among some social groups then these flaws must also be universal within these groups. (A corollary of this view is that since these groups (leaving **class** aside) are presumed to be biological constructs—that is regardless of what science states—the flaws are biologically determined and hence society is powerless in the face of their immutability.)

In other words, the meritocratic logic rests on the assumption that we do not live in a society that is social structurally riven for historically determined reasons (rather than biological reasons), and where social groups exist in unequal power relations. But is this assumption correct? Is the social structure biologically determined? More to the point, does academic achievement rest solely on individual qualities? Is it not possible that it may also depend on where one is within the social structure because one’s location in that structure allows one access to specific educational advantages (manifest in such ways as access to resource-rich schools, qualified teachers, safe neighborhoods, etc.) In fact, research in support of this point is so extensive and ubiquitous in the field of education that it even renders reference citations to it redundant. Leaving education aside, the fallacy

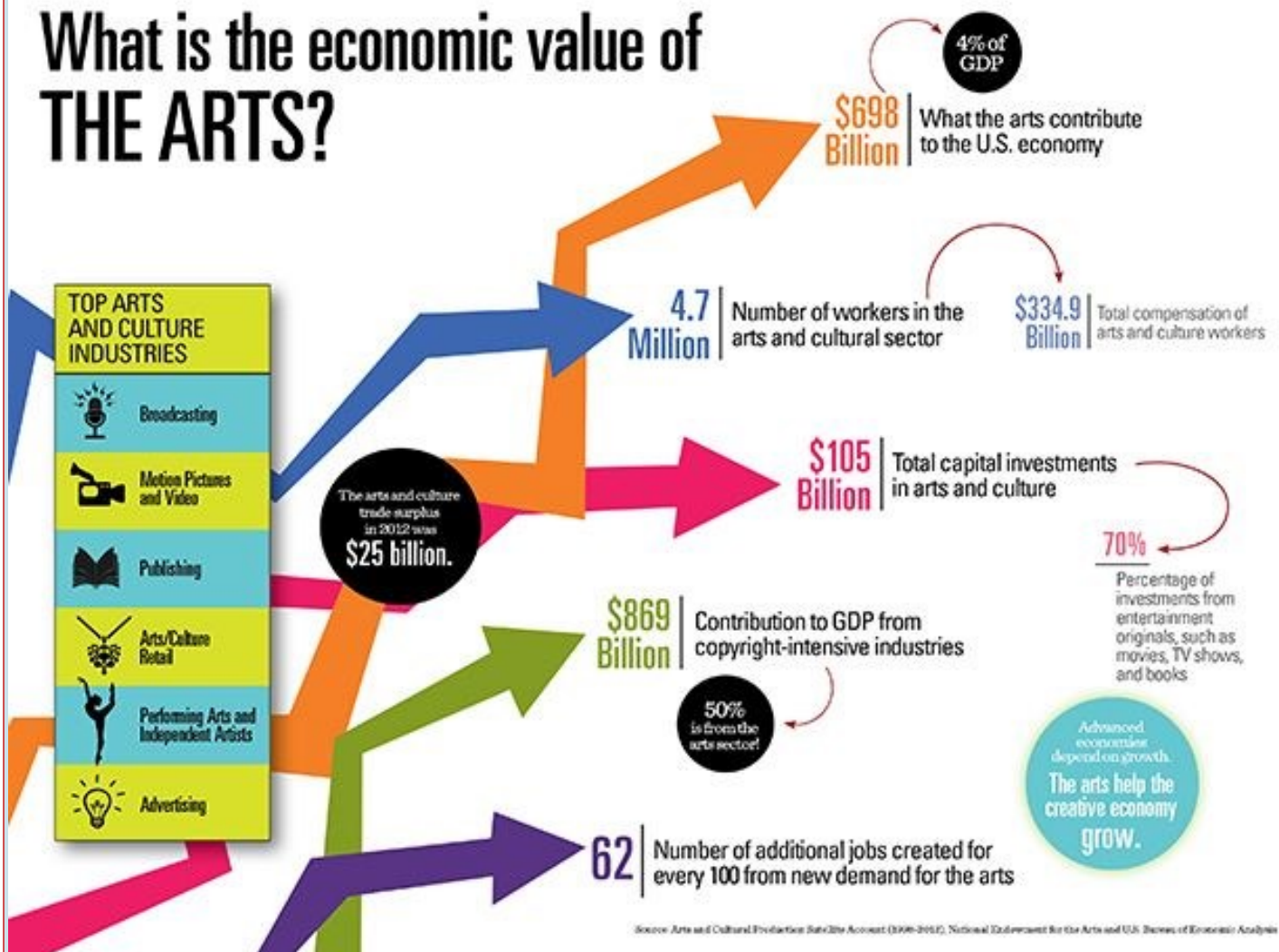




manities belong to all the people of the United States. (2) The encouragement and support of national progress and scholarship in the humanities and the arts, while primarily a matter for private and local initiative, are also appropriate matters of concern to the Federal Government. (3) An advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone,

of the concept of meritocracy is further emphasized when you consider people with mental/physical disabilities, single mothers, the elderly, orphans, and so on; that is, all who may not have the resources to achieve the *American Dream*—the U.S. version of meritocracy. Exploring this concept will help to highlight this point further.

## What is the economic value of THE ARTS?



but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future. (4) Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It must therefore foster and support a form of education, and access to the arts and the humanities, designed to make people of all back-

## American Dream

The term *American Dream* refers to both an *end-goal* and the *process* of reaching it. It is a manifestation of what may be referred to as the “Horatio Alger syndrome.” (Horatio Alger, Jr. was a nineteenth century novelist whose specialty was children’s books aimed at the teenage market in which the common theme was poverty-stricken teenage boys achieving upward socio-economic mobility by means of hon-

grounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.”)

**1965: Water Quality Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson):

- required that states develop water quality standards and for interstate waters establish water quality goals.

**1967: Public Broadcasting Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- *Corporation for Public Broadcasting* (but not as a government agency, but as a private corporation so as to, in the words of the Act, “afford maximum protection from extraneous interference and control.” The rationale for this legislation included this language: “it is in the public interest to encourage the growth and development of public radio and television broadcasting, including the use of such media for instructional, educational, and cultural purposes;.... expansion and development of public telecommunications and of diversity of its programming depend on freedom, imagination, and initiative on both local and national levels; the encouragement and support of public telecommunications, while matters of importance for private and local development, are also of appropriate and important concern to the Federal Government; it furthers the general welfare to encourage public telecommunications services which will be responsive to the interests of people both in particular localities and throughout the United States, which will constitute an expression of diversity and excellence, and which will constitute a source of alternative telecommunications services for all the citizens of the Nation; it is in the public interest to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities;....” )

**\*1968: Fair Housing Act** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

esty, courage, hard work, and so on.) Specifically, it refers at once to a particular definition of the “good life” and to the ideological *notion* that in United States you can achieve your wildest materialist dreams (the “good life”) so long as you agree to play by the rules and you are willing to work hard; that is because the United States is a land of freedom and opportunity



for all where nothing can hold you back in your quest for upward socio-economic mobility: neither race nor ethnicity; neither class nor gender; neither religion nor nationality; and so on.

One will notice right away that this concept also relies on **ahistoricism**. The continuing legacy of a history of, among other things, the brutal expropriation of the lands of Native Americans and the labor of African Americans against the backdrop, initially, of the imported English social structure of commoner versus aristocracy is, of course, relegated to the dustbin of historical amnesia; nor is there any recognition of the inherent contradiction arising from the problem of **class**-determined inequality in a capitalist society.

The fundamental basis of the fallacious reasoning that underlies this concept is the inability by those who believe in it to separate out issues of personal **agency** and issues that stem from institutional **structures**. The fact that millions of people in United States work long hours (sometimes holding down two to three jobs) is clear evidence that laziness and lack of ambition is not the reason why they are not millionaires. At the same time, to assume that all the wealthy in this country have acquired their wealth through hard work and playing by the rules is to disengage from reality because it does not



- Prohibition of discrimination in purchasing or renting housing.

**1968: *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*** (Lyndon B. Johnson); established:

- a national system of outstanding rivers of scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife, cultural, geologic, historical, etc. significance.

**1970: *National Environmental Policy Act***

(Richard M. Nixon [R]); established:

- the Council on Environmental Quality to set national policies on the environment; and
- the requirement that actions by federal agencies that would have major consequences for the environment be preceded by environmental impact statements before such actions could be taken. (Note: in the same year, Nixon would sign an Executive Order establishing the *Environmental Protection Agency* to consolidate under one agency a variety of environmental protection tasks mandated by various relevant legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act.)

**1972: *Clean Water Act*** (vetoed by the Republican president Richard Nixon but overridden by a Democratic Party majority in the U.S. Congress); established:

- a legislative mechanism (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System—NPDES) for reducing water pollution, a problem that could not be effectively tackled by the establishment of water quality standards alone, as mandated by the *Water Quality Act of 1965*.

**1974: *Safe Water Act*** (Gerald R. Ford [R]);

- amended the Public Health Service Act to ensure that safe drinking water was available to the public by requiring the Environmental Protection Agency to establish appropriate water quality standards.

bear out this foolish assumption. (The truth is that most among the wealthy have inherited their wealth; this fact is often conveniently forgotten. Interestingly, the notion of “playing by the rules” is rarely, if ever, analyzed: Whose rules are we talking about here? The rules set up by the



rich and the powerful?) The capitalist system is structurally designed, through property rights enshrined in law, to ensure that only a tiny minority remains at the top, otherwise

the system would collapse because there would be no one to do the grunt work—without which, wealth cannot be created. In fact, it will come as a shock to most of you to learn that the *relative* positions (the key word here is relative) of *most* of those at the top and *most* of the rest below them has remained constant since Roman times, if not before—pointing to the Mount Everest-like insurmountable-



**2010: Affordable [Health] Care Act** (Barack H. Obama [D]):

- popularly known as “Obamacare,” established mechanisms for expanding health care coverage to a wider section of the U.S. public and for reducing health care costs. (Among its many provisions are prohibition of discrimination against those with pre-existing health conditions by insurance companies; prohibiting insurance companies from withdrawing coverage; providing free preventive care; allowing young adults to remain on their parents’ insurance plans until they turn 26; expanding coverage for early retirees; strengthening community health care centers; and understanding and combating health disparities based on race, ethnicity, language, etc.)



ness of social structures for most people in the Euro/American *ecumene* in their illusory quest for upward socio-economic mobility. Hence, if you were to

trace your ancestry there is an almost one hundred percent chance that you would end up with ancestors who were either slaves from Africa or slaves in the Roman times in Europe. Focusing on Europe, the slaves from Greek and Roman times eventually became serfs in the feudal era and who then, in turn, became the modern working

classes in the era of industrial capitalism, millions of whom along the way ended up in the European Diaspora scattered across the planet—an immensely brutal and painful process—from Australia to Brazil, and from Canada to South Africa.

Incidentally, the first usage of this term (American Dream) and its definition is credited to the historian James Truslow Adams, who, writing in 1931 (at the height of Jim Crow, one may ironically recall), stated that the American Dream was “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for



**If you can't afford a doctor,  
go to an airport - you'll get a  
free x-ray and a breast exam,  
and; if you mention Al Qaeda,  
you'll get a free colonoscopy.**



each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” (p. 404, *The Epic of America* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1931]) Notice that unlike the way it has come to be understood today, in this definition of the American Dream, materialism is not the defining quality, but rather egalitarianism (and, therefore, in this sense the American Dream is about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all, that is **authentic democracy**—in contrast to **procedural democracy**). It is also worth pointing out that today the “American Dream,” for most Euro-Americans also means the opportunity to live in racially segregated neighborhoods. As Daniel Denver, in his article “The 10 Most Segregated Urban Areas in America,” accurately observes: “For the besieged white subdivision dweller, the American Dream means freedom from society’s poor and black.” (Article published in [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com).) See also a feature story titled “Cyberdiscrimination in [Dallas](#),” by Professor Gregory D. Squires). Of course, race is not the only relevant matter here, class is too in the sense that the American Dream also means the opportunity for the rich (regardless of color) to live as far away from the poor (regardless of color) as possible.



James Truslow Adams (1878-1949)

To conclude, one of the most important ideological concepts in a capitalist democracy is that of meritocracy, and in United States meritocracy is expressed as the “American Dream.” The ideological role of this concept is to help underwrite political stability for the capitalist system. As long as the masses believe in the concept of meritocracy they will not challenge the system, in fact, on the contrary, they will become its most ardent supporters. However, given the nature of capitalism, meritocracy, whether considered in its generic sense or in the sense of the American Dream, is, *by and large*, a mythological concept—and this is doubly so when considered from the perspectives of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and so on.

Notice the qualifier in the preceding sentence. In other words, to make you feel better, the foregoing should *not* imply, however, that the concept of the American Dream is completely bogus (after all, to some degree, the concept is a subjective one—what constitutes the American Dream is not necessarily the same for everyone). While those who attempt to pursue their American Dream are not immune from *systemic* or structural oppression (racism, sexism, classism, and so on) in a **capitalist** democracy like the United States, one must also acknowledge that this is not just a capitalist society but it is also a **democracy**. That is, in a post-civil rights era United States there is sufficient space for *some* individuals to successfully confront structural oppression by exerting their **agency** (instead of waiting for the revolution, which, trust me, is not coming any time soon no matter what the *bourgeois-left* says). If *all* oppression was structural then there is absolutely no hope for a better tomorrow. Yes? The fundamental truth is this: capitalist democracies may be meritocratic, but only at the level of a few (relatively speaking) “lucky” individuals but not at the level of social groups as a whole. But who are these lucky individuals? They are those who through chance and design manage to achieve their American Dream by being in the right place at the right time.

There is, in fact, a vast “self-help” cottage industry in the United States that aims to teach you how to improve your chances of achieving the American Dream. A well-known guru, for example, of this industry is one Tom Corley. He claims that he spent five years studying the daily habits of 233 self-made millionaires and 128 poor people in United States and as a result he came up with 300 habits that “separate the rich from the poor.” He concludes: “The fact is, the poor are poor because they have too many Poor Habits and too few Rich Habits. Poor parents teach their children the Poor Habits and wealthy parents teach their children the Rich Habits. We don’t have a wealth gap in this country we have a parent gap. We don’t have income inequality, we have parent inequality” (from his [website](#)). So, what are some of these bourgeois habits he is talking about? Here is a selection from his website (which you will notice are worth pursuing even if you don’t stand a chance of becoming a member of the bourgeoisie):

*Gambling Habits* – 6% of self-made millionaires played the lottery vs. 77% of the poor. 16% of self-made millionaires gambled at least once a week on sports vs. 52% of the poor.

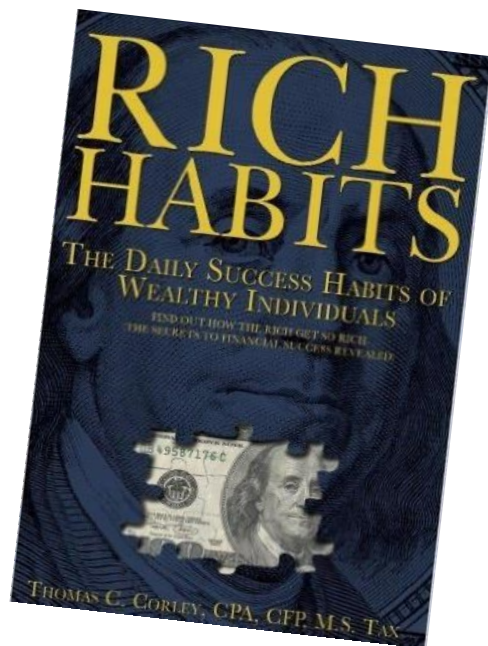
*Health Habits* -21% of self-made millionaires were overweight by 30 pounds or more vs. 66% of the poor. 76% of these millionaires exercised aerobically 30 minutes or more each day vs. 23% of the poor. 25% of these millionaires ate less than 300 junk food calories each day vs. 5% of the poor. 25% of these millionaires ate at fast food restaurants each week vs. 69% of the poor. 13% of these millionaires got drunk at least once a month vs. 60% of the poor.

*Time Habits* – 63% of self-made millionaires spent less than 1 hour per day on recreational Internet use vs. 26% of the poor. 67% of self-made millionaires watched 1 hour or less of TV per day vs 23% of the parents of the poor. 67% of these millionaires maintained a daily “to-do” list vs. 6% of the poor. 44% of these millionaires got up 3 hours or more before they actually started their work day vs. 3% of the poor.

*Living Below Your Means Habits* – 73% of self-made millionaires were taught the 80/20 rule vs. 5% of the poor (live off 80% save 20%).

*Relationship Management Habits* – 6% of self-made millionaires gossip vs. 79% of the poor. 75% of these millionaires were taught to send thank you cards vs. 13% of the poor. 6% of these millionaires say what’s on their mind vs. 69% of the poor. 68% of these millionaires pursue relationships with success-minded people vs. 11% of the poor.

*Learning Habits* – 88% of self-made millionaires read for learning every day vs. 2% of the poor. 86% of these millionaires love to read vs. 26% of the poor. 11% of these millionaires read for entertainment vs. 79% of the poor.





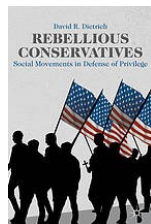
# MATERIALS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like to explore further the themes/issues presented in this flowchart, you are encouraged to consult some of the materials listed below (which are alphabetized within these seven broad *but interrelated* categories: 1. Class/Class-Warfare/Capitalism; 2. Race/Racism; 3. Race and Law; 4. Capitalism/Militarism; 5. Other Topics; 6. Recommended Films/Documentaries; and 7. Recommended Websites.)

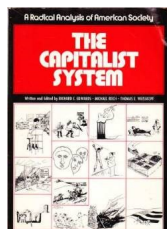
## 1. Class/Class-Warfare/Capitalism (see also category 4)



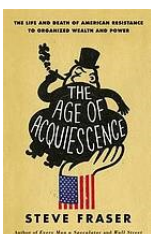
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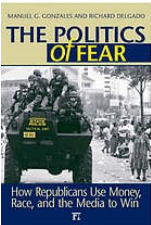
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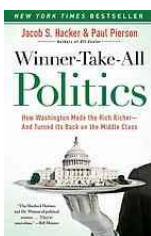
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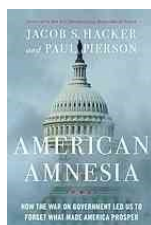
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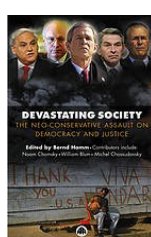
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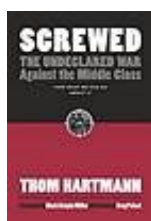
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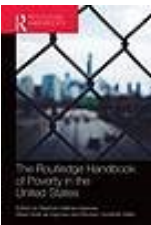
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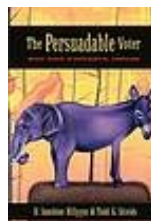
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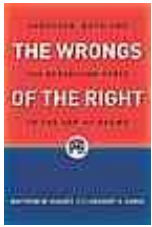
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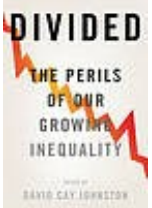
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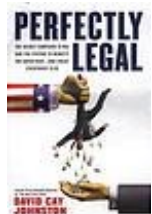
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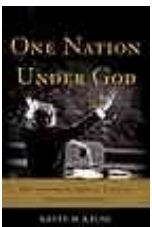
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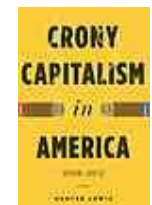
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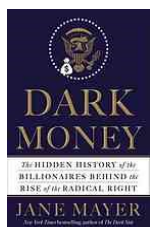
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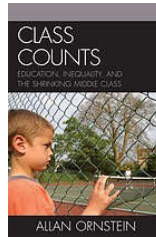
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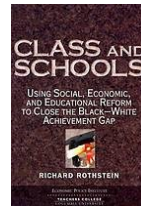
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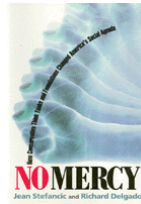
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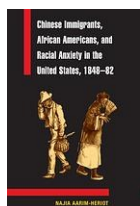


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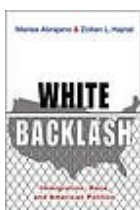
## 2. Race/Racism



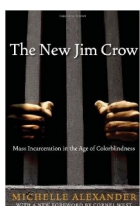
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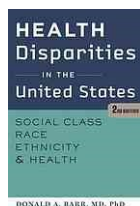
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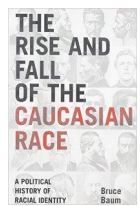
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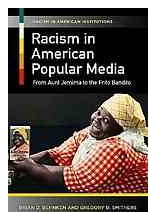
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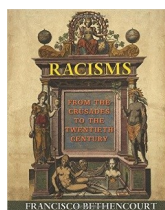
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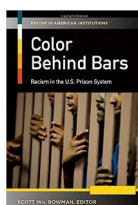
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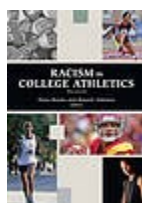
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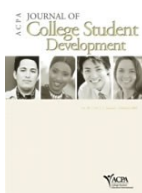
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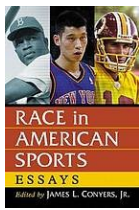


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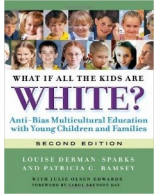


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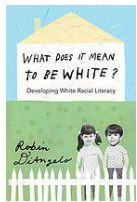




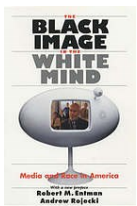
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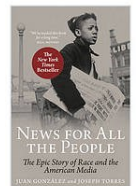
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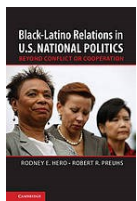
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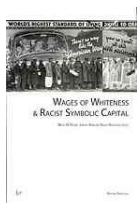
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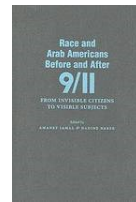
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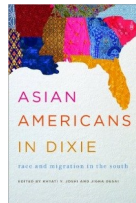
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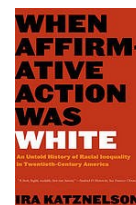
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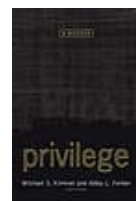
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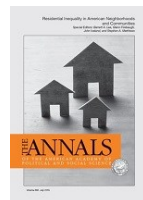
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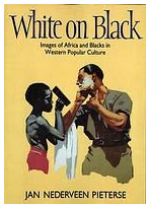


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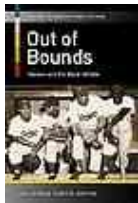
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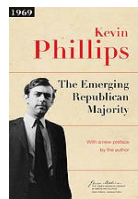
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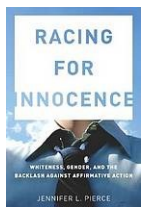
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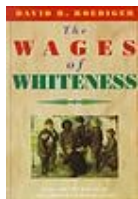
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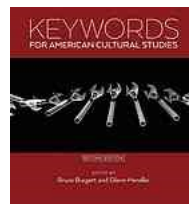
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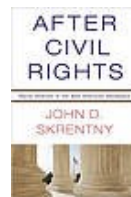
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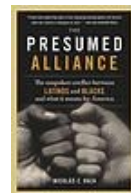
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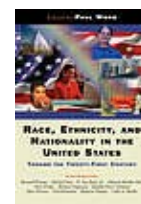
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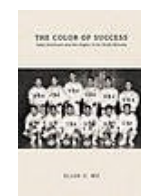
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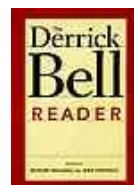


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### 3. Race and Law



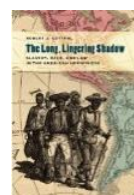
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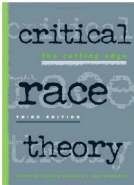
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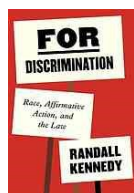
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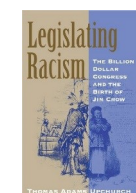
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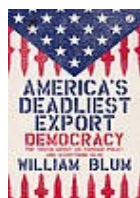
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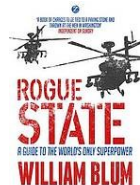
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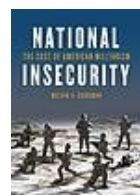
## 4. Capitalism/ Militarism (see also category 1)



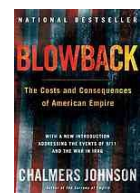
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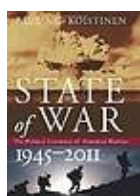
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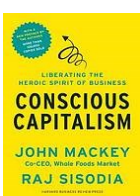
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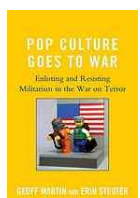
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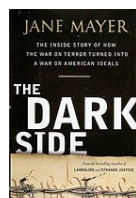
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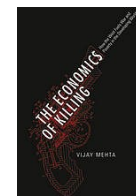
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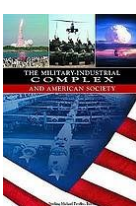
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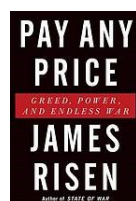
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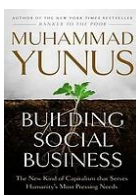
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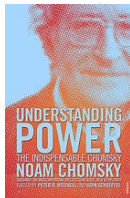
## 5. Other Topics



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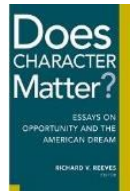
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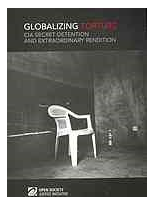
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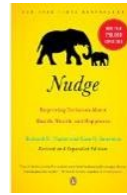
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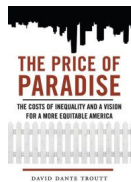
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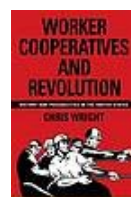
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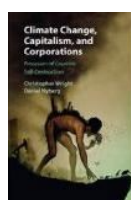
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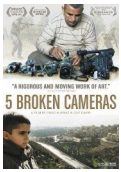
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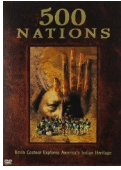
Wright, Christopher, and Daniel Nyberg. 2015. *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations: Processes of Creative Self-destruction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## 6. Recommended Films/Documentaries

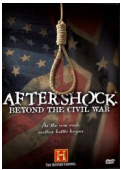
(Note: links take you to descriptions at Amazon.com)



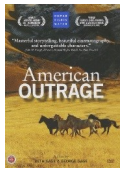
[5 Broken Cameras](#)



[500 Nations](#)



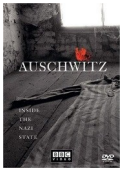
[Aftershock: Beyond the Civil War](#)



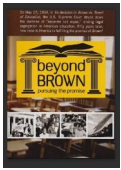
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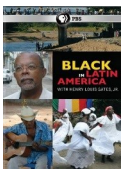
[Amistad](#)



[Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State](#)



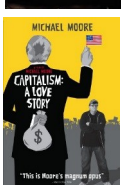
[Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise](#)



[Black in Latin America](#)



[Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee](#)



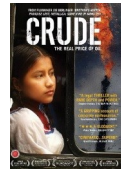
[Capitalism: A Love Story](#)



[Citizen Four](#)



[Control Room](#)



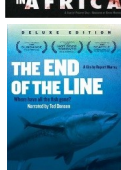
[Crude](#)



[The Corporation](#)



[Empire in Africa](#)



[End of the Line](#)



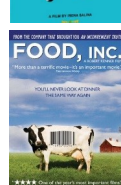
[Fog of War](#)



[For Queen and Country](#)



[Flow](#)



[Food, Inc.](#)



[Glory](#)



[The Great Debaters](#)



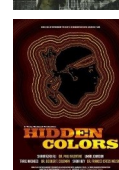
[The Grey Zone](#)



[The Harvest](#)



[Heist](#)



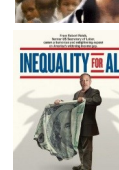
[Hidden Colors 3](#)



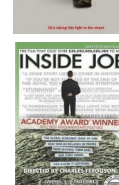
[Hidden Colors 4](#)



[Hotel Rwanda](#)

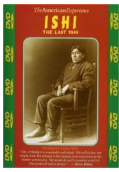


[Inequality for All](#)

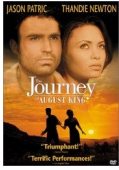


[Inside Job](#)

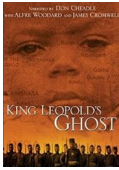




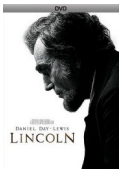
[Ishi: The Last Yahi](#)



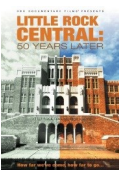
[The Journey of August King](#)



[King Leopold's Ghost](#)



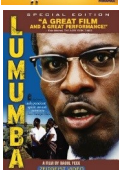
[Lincoln](#)



[Little Rock Central: 50 Years Later](#)



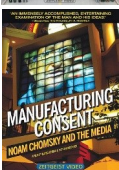
[The Long Walk Home](#)



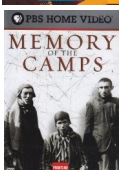
[Lumumba](#)



[Manufactured Landscapes](#)



[Manufacturing Consent](#)



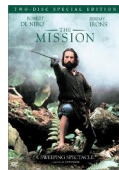
[Memory of the Camps](#)



[Miss Evers' Boys](#)



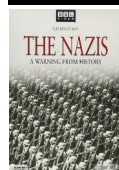
[Missing](#)



[The Mission](#)



[Mugabe and the White African](#)



[Nazis: A Warning from History](#)



[Occupation 101](#)



[Outfoxed](#)



[Places in the Heart](#)



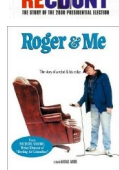
[Rabbit Proof Fence](#)



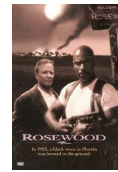
[Reconstruction: The Second Civil War](#)



[Recount](#)



[Roger and Me](#)



[Rosewood](#)



[Schindler's List](#)



[Sicko](#)



[Skin](#)



[Something the Lord Made](#)



[Spellbound](#)



[Too Big to Fail](#)



[Thousand Pieces of Gold](#)



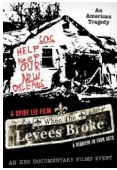
[Unfinished Business](#)



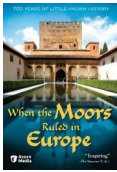
[Untold History of the United States](#)



[We Shall Remain](#)



[When the Levees Broke](#)



[When the Moors Ruled in Europe](#)



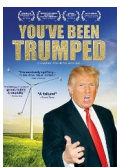
[Where to Invade Next](#)



[Which Way Home](#)



[Why We Fight](#)



[You've Been Trumped](#)

## 6. Recommended Websites



Al-Jazeera America: <http://america.aljazeera.com>



Alternet: <http://www.alternet.org>



Americans for Tax Fairness: <http://www.americansfortaxfairness.org>



Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org>



Avaaz: <https://avaaz.org>



BBC: <http://www.bbc.com>



B Corporation: <http://www.bcorporation.net>



Black Agenda Report: <http://blackagenda.com>



BlackPast.Org: <http://www.blackpast.org>



Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: <http://www.cbpp.org>



Center for Public Integrity: <https://www.publicintegrity.org>



Center for Science in the Public Interest: <http://www.cspinet.org>



Columbia Journalism Review: <http://www.cjr.org>



Colorlines: <http://www.colorlines.com>



Corp Watch: <http://www.corpwatch.org>



CounterPunch: <http://www.counterpunch.org>



Democracy Now: <http://www.democracynow.org>



Dollars and Sense: <http://www.dollarsandsense.org>



EcoHearth: <http://ecohearth.com>



End Racism (Runnymede Trust): <http://www.end-racism.org>



Equality Trust: <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk>



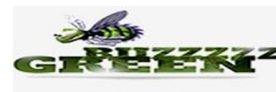
Factcheck: <http://www.factcheck.org>



Free Rice: <http://freerice.com>



Global Witness: <https://www.globalwitness.org>



Greenbuzz: <http://greenbuzz.com>



Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org>





Greenpeace: <http://www.greenpeace.org>



Hatewatch by the SPLC: <https://www.splcenter.org>



Jacobin Magazine: <https://www.jacobinmag.com>



Living on Earth: <http://loe.org/index.html>



Media Channel: <http://www.mediachannel.org>



Mother Jones: <http://www.motherjones.com>



Monthly Review: <http://monthlyreview.org>



The Nation: <http://www.thenation.com>



National Priorities Project: <https://www.nationalpriorities.org>



NPR (National Public Radio): <http://www.npr.org>



New Left Review: <https://newleftreview.org>



Occupy.com: <http://www.occupy.com>



On Point: <http://onpoint.wbur.org>



On the Media: <http://www.wnyc.org/shows/otm>



Open Secrets.org: <http://www.opensecrets.org>



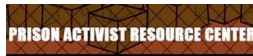
Oxfam: <https://www.oxfam.org>



Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org>



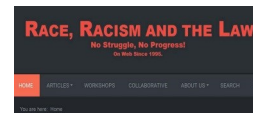
Politifact: <http://www.politifact.com>



Prison Activist Resource Center: <https://www.prisonactivist.org>



ProPublica: <https://www.propublica.org>



Race, Racism, and the Law: <http://racism.org>



Race Issues section of the Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/race>



Reveal (Center for Investigative Reporting): <https://www.revealnews.org>

Share

The World's Resources

Share: <http://www.sharing.org>



State of Nature: <http://www.stateofnature.org>



Transparency International: <http://www.transparency.org>

World Socialist Web Site

Published by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)

World Socialist Website: <http://www.wsws.org>



WWF: [www.worldwildlife.org](http://www.worldwildlife.org)

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