Let’s Boldly Create the Future We Really Want

by Glen Anderson

**People know the status quo is bad – and they want to solve the problems:**

In 1776 the Declaration of Independence included this in its list of grievances against the British Empire: ***“In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.”*** Doesn’t this sound familiar as grassroots people who work for peace, social justice, and economic fairness petition our federal, state and local governments for redress of our grievances?

In 1776 the American colonists – based on principles of democracy and human rights – launched a revolution. Why can’t Americans nowadays launch nonviolent revolutions of resistance against the governmental and economic oppressions that grind us down and deny democracy, human rights and environmental health?

Bob Herbert wrote this in the New York *Times*: “America will never get its act together until we recognize how much trouble we are really in, and how much effort and shared sacrifice is needed to stop the decline. Only then will we be able to begin resuscitating the dream.”

We must recognize the hard reality that **all systems are broken**: More and more Americans are recognizing that **every system in our society is broken**: foreign policy, national defense, economics, criminal justice, education, food and agriculture, governmental regulatory agencies, political and electoral, industrial, energy, news media, and now even the world’s climate – **all of these** systems are broken. The people reading this article already know that we must fix all of the broken systems. How can we best proceed?

Trump will NOT “make America great.” Just the OPPOSITE! Trump is making America CORRUPT, POLLUTED, IGNORANT, ANGRY and CRUEL.

But Trump did not cause the problems by himself. He is a symptom of systemic problems that have been festering and worsening for decades.

**It is hard to make big changes throughout our society:**

A Turkish proverb says, “No matter how far you’ve gone down on a wrong road, turn back.” Our nation is very far down a wrong road. The article you’re reading now will help us turn back.

An ancient Chinese proverb says, “If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are going.”

Public opinion polls keep saying the American people know our nation is heading in the wrong direction. This article – which I’ll flesh out into a longer chapter in the book I’m writing – will help us organize at the grassroots to change our direction, fix the broken systems, and create a better future.

Big radical changes will not come to us as gifts from anyone with official power. We must organize from the grassroots – from the bottom up. See more about that near the end of this article, in the book I’m writing, and in my blog and the free workshops I conduct.

Our current political crisis goes much deeper than Trump and the Republican Party. The roots include: (1) Big-money corruption of both political parties and the two big dysfunctional political parties that have rigged the system to prevent serious challenges; (2) News media that value entertainment and profits instead of truthfully informing the public; (3) Greedy business corporations that put profits ahead of human rights and environmental health; (4) Longstanding bias and discrimination on the basis of race, religion sex, sexual orientation, immigrant status, economic class, disability, etc.

The aggregate of all of these enormous problems feels overwhelming. The odds are stacked against us, so it is natural to feel despair. No wonder so many people are depressed! Although the general public tries to deny these hard realities, still they know, so trying to deny these hard realities adds more emotional stress on top of the stress already caused directly by these problems.

Middle-aged and older people remember when government sometimes was on our side, but young people have no first-hand experience of the federal government ever being our friend, and most young people have never experienced the positive feeling of job security. When they express alienation and despair, they are “canaries in the mine.”

**We cannot escape the need to choose between the dysfunctional status quo or something radically different:**

“We cannot put off living until we are ready. The most salient characteristic of life is its coerciveness: it is always urgent, ‘here and now’ without any possible postponement. Life is fired at us point-blank.” These words of philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) pertain to us today.

Existentialist philosophy recognizes that individuals are stuck in a universe that is indifferent or even hostile. Existentialism also recognizes not only our freedom to choose but also the absolute necessity of making choices. We cannot avoid making hard choices now, as the Existentialists had recognized more than half a century ago. Now we are stuck in a “life-or-death” crisis where everything is stacked against us. Existentialists said that – even in such a difficult situation with no good alternatives – we **absolutely must DECIDE**, and we **absolutely must ACT** on our decisions. Political progressives know this in our guts. This Existential crisis dogs us day and night. Actually, acknowledging this mess is psychologically healthy, and taking responsibility can lead us to productive next steps.

**Ground ourselves in good values, including nonviolence and profound justice:**

Many wise people and skilled organizers have urged grounding ourselves in positive values of compassion, love and yearning for people’s empowerment so society can live up to its highest values:

* “Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.”
~ Abraham Joshua Heschel
* “Let us reflect on what is truly of value in life, what gives meaning to our lives, and set our priorities on the basis of that.” ~ 14th Dalai Lama
* “Compassion is the radicalism of this age.”
~ The Dalai Lama
* “To develop the drop of compassion in our own heart is the only effective spiritual response to hatred and violence.” ~ Thich Nhat Hanh
* “Because we all share this small planet earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. That is not just a dream, but a necessity.” ~ The Dalai Lama
* “Real human progress depends not so much on inventive ingenuity as on conscience.” ~ Albert Einstein
* “Social movements must be based on widely held universal values. To place their social movement in the center of society... movement activists must consciously stand for and articulate the culture's fundamental values, such as justice, democracy, civil and human rights, security, and freedom.” ~ Bill Moyer in ***Doing Democracy***

My own grounding includes:

(1) A strong sense of personal responsibility to turn my values into action;

(2) Religious beliefs and values;

(3) Belief in the power of nonviolence;

(4) A sense that my life’s purpose is to help other people promote peace and justice;

(5) Seeing the big picture while also being willing to take small incremental steps; and

(6) Commitment to devising creative strategies for achieving goals of peace and justice.

These six anchors ground me for lifelong organizing for peace and justice.

I encourage you to live your life meaningfully, vigorously and effectively. If YOU don’t act boldly for your best values, nobody else will.

**We need real hope that’s not merely naïve or simplistic:**

* The wise historian Howard Zinn wrote: “To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.”
* “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well,” Czech dissident, writer and statesman Václav Havel said, “but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out.” Havel was a great writer and playwright. The communist government repressed and imprisoned him, but he emerged and was elected to lead his nation.
* First they ignore you, then they laugh at you*,* then they fight you, then you win. ~ Mohandas K. (“Mahatma”) Gandhi
* “If you don't feel hopeful, you're not doing enough.” ~ Josh Fox, creator, director and narrator of the film "Gasland"
* “It always seems impossible until it’s done.”
~ Nelson Mandela

**Let’s creatively envision a better future and creatively inspire people to help us build it:**

We grow up in a political culture that shows us only a very limited range of choices. Most people choose from this very limited range, so our political culture remains stuck. We can make progress only if we create a much wider range of choices – and then use our best values and our best thinking to choose the wisest, most compassionate ones – and also encourage and empower other people to explore and choose wider possibilities too.

We need to creatively re-frame the issues, hijack and ridicule their rhetoric, expose their lies, and substitute the truth. Let’s counter the propaganda lie that Trump can “make America great.”

We need to promote the opposite truth, because actually, immigrants make America great, and environmentalists, water protectors, and climate activists make America great. Organizers of grassroots movements for peace, social justice, and Left economics make America great.

Let’s turn the right-wing propaganda on its head, and affirm progressive values and organizing. During crazy political times, humor and creativity are revolutionary acts – and they can be effective in “making end runs” around “politics as usual.”

We need to offer to the public bold, creative visions and public policies that will serve the broad public interest and inspire the public to join with us.

**Our vision and our activities must be very bold:**

* “In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” ~ [George Orwell](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=T5uT9MVBC5Fp2e%2BEtLxULAEm%2BU8Xelsv)
* “Be truthful, gentle, and fearless.” ~ Mohandas K. (“Mahatma”) Gandhi
* “Nothing could be worse than fear that one has given up too soon and left one effort unexpended which might have saved the world.” ~ [Jane Addams](http://org.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=zOs4nhKvVB8mIg1LtzlUpwARkaC4OPTM)

**“Be realistic: demand the impossible!”** That inspiring slogan from the 1968 French uprising is even more important today when we face an extremely serious climate crisis, escalating danger of nuclear war, and Trump imposing fascism upon us. We must fight – urgently, boldly, nonviolently and creatively – in order for democracy, civilization and our species to survive.

In the U.S., liberals timidly ask what is “politically feasible” and ask for small changes that the political parties and giant corporations could be persuaded to grant us. However, in Latin America, people demand bold reforms and agitate actively. In the U.S., our modest reforms are watered down and deferred. If we want real progress, we must be more like the Latin Americans.

**“People-Power” is powerful! Yes, we can win!**

* “Dictators are never as strong as they tell you they are. People are never as weak as they think they are.” These wise words came from Gene Sharp, the world’s best researcher on the power of nonviolence and how to use nonviolence to remove dictators from power. See resource information at his non-profit organization [**www.aeinstein.org**](http://www.aeinstein.org/)
* Martin Luther King said this to about 35 people in a church basement: “We have the power in this room, if we mobilize it, to change the future course of America.”
* “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”
~ Mohandas K. Gandhi
* “Do something wonderful. People may imitate it.” ~ Albert Schweitzer

The **Power of the People** is more powerful than the **People in Power**. Powerful reforms must come from below, because nobody holding four aces wants the cards to be dealt over again. Each person can do something! Together we can accomplish much!

**We can solve problems if we:**

(1) Ground ourselves in humane, compassionate values;

(2) Educate ourselves about the real issues;

(3) Nonviolently expose and resist the bad stuff; and

(4) Organize strategically savvy nonviolent grassroots movements for social, economic, environmental, and political change.

**Replace the bad status quo with positive new alternatives:**

Besides protesting against what we **oppose**, let’s ALSO work just as hard to organize to achieve the **positive goals that we want instead**!

We need to keep protesting against the cruelty, corruption, injustice and violence that continually assault us. But if we spend most of our time and efforts fighting the bad stuff, the oppressors will continue to have the upper hand because they can keep throwing bad stuff at us and we will always be on the defensive.

We need to spend half or more of our time and efforts taking the initiative to organize for the positive goals that we want instead. We must become proactive instead of merely reactive. We must envision the future we want and organize to achieve our positive goals.

A basic human need is for our lives to be meaningful. Being always on the defensive is not nearly as meaningful as organizing for positive alternatives. Working for humane, peaceful, just, sustainable goals can give meaning to our lives and help us through these current hard times. It can also turn history around and accomplish positive goals for a better society and a better world.

So even while we protest against what we oppose, let’s invest much more of our time and energy working to build the society and world that we want instead.

* “Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.” ~ Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.
* “I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change.  I am changing the things I cannot accept.” ~ Angela Davis
* “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” ~ Buckminster Fuller
* “We must rapidly begin the shift from a ‘thing oriented society’ to a ‘person oriented society.'’ When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.” ~ [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](https://default.salsalabs.org/Ta9cc5f27-0b8f-4418-b9a9-198601ddd756/73f213d0-9291-4d36-89ed-21024f132530)
* “For the evils of racism, poverty and militarism to die, a new set of values must be born. Our economy must become more person-centered than property- and profit-centered. Our government must depend more on its moral power than on its military power.” -- Martin Luther King, Jr., on p. 133 of his 1967 book, ***Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?***
* “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo ….” ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Beyond Vietnam” Speech, April 4, 1967

Stop Trump’s abuses. Make Orwell fiction again.

Visit my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org/), and see the blog postings about “Nonviolence,” “Organizing & Activism,” and “Our Current Political Crisis.”

**I plan to flesh this out into a much longer essay that will be a chapter in the book I am writing.**

*Glen Anderson has volunteered consistently for peace, social justice, and nonviolent grassroots organizing since the 1960s. He writes, speaks, and conducts training workshops on a wide variety of topics. His blog is* [***www.parallaxperspectives.org***](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)