

Participating in Democracy is about *Participating!* — In a world where access to traditional mass communication is carefully guarded and controlled by corporate executives employing staggering financial barriers to entry; in a world where a political structure monopolizes debate and national dialog to the exclusion of all but the manufactured machinery by the two factions of the **Corporate R&D Party** — *I am very glad that these words have reached YOU; please pass them on.*

I offer these observations and thoughts as part of *my* participation in democracy to help enhance your awareness, challenge your assumptions, and uplift your notion of *the possible* for America's future. And indeed, I encourage you to cast your presidential vote with a conscience for *what is right for our country's future* that the **Ralph Nader** ticket so exemplifies with its vision for people-centered democracy and its majority-supported platform for a more humane and just America.

Disappointed, disillusioned and disheartened **Republicans**, don't waste your vote that they take for granted yet again for continued idiocy cloaked in flags of 'patriotic' ideological clichés and demagoguery of the McCain campaign that is so cynically insulting to your intelligence and common sense. McCain puts McCain first and Country last. **Real Conservatives** who care about the peril of Constitutional Democracy, check out VoteNader.org and discover the candidate who will actually fix our broken politics. I'm a Vietnam veteran and I've voted Republican before; so I have deep compassion for those thinking Republicans and Conservatives who are so horrified about what has happened to their party after seeing the grotesque mutation it has suffered from the theft of its identity and the debasing of its core principles by fanatical Right Wing extremists. McCain won't win; if he wins Republicans still lose their identity as it folds into evermore radical extremism — it's over for the Republican Party as we now know it. It's time to break ranks!

Hopeful **Democrats**, don't waste your vote as a fearful tactical vote for the Obama pseudo-progressive "least worst" side of the two-headed corporate subservient monster that imprisons our democracy. Be on the right side of history. It's time to break ranks!

Trepid **Progressives** and **True Liberals**, if you simply give Obama your vote, cashing in your integrity and precious hope to stave off your fear of the fear-mongering candidate, you will find Obama to be your biggest disappointment ever because you have not demanded anything from him. After Obama's shifting, appeasing and knee-bending patronizing gestures to the right, what will be next? A Gerald Ford pardon for the key figures of this criminal immoral Bush regime in order to supposedly "heal the country from its long nightmare?" A Nancy Pelosi style "the Constitution is off the table," while Obama continues to support a degraded version of our Bill of Rights? A compromising candidate who thinks he is everyone's candidate ends up being no one's candidate as he compromises his integrity and core principles for the money and power offered by the Corporate Political Complex. Helpless hope is easily left wanting; so, it is this time to display the courage it takes to break ranks and demonstrate that your vote is worth more than their presumed count.

Everyone, simply search out a speech or two on YouTube.com, or the Third Party Debates saved on CSPAN.org, and you will observe for yourself the only viable presidential candidate with the courage to speak truth to power, **Ralph Nader**, who has a more impressive legislation record as an outsider than do Senators Obama and McCain combined. Don't just believe me; check it out!

What do the corporate R&D Party candidates have to do to lose your passive vote? What's your breaking point? What is your single precious vote worth to you in terms of your own personal integrity and conscience? Is it your vote or theirs? Do you want your vote to be a "stand up and count me in" vote for true democracy for our people; or let them take it for granted in the name of "managed democracy" for the Corporate Political Complex? When you close the curtain of your voting booth, it is only you and your moral conscience inside the booth. Don't be afraid to vote your conscience and be on the winning side of history; **vote for democracy or forever lose it.**

— Root Routledge, 2008

Fury at the Polls — for Democracy’s Sake in 2008

Root Routledge, PhD
Durango, Colorado
October 31, 2008

“A stake of truth needs to be driven into the heart of this ideological dragon with such fierceness, tenacity and finality that no doubt is left when its centrality and accountability for the unimaginable suffering and destruction its ideas have wrought are exposed with properly understood measures of outcome...”

Collective Wisdom of the Conscious Commons

The Tragic Tyranny of Totalizing Ideology

We now find ourselves in the midst of a tragic economic collapse. It is a manifestation of the corporate-caused destruction of both capitalism and anything positive that Adam Smith ever proffered would arise from entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship meaning the small scale direct involvement of owners in the local management of their capital). As a fig leaf of cover in the eye of the storm, and with unqualified simplicity and uncritical *belief* in Adam Smith’s ‘divine utterance’ of the ‘Invisible Hand,’ now frightened yet undeterred corporatist collaborators in this morass continue to proselytize the untethered version of this “logo-belief” with fundamentalist conviction and dogmatic fervor. But, as they righteously claim Smith’s legacy set in a context that Smith never imagined, they point their collective finger of ignorance to something quite different as their guiding ‘moral’ light than Adam Smith was referring to: their Friedmanite “free enterprise” mantra of “unfettered free markets with corporate ownership of all resources (privatization), unconstrained by any regulation.” While some from the club of disaster confess to be dumbfounded by the incongruity of the meltdown and their Friedmanite belief system (former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress that it left him in a “state of shocked disbelief”); others leading the swindle recite once more their steadfast fundamentalist belief as if they had a clue what was going on: George W. Bush calls for leaders of all nations to “recommit themselves to the fundamentals of long-term economic growth — free markets, free enterprise and free trade... This moment of global economic uncertainty would be precisely the wrong time to reject such proven methods for creating prosperity and hope.” So; fundamentally it’s all “free,” having to do with “freedom to do what they want.” Ideological fundamentalists

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will never see a need to challenge any assumptions or beliefs (W’s “proven”) even in the face of massive systemic failure their beliefs have wrought.

So, in the battle to dominate the perceived meaning of America’s most important ideas, they continue to equate the noble notions of liberty and freedom, and democracy itself, purely and simply to the freedom of money. But, the historically catastrophic phenomenon we are witnessing should indeed be seen as an *expected* outcome of the myopic notion of “ideologically managed democracy,” which is the only vision that emanates from the “freedom-for-money” Corporate Political Complex, while it simultaneously characterizes the decision-making impotence of the general public in our modern-day political world.

In the midst of this malaise a few titan dinosaurs now devour each other in their clamor to consolidate the mirage of ‘final and definitive control’ over the evaporating virtual fruits of a speculative nonproductive investment system that is imploding upon itself; while they eject all costs, responsibility and accountability for their catastrophic failure into the public sphere right onto the backs of hardworking people everywhere. Amusingly, one presidential candidate of the **R&D Party**, the **R** with big family money and lots of rich friends, entertains his ignorant followers by chastising the other **R&D Party** candidate, the **D** with big familiar hopes and lots of little friends, with “promoting socialism” for having the audacity to suggest that the “wealth should be spread around” (“It’s your money they want to spread around!”). All the while, the lobbyists for corporate capitalist crooks demand that their henchmen “spread the taxpayer’s bailout wealth around” (“Yes, it’s your money they want to spread around; but so fucking what!”) and then even argue why they need even more “help” from the government. With their capitalist henchmen in control of our government, Karl Marx must be chuckling in his grave, because “The betting is that many with their hands out will be successful.”¹ The Corporate Political Complex now finds itself uncontrollably morphing into a huge vortex that is simultaneously sucking down with it the resources of nations around the globe into their investment black hole, creating insurmountable burden on generations to come.

They demanded a package of ‘Exlax-700’ costing taxpayers \$700 billion to ease their credit constipation so they could dump their indigestible refuse back onto the American taxpayer who paid for their treatment. They promised it would bring about regularity by soothing the jitters of those still holding all the power cards. Yet, even decorated with another \$150 billion of trinkets like earrings on earmarks, immediately upon its passage market volatility continued to exhibit its multiple hundreds of points daily swings, while sustaining an overall downward trend. The entire leadership of your two-faction Corporate Political Complex, including the Presidential **MOB** bosses **McCain**, **Obama** and **Bush**, promoted the delusion and insisted with a straight face that, “Well, to save Main Street, we have to bailout Wall Street in order to bring ‘stability’ to the markets.” It was a fraudulent lie, simply because they then had no idea how the financial system would respond, and they still don’t. So, they stole our money and gave it to the crooks that promoted the scam, which didn’t bring forth any of the promised stability! Under the threat of marshal law, some in Congress said, and with no public discourse on the most important matter affecting this county’s economic wellbeing in 75 years, and over the objections of the public 100

¹ “Companies fight for shares of bailout money: Many said to receive benefits with economy dropping as it is,” *The Durango Herald*, 10/26/08. Isn’t this just another variation on the so-called 1980s style “neutron mortgage” bomb-package that wipes out the buyer and builder, while leaving the lender in tact?

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to 1, they passed the bailout legislation renaming it to a more palatable “rescue” in order to appear “compassionate” and so you would think Big Daddy is actually “saving you”... from yourself? The ‘discourse’ included only panic-ridden Congressional interviews of Bush Administration officials and strong-arm backroom tactics by the culprits. They excluded the public, bringing no outside economic experts into the discussion for enhanced analysis, understanding and a broader range of viable options that would protect the public and bring a broken system into accountability. They simply looked us in the eye, stole our money and gave it to the rich; to be divvied up by the members of the corporations who not only created and benefitted from the makings of the catastrophe, but who stand to benefit the most from the bailout! America — you’ve been suckered!²

What could only be more unbelievable than the audacity and hubris with which they pulled this theft off, is the joyful acquiescence of power by the majority of the American public to the perpetrators of the bailout, led by the presidential R&D Party MOB (McCain, Obama and Bush). Anyone who could see the makings of this perfect corporatist storm coming, such as **Ralph Nader** who had been warning about it for years right up to letters he wrote late this summer, were soundly chastised “on both sides of the aisle” for being “out-to-lunch alarmist,” while the most ignorant among the political ideologues from both factions of the R&D Party assured us all that “the economic fundamentals are just fine and all will pass without much ado.” I am personally sick of the lying, incompetence, and thievery that continue to come from our pseudo-two-party corporate political complex that is wrecking our country right in front of our faces.

They have sold the American public a failed ideology; an ideology perpetrated and perpetuated over decades by what is really a single monopolistic party of excess — the two-headed Friedmanite disaster capitalism monster, with one head wearing the makeup of Democrats and the other one wearing the makeup of Republicans. The failure of this ideology is now risking the collapse of national treasuries, national sovereignties, the dignity of nations of people, and the potential for subsequent oppression on a scale yet unfathomable as people affected around the globe rise up in protest to this fraud. More ominously, out of this raid on national treasuries, global corporations are indeed set to definitively and indefinitely *rule the world* once and for all³, as they redefine themselves “too large to fail” and merge the levers and assets of government into their fold, taking the world as ‘rightfully’ theirs to exploit and control. Add a little spice of religious zeal on the right, American flag logo on their left lapel, shake and bake

² At this point it is amusing to contemplate the ferocious ‘cause-and-effect’ blame that would have been blasted against all those who voted against the final bailout if it *didn’t* pass... and, yet, the same market volatility manifested. So, I guess we have to thank our lucky stars for the fact that the phenomenon we are witnessing — theft of the U.S. Treasury to bail out speculative investors (borrowing the \$700 billion with solid loan terms under the good name of the United States taxpayers, to buy garbage loans under the shit names of Wall Street crooks) and watching the market *still melt down anyway* with wild panic swings and a downward trend. What actually happened forever debunks their arguments that: a) they know what their talking about and doing; and b) that sucking down our national Treasury into this crooked scheme ever had any merit as a good idea. When and where does any casino guarantee that if you eventually gamble *too much* money, they (or the non-betting taxpayers) will give back your bets? They are gone; they’re not repayable; and they need to be written off as ‘bad investments’. Then we need to figure out how to keep people in their homes and rebuild our economy, starting with rebuilding our decaying infrastructure from the ground up by creating millions of new jobs that *will stay in America* and rejuvenate our economy.

³ So well forewarned by David Korten in his 1995 watershed classic: *When Corporations Rule the World*. Kumarian Press and Berrett-Koehler, Harford and San Francisco.

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the public with a few patriotic clichés, and you have the *fascism* of American Style Crony Capitalism.

All in all, the chaotic and catastrophic collapse we have seen must indeed be expected as a probable result from the characteristic instability of the system itself. Such instability is inevitable for a complex of mutually reinforcing devices (corporations) whose performance, individually and collectively, is driven and measured by a single unlimited unidirectional force — *the unconstrained growth, accumulation and concentration of money* — that has no optimum and no governor on its machinery. Eventually it comes up against physical limitations of the earth, since no political limitations are imposed by the populace through their cowardly ideologically driven representatives. It eventually begins to consume itself as it drives living-wage labor (and hence consumption) out of the picture by outsourcing around the globe, only “leveling at the bottom” with the lowest common denominator — massive populations of Third World laborers living in cramped worker-dormitories, working 16-hour sweatshop days, with no rights. It guts the economic viability of America as more and more people make less and less; and speculative investments siphon off more and more capital that could otherwise go into productive investments for our own manufacturing and infrastructure. As our treasury is gutted, so goes our infrastructure upon which the system is built and depends for its success. As a nonhuman device-complex, such notions of loyalty and patriotism are not part of the motivation and reward system; giant megalithic corporation complexes untether themselves from any nation in single focused pursuit of money. The eventual demise of the system is built into its core structure; but it has the potential to wreak such severe damage on a global scale before it will ever succumb on its own, that our very survival is uncertain. To wit: the current phenomena.

In fact, *disaster* is known to be a requisite ideological component to the Friedmanite system whose mythical merits, always enjoyed by the wealthy few, do not, have not, and cannot manifest in a sustainable way for the masses. Naomi Klein holds Friedmanite ideology to the bonfire of truth by documenting its outcome in terms of the suffering it has perpetrated and induced on populations around the globe under such innocuous names as “free enterprise” and “neoliberalism.”⁴ It simply doesn’t work in a democracy without a draconian force of some sort, either by nature, by dictators, or self induced. When ordinary people have a say in their common welfare and mutual suffering, better results are found. History has shown that either the corporatist Friedmanite disaster capitalism ideology goes; or democracy goes. They are not only *not* equivalent; they are incompatible in any genuine sense of meaning for *democracy*.

Unfortunately, it is this very disaster generating instability that the vultures of shock now rush to exploit in order to yet again prey upon the confused and frightened masses who are the victims of the very ideological system they are taught to worship with the empty mantra: democracy = capitalism (the rich control and grow while the lower classes consume and fume). Their tactics stay the same: drivers of the Corporate Political Complex forecast panic, generate fear and promote stampede, as they rush in to gather up the scraps and cripple our nation’s people by putting a lien on our grandchildren’s grandchildren before anyone realizes what is happening. Reasoned thought, analysis and understanding never get a hearing when the herd mentality yet

⁴ Naomi Klein. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Metropolitan Books, New York.

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again buys into the continued ascent of this fraud as *the only* monolithic organizing ideology allowable for the planet. In ignorant acquiescence, we the people sew our own demise.

It is important to understand that this “totalizing ideology” doesn’t have to come about through the directly overt horrors perpetrated by such infamous characters of last century’s classical totalitarianism like Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, although there are many features in common. The tendencies of our own system of power are indeed opposed to the fundamental principles of constitutional democracy; they are “totalizing” in the sense that they are obsessed with control, expansion, superiority, and supremacy. The paradigmatic direction is still to monopolize and control both the state and the economy, to say nothing of the rest of the world. What Sheldon Wolin calls “inverted totalitarianism” is only partly a state-centered phenomenon in that it primarily “represents the *political* coming of age of corporate power and the *political* demobilization of the citizenry.”⁵ “Inverted totalitarianism” is not derivative from the “classical totalitarianism” represented by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, or Stalinist Russia. It successfully projects power inwards by encouraging and exploiting a symbiotic power relationship between traditional government and the system of private governance of the modern corporation.

Although the intellectual construct of “capitalism” was conceived in the late 18th Century as a decentralized power structure offering an antidote to centralized power, one of Adam Smith’s fundamental contentions for it to work was that *individuals* were capable of making rational decisions about the management of their own capital *only* on a *small scale*. But the rapid emergence of the business corporation device opened forms of concentrated interconnected power structures that marked the presence of private power on a scale and in numbers previously unknown. This is resulting in a concentration of private power that is unconnected to a citizen body and thus only has one agenda, previously stated as growing and concentrating money, regardless of the impact on others. As the momentum of political and social democracy in the U.S. waned with the outbreak of World War II, the merger of state and corporate interests resulted in an unprecedented combination of power with totalizing tendencies whose very nature is to continually challenge established political, moral, intellectual, environmental and economic boundaries. It also created and promoted a consumer culture that focused the nation on private pleasures while accepting political passivity. “A major consequence,” Wolin writes, “is the construction of a new imperial identity that is less democratic. That new identity involves questions of who we are as a people, what we stand for as well as what we are willing to stand for, the extent to which we are committed to becoming involved in common affairs, and what democratic principles justify expending the energies and wealth of our citizens and asking some of them to kill and sacrifice their lives while the destiny of their country is fast slipping from popular control.”

A Benchmark for “Evil”

What if, in the evolution of humanity, well-meaning rational experimenting human beings created a technological device, which they expected to serve limited well-defined and valid needs for humanity in a beneficial way? Yet, over time human control of the abstract device

⁵ Sheldon S. Wolin. 2008. *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. (original emphasis, see the Preface for quotes)

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subtly slipped away as the device morphed and coalesced into a complex of devices that not only escaped human control, but actually commandeered it by design into complicit single focused service to the device through its motivation, evaluation and reward system for the human element? What if humans then realized too late that this device complex, now becoming evermore free from constraints and systemically compelled to enlarge itself with its insatiable drive to grow, accumulate and concentrate money, finds itself consuming anything and everything on its horizon. Those within the device complex who are best at promoting its paradigm are rewarded by contractual engagements allowing them to skim of obscene amounts of personal wealth from unfathomable money flows. But the device complex is designed to eject any individual who questions its legitimacy, the impact of its excesses, and indeed the paradigm of growth itself. With no one able to reset its controls, the device complex will continue until the stability of the life support systems of the planet, the resilience of socioeconomic systems, and all things sacred about life succumb and collapse under its rapacious appetite, leaving a catastrophic wasteland in its wake and the survival of civilization and our species in question???

Now *that* is something we might properly call a *benchmark of evil* — an uncontrolled device complex on the loose that is destroying the planet. And is that not what we face with this disastrous uncontrolled ideological construct made up of artificial device entities called “corporations?” Salvation will only come when the stake of truth is driven into the heart of this ideological dragon with such fierceness, tenacity and finality that no doubt is left when the unimaginable suffering and destruction its ideas have wrought are exposed with properly understood measures of outcome. Ideas have consequences. Enlightened human beings must stand with strength and moral conviction to prevent the resurrection of such a device in its current form. But first they must preserve the ability to do so — and time is running out on genuine democracy.

The Peril of Democracy — that is the root issue that places the 2008 Presidential Election at the precipice of our nation’s historical experiment

You won’t hear about it through the *corporate media complex*. You won’t hear about it from the two R&D Party presidential candidates that dominate the mass media personality scene. You won’t hear about it from corporate-subservient political pundits, who demonstrate themselves to be merely hired entertainers charged with propagating variation on their shared ideological theme. You didn’t hear about it from the corporate dominated fraud⁶ known as the Commission on Presidential Debates; another two-headed corporation-device monster jointly headed by the former chairs of the R&D Party that controlled and directed our national “debate” scam. You won’t hear about it from any aspect of the *Corporate Political Complex* — a massive

⁶ *Fraud* being “intentional perversion of truth in order to induce another to part with something of value [i.e. democracy] or to surrender a legal right [i.e. First Amendment]; an act of deceiving or misrepresenting [the façade of democracy]; one who is not what he pretends to be [a “debate”]; one that is not what it seems or is represented to be;” having synonyms of “deception, subterfuge (suggesting adoption of a stratagem in order to gain an end, such as single ideology political domination); and trickery (implying ingenious acts intended to dupe or cheat).”

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organizational complex now culminating in the full merging⁷ of our two primary power structures: the overwhelming leverage over all things political that disaster capitalism has gained through corporate infiltration and control of the levers of political power; with our one-theme political rule that manifests in the moneyed subservience of both the Republican and Democrat national factions of the R&D Party.

What has happened to what we thought was democracy? To get at that, we have to get some insight into how we imagined democracy in the first place. In the second chapter of his book, a book with the telling title phrases “*Democracy Incorporated (Managed Democracy)*,” Wolin outlines the path that has transformed the American “political imaginary,” the imaginary that becomes the staple of the general culture and its perceived role in the power structure — hence, the “power imaginary.” These are the roots of the narrow “notions of popular participation represented by the two major party organizations.”⁸

The public’s role and options were formed into narrow well-defined choices that sustained a single theme of political power. “The Cold War consolidated the power of capital and began the reaction against the welfare state *but* (original emphasis) without abandoning the strong state. What was abandoned was all talk of participatory democracy. The propaganda of business interests depicted the combination of social democracy and political regulation of the economy as simple socialism and therefore the blood relative of communism. The new state would continue to promote business but without requiring it to be socially responsible.” Rolling back the social and political ideals of the New Deal, the new unifying ideology of the masses was “a combination of patriotism, anticommunism, and fear” providing a setting “by which totalizing power would become normalized.” American’s susceptibility to the frame of a “war imaginary” blended the military defense and corporate economy, inspiring “the gradual disappearance from the national political agenda of the regulation and control of corporations... The economy became untouchable for purposes other than ‘strengthening’ capitalism.”

“The ultimate merger would be between capitalism and democracy... The stage was then set for the intimidation of most politics... Nationalism and patriotism, rather than ideology, sufficed to control the population and gain its support [and hence] enforce ideological conformity and political orthodoxy [...with] New Deal values of social democracy effectively purged from the national power imaginary.” All of this helped limit, redefine, and shift what Americans perceived as their responsibility for “participation” in their country’s future. “Popular participation in participatory democracy [was transformed into] a populism exchanging socioeconomic power for loyal conformism, hope for fear.” As the levers of power became more and more removed from the public’s view and influence (“experts should decide among themselves”) the emergence and legitimization of a political class of elitism formed a “privileged claim to power” and served

⁷ *Merging* being a gradual blending together [e.g. corporations with politics and government] in a way that blurs distinctions, with one or more elements [e.g. political democracy] being lost in the whole [the corporate political complex].

⁸ See Wolin, *Managed Democracy*, Chapter 2: Totalitarianism’s Inversion: Beginnings of the Imaginary of a Permanent Global War, p15-40. (The “imaginary” means existing only in imagination as formed by the dominating narrative story being fed by whatever means to the populace; but not really existing.)

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as “the antidote to mass ignorance.” In such an inverted system, “the leader [such as George W. Bush] is not the architect of the system but its product.” And, although “inverted totalitarianism trumpets the cause of democracy worldwide, ‘democracy’ becomes understood as ‘managed democracy,’ a political form in which governments are legitimated by elections that they have learned to control... Managed democracy is centered on containing electoral politics; it is cool, even hostile toward social democracy... The United States has become the showcase of how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed... Voters are made as predictable as consumers... The regime ideology is capitalism... and democratic myths have become detached from democratic practices.”⁹

Freedom has become an idea up for grabs. Huge amounts of money have been poured into the ranks of “perception managers” to identify and “define” such noble notions in order to steer public perceptions in a way that justifies not only projection of imperial power outward but limiting expectations and understanding of what “freedom” should mean internally to the American public at large. Outwardly, John Pilger documents in his book, *Freedom Next Time: Resisting the Empire*, what the projection of American power has done for the “freedom” of different peoples around the world, justified through the twisting of words and phrases in order to characterize such dehumanized imperialistic goals as “full spectrum dominance” as “benevolent and moralistic.” But historical outcomes from the real policies point to a different reality. “From 1945 to 2005, the United States attempted to overthrow fifty governments, many of them democracies, and to crush thirty popular movements fighting tyrannical regimes. In the process, twenty-five countries were bombed, causing the loss of several million lives and the despair of millions more.”¹⁰ Internally, others have examined the subtle yet steady decline of freedom within our own borders. Naomi Wolf in her book, *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, offers a comparative historical progression of fascism. She shows how events of the past years of the Bush administration, as “historical echoes,” parallel steps taken in the early years of incipient movements of the 20th century’s worst dictators. Her point is to call attention to “important lessons from history about how fragile civil liberties are, and how quickly freedom can be lost.” She identifies ten steps to dictatorship that have been exhibited by historical “fascist shifts,” and relates them to our own experience.¹¹

But there is a characteristic mental “frame” or “worldview”¹² that affects how we understand certain ideas and concepts, such as “freedom,” and so even though two people may be tossing around the same term, they very well may not share the same meaning; in fact, their individually held meanings may even be antithetical to each other. Regarding our everyday lives, for example, most Americans perceive themselves as enjoying “freedom” that so many have “fought and died to preserve.” But, the examples they might give may be quite varied. **Ralph Nader** makes the notion explicit when he points out the difference between “personal freedoms” and

⁹ *ibid*, see Chapter 3: “Totalitarianism’s Inversion, Democracy’s Perversion,” esp. p44-47.

¹⁰ John Pilger. 2007. *Freedom Next Time: Resisting the Empire*. Nation Books, New York. p4-5.

¹¹ Naomi Wolfe. 2007. *The End of America: Letters of Warning to a Young Patriot*. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont.

¹² Often written in the Germanic “weltanschauung” meaning a comprehensive conception of the world from a specific standpoint.

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“civic freedoms.” Personal freedoms are plenty, involving such things as what you wear, drive, eat, do for a living, etc. However, *civic freedom*, which he defines as “participation in power,” is always under pressure by those structures and their operatives who currently dominate existing power. Hence, third party candidates for president, and hence voters themselves, don’t have the same opportunities to participate in power through open public debates that the First Amendment addresses in the right to petition your government through the political process. The R&D Party, and their current presidential aspirants McCain (R) and Obama (D), is a major anti-democratic force in our politics. It’s remarkable how undemocratic even the “Democratic Party” is. Neither the R nor the D factions of the R&D Party are about to engage in the open democracy of civic freedom when they control what political discourse the public at large is allowed to hear, think about and participate in; they accomplish this domination through their corporate control of the process, e.g. the corporation known with the lofty phrase as “The Commission on Presidential Debates.” The R&D Party operatives didn’t like the openness and independence that The League of Women Voters brought to the debate arena a quarter of a century ago, so they refused to participate in open debates anymore, created their own internal debate façade under this name in 1987, and hence reinforced the notion that America’s viable political options consist of only two choices cut from the same ideological cloth: R: Republican and D: Democrat. This has resulted in insurmountable barriers to “civic freedom” for anyone else who offers critical and well-reasoned assessment of and challenge to the results that emanate from the corporate dominated “R&D Party” that they represent. With this they hope to dash any possibility of the beginning of a new era of civic politics; all the while making it appear to the tens of millions of voters that they actually are participating in a “real choice” by voting either for the R or the D (heaven forbid that you “waste your vote” on some RN, for example).

These ‘worldviews’ or ‘frameworks’ that operate in our minds fall into two broad categories, which result in extremely different conceptions of freedom and democracy. Let us refer to them as the “authoritarian parent frame” and a “nurturant parent frame.” John Dean, the former White House legal counsel to Richard Nixon, analyzes “conservatism” and the conservative movement that has been energized over the past couple of decades and points out clearly that “the victim is democracy.” The mindset, language and thinking of this contemporary conservative faction is fundamentally authoritarian in nature. Based on prominent social science research, Dean dissects the striking authoritarian character of contemporary conservative beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices, and how these are expressed in policy and practice. Out of it comes a compelling portrait of the cult that has consumed the Republican Party (and compliant, if not sympathetic Democrats), which has driven it to become indifferent to the founding principles of liberty and equality. The dominant leaders who rise to the surface of this cauldron cloak their actions in moral superiority while pushing the country further and further from constitutional foundations.

Dean identifies two types of authoritarian personalities.¹³ There are “right-wing authoritarians” who are the followers; persons who are submissive to authority. This means that “these people accept almost without question the statements and actions of established authorities, and they

¹³ John Dean. 2006. *Conservatives Without Conscience*. Viking, New York. Dean dedicates his book to the memory of Senator Barry M. Goldwater (1909-98), whom he describes as “a conservative with conscience.” The quotes come from the chapters titled: “How Conservatives Think,” “Conservatives Without Conscience,” and “Authoritarian Conservatism.”

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comply with such instructions without further ado.” They feel safer under powerful authorities and are intolerant of criticism of their authorities, typically displaying aggressive support of authority, aggression which is readily projected onto others. Research finds that right-wing authoritarians are “inclined to control the behavior of others through punishment;” and their authoritarian aggression “is fueled by fear and encouraged by remarkable self-righteousness, which frees aggressive impulses.” Their thinking “is more likely based on what authorities have told them rather than on their own critical judgment, which results in their beliefs being filled with inconsistencies.” This group is characterized by the so-called evangelical ground troops of the Christian Right who, like mindless sheep, followed their marching orders from pulpit leaders to do everything they’re told in order to elect and re-elect George W. Bush; and then they trustingly supported every illegal and immoral decision and action he took.

This begs a profound moral question: Given that this cadre of millions of Evangelical Christians managed to get Bush close enough in election results in order for his party to steal (*Thou Shalt Not...*) the elections of 2000 and 2004,¹⁴ what moral responsibility do they hold for the criminal actions subsequently perpetrated by George W. Bush while in office? Why should they not be held accountable as accomplices, for example, in the well argued and documented case of trying George Bush for murder?¹⁵ (*Thou Shalt Not...*) Is blind obedience to authority a justifiable defense? “Those who submit to an authoritarian order, and who adopt the conscience of the authority figure that issues the order, are in an ‘agentic state.’ They have become an agent of the authority figure’s conscience.”

The other type of authoritarian personality is that of the “social dominators,” persons who want to lead and be submitted to and enjoy having power over others. Research finds that “social dominance orientation suggests an underlying personality that is characterized by traits of being hard, tough, ruthless, and unfeeling toward others, as opposed to compassionate, generous, caring, and altruistic.” Although closely related, the worldview of a person with a social dominator/leader personality is different from that of a right-wing authoritarian/follower. “Authoritarian leaders see the world as a competitive jungle in which the fittest survive; authoritarian followers see the world as dangerous and threatening.” Of course one plays right into the other. Further, persons who exhibit both character traits are extremely dogmatic, embracing “grand philosophies or creeds,” and “can pose a serious threat. This is not only because of their own ideology and nature, but because they lead people who are uninclined to think for themselves; submissive, gullible right-wing authoritarian followers, who are brimming with self-righteousness and zeal, and are fain to give dictatorship a chance... who are most likely to mobilize and lead extremist right-wing movements in the United States.” Drawing from the research, Dean writes, “A striking revelation found within these studies is the fact that both right-

¹⁴ This is an extremely well investigated and documented fact, and many books have been written documenting the case.

¹⁵ Every evangelical Christian who considers themselves to be on the right side of morality must read the two airtight cases for criminally prosecuting George W. Bush.

For conspiracy to defraud the United States, see the argument presented by experienced Federal Prosecutor Elizabeth de la Vega (2006) *United States v. George W. Bush et al.* Seven Stories Press, New York.

And, taking the criminal implications much further, see the argument presented by America’s most prominent and successful prosecutor, Vincent Bugliosi (2008) *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder.* Vanguard Press, New York.

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wing authoritarians and social dominators can be accurately described as conservatives without conscience... [based on] stated beliefs and expressed behavior.”

So, it is quite clear that while these types relentlessly invoke the word “freedom,” they employ it as slogans to justify imperial aggression: “The United States can strike preemptively because ‘freedom is on the march’.” Its use is deployed by these types “opportunistically to justify American military action abroad and the curtailing of civil liberties at home.” George Lakoff, one of the research scientists whose work Dean draws from, in his insightful book, *Whose Freedom? The Battle over America’s Most Important Idea*, reveals that in fact “the right has effected a devastatingly coherent and ideological redefinition of freedom. Disregarding the progressive ideal of freedom taken for granted throughout our history, the conservative revolution has made ‘freedom’ its central weapon on the front lines of everything from the war on terror to the battles over religion in the classroom and abortion... The country is divided by two dramatically different worldviews, cognitive frames that determine how we think about economic policy, religion, science, foreign affairs — and freedom.”¹⁶ Lakoff reveals “the mechanisms behind the right-wing hijacking of our most cherished political idea.” And he shows how “*progressives not only have failed at every turn to counter this attack, but also have failed to recognize its nature and, even worse, have failed to articulate their own intuitive understanding of freedom.*” (emphasis added)

And this is the crux of the peril of democracy. Since our political system is dominated by the corporate R&D Party, which as already pointed out operates to ensure the exclusion of any other line of thought, Progressives find themselves facing the fearful prospect of a McCain victory and another four years of having to fight the erosion of freedom imposed by his right-wing authoritarian followers and their obliging leaders. But, yet again Progressives also find themselves dealing with the double-bind that fear brings on; that is, feeling trapped with the only alternative the dominating corporate R&D Party offers them — the promises they hope will break out of the corporate chains wrapped around Barack Obama. It ain’t gonna happen! Obama has no mandate and Progressives have not demanded anything from him. They offer him their votes so cheaply with fawning support, as he has continually demonstrated, despite his gift of oratory, his willingness to compromise his initially purported progressive ideals to cynically seek to include the cabal of right-wing authoritarian followers that the Democratic Party seems to think he needs to win. What he has instead accomplished is *nothing* from that side, besides thinking he can trade off his “given” progressive base for the hope of gaining some of these votes. Yet, he and his Party bosses have again compromised the Democratic Party’s integrity the same way every other Democratic loser of presidential elections has over the past, what?, 30 years? When will Progressives and forward thinking people who used to identify with the R or the D, who are fed up with both factions of the corporate R&D Party, take heed of Lakoff’s charge?

Ralph Nader is the only one who has consistently, faithfully, clearly and unapologetically stood on principled grounds and challenged the status quo, in his relentless and courageous fight for democracy that he has led for over 40 years. Nader naturally steps into the higher rationality that real freedom requires, and easily transcends the ideological framing that radical conservative

¹⁶ George Lakoff. 2006. *Whose Freedom? The Battle over America’s Most Important Idea*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York. These quotes from the cover jacket.

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language imposes on issues and ideas, trapping Democrats, Liberals and Progressives alike. Nader does so well the two kinds of work required. He does the *political work* of organizing, uniting, inspiring and building coalitions, always with limited resources, in the face of major media blackout, and exclusion from the “national” debates, which is the only way to get access to the tens of millions of people who will be voting (most of whom aren’t even aware that Nader is running, let alone what he is offering); and yet has been consistently polling at 5 or 6% nationally, even 8% in some states. Ross Perot had similar numbers before being able to participate on the national debate stage, which then brought his vote percentage above 20%. Jesse Ventura had similar experience, but after debating won a state governorship. After Perot, the R&D Party Commission on Presidential Debates raised the hurdle from 10% polling to 15%, that must be demonstrated by all six of their selected pollsters, whom they won’t even identify. That, by default ensured that no third party candidate could *ever* get the kind of national exposure to win. This is primarily what Obama is riding, because he hasn’t been challenged on important things; and if that doesn’t blow your fucking mind about the peril of democracy, I guess nothing will. *Barack Obama, I challenge you to have the courage to stand up and debate Ralph Nader for the support of the progressive people of America, if not everyone; out in the metaphorical field, with all the people gathered around, hearing the uncontrived arguments exhaust themselves back and forth. Both the Libertarian and Constitution Party candidates had the courage to debate Nader and the other three candidates were invited, including the R and D candidates. We would expect McCain not to attend; but you, Barack? What’s up with this, Barack? And so, if you don’t engage this challenge, Barack Obama, then I challenge you to change the system for selecting our top leader that addresses exactly these problems that are so well recognized and essential for civic freedom and the future of democracy in America. There can be nothing more important on your agenda.*

The other kind of work that is required to save our freedom and democracy that Nader exemplifies so well is the *cognitive work*. This means learning how to gain, and then expressing, the ability to recognize that the other side has commandeered our words and changed their meaning. We must not be trapped into arguing their arguments by assuming we share the same meaning of the words they use, and simply thinking we can counter their facts.

We must take back the very idea that defines our country — freedom. This means, Lakoff insists, unless we realize the need and acquire the ability to recognize ideological framing, where one can see the ideology behind the language and tell whether a phrase or an argument is based on a ‘strict’ authoritarian or ‘nurturant’ value system, “the culture wars will continue, they will keep our country divided and make it less likely that elections alone will serve the cause of real freedom.” We have to let go of childhood notions that assume everyone holds the same “common sense” and transcend that limiting notion to a higher rationality. “One person’s common sense is another’s oppressive political ideology... We now have to become aware of contested concepts; that ‘freedom’ means something radically different to the radical right; and so do other important words like ‘opportunity,’ ‘fairness,’ ‘responsibility,’ ‘harm,’ ‘compassion,’ and even ‘God’.”

We also have to know that deep seated frames tend to always trump the facts. The tired argument of Liberals that “all that money (from the war, bailout, etc.) could have paid for healthcare, umpteen thousand schools, etc.; what a waste” is entirely irrelevant. The Right only traps you in the argument that “there is not enough money to do all the things ‘tax-and-spend’

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Liberals want,” because to the core of their existence, they are ideologically opposed to any of it based on their fundamental worldview about the nature of humanity — regardless of how much money is available. It isn’t a matter of money; it’s a matter of their ideological framework. Of course there’s lots of money, from their perspective, to forever ‘borrow-and-spend’ on never-ending wars and to bail out corporatist capitalists who scam our system for their own benefit.

Lakoff exposes a whole host of progressive pitfalls, the biggest being the philosophical paradigm called rationalism. “Because rationalists see reason as conscious and literal, they miss the framing and worldview effects... that give political thought and language its moral and emotional depth, complexity and color.” These aren’t traditional rational conservatives we’re talking about; they are the ardent right-wing authoritarian followers. And they continue to trap Democrats like Barack Obama and his wistful followers into their frames. Lakoff warns, “Before free will can operate, you must be able to conceptualize what you are willing. Since you can’t conceptualize without concepts, you can’t take back progressive freedom unless you know what progressive freedom is, that we are losing it; and what is replacing it.”¹⁷ *If you don’t think this election is a profound war for freedom, you need to sober up and take note.*

Taking Moral Responsibility for Your Country

If you become aware that someone is at peril of being raped; do you as a human being have a moral responsibility to do something about it? If so, what is your moral responsibility and how should you exercise it? If not, do you simply turn your head away or become a voyeuristic spectator to be passively entertained?

If you become aware that your country’s democracy as we envision it is in peril; do you as a citizen have a moral responsibility to do something about it? If so, what is your moral responsibility and how should you exercise it? If not, do you simply turn your head away or become a voyeuristic spectator to be passively entertained?

Obama and McCain and the national media ignored the most serious issues facing our country during their three Anheuser-Busch sponsored parallel interviews (aka The Commission on Presidential Debates) and their proposals fell far short of expectations of the American people. There was no need for them to address any of it, because there were no media questioners with the guts to press them on any of it; all of the “ground rule parameters” were contractually agreed upon in advance by both the R and the D of the R&D Party entertainment show. They traded platitudes, and a few personal jabs, while they agreed on major points and positions of the corporate R&D Party ideology — corporatism and militarism — only differing on who could do what better.

The only presidential candidate who holds the majority national opinion on every program and policy proposal affecting the American people, and who fearlessly brings “untouchable” issues to the fore, is **Ralph Nader**. Nader was not only *not* invited to participate; he was actually threatened with arrest when he merely attempted to attend one of the debates as a viewer, valid ticket in hand. Unbelievable how absurd this is when everyone is smiling and waving the “flag of

¹⁷ Lakoff, *Whose Freedom?*, passim, but especially Chapter 13: “Taking Back Freedom”. This book is a must read for anyone who really cares about freedom, democracy and what is most definitely at risk at this point of our history.

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democracy” celebrating our four-year ritual of “American style freedom and democracy,” in — you know — the “Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.” Where is the freedom? Where is the bravery?

Ralph Nader is the quintessential benchmark for the debater. If the others aren’t willing to exhibit the “bravery” to debate him in a “free and open” election process where all viable presidential voices are heard before the American people, then what their exclusive corporation calls “debates” must be deemed a profound fraud upon the American people. We deserve so much more from our leaders at this point in time. We must demand integrity now; or we will never get it! History will record the process we now witness and, far from being a mere footnote, its exposure and critique will not retreat; it will crescendo until we have reclaimed what is rightful ours — the right to participate in power; the right of civic freedom. Get used to it; win or lose we’re not going anywhere. The Nader/Gonzalez agenda itself won’t skip a beat right through Election Day and on into what happens with our country next as a new administration and congress come into power. Right now, four days before the election, Nader is polling in numbers around the nation that amounts to 5 millions voters putting their support behind the Nader/Gonzalez shift-the-power agenda. That is a genuinely real force for democracy; and that’s with no main stream visibility. People are finding out about it and demanding more from their political process. You are not alone in displaying the courage of choosing to be a part of the energy that is building for a new future of democratic participation.

So, what about *your* moral responsibility for your country? In his wonderful book, *Real American Ethics: Taking Responsibility for Our Country*,¹⁸ modern-day philosopher Albert Borgmann challenges us in this regard: “America, for better or for worse, is still a nation that *we* have built. So why then are we failing to take responsibility for it?” Borgmann’s position is grounded in neither conservative nor liberal ideology, but in what he sees as a devoted citizen himself among many.

“The great virtue of a nation,” Borgmann writes, “is that the people comprising it take responsibility for one another and for what they have in common... We have to take our mutual and inclusive responsibility more seriously and understand it more deeply... Taking responsibility in a patronizing way is clearly unacceptable. But taking responsibility for what we obviously and perhaps detrimentally do to one another is recognition or realization rather than intrusion.” When you see our two major candidates for the nation’s highest office draped in the shackles of corporate money and failed ideology, what should you do to help free our political process from this bondage and address the failure of our power structure to represent the people — that is, to represent *you*? Should you just throw up your hands and say, “Well, there’s nothing we can do about it; Obama and McCain are all the system is going to offer us. It’s always the same; what can we do? We’ll just have to ‘hope’ that Obama keeps some of his progressive promises and, like Michael Moore said today on DemocracyNow.org, hope further that the *non*-progressive militaristic promises he did make were just macho political talk to get elected and he’ll abandon these promises, like all politicians do, when he gets into office.” That simply

¹⁸ Albert Borgmann. 2006. *Real American Ethics: Taking Responsibility for our Country*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Quotes from p3-16, 40-41, 143.

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amounts to hoping that your candidate is not really who he has portrayed himself to be; that on inauguration day, you hope he’ll take off his campaign persona and become the “real thing” you are so hoping he will be. What kind of timid response is that? It does not reflect virtues like integrity and courage; it runs from them in the self-delusion that “hope” is reality.

As the Corporate Political Complex power structure now stands, supporters of causes, such as social justice and the environment, Borgmann points out, forever find themselves in the roles of “petitioners to power,” who now and then score victories and at other times try to defend what territory they have been granted by the power structure. They have never commanded the effective power of government, which corporations dominate regardless of whether the R or the D of the corporate R&D Party is in power. But further, not only are such movements characterized by relative powerlessness, albeit accompanied by the genuine passion that goes with these causes, “these movements lack any profound vision that animates them.” Borgmann continues, “Their moral visions are narrow, and their language is always in danger of getting shrill, though all of them have moderate advocates with honorable motives.”

So where and what is the moral vision that brings life to these crucial causes? Are they to forever be merely “petitioners” to a power structure that is designed to paradigmatically pressure their marginalization, if not exclusion from participation in power? Simply examine all the hard fought gains that have been undone by eight years of the Bush regime, which is still trying to undo everything else it can before leaving office. Something else must emerge that breaks through the perceived rigidity of the political parameters and walls to power; something that brings not only awareness of our collective potential to demand so much more, to demand to be part of the redefinition of politics, but that invigorates our courage to go out and make it happen. You must *imagine democracy* as it *should* be, not meekly take what they give you; and you must create a new expansive narrative to envision and define a future where the power is shifted from the Corporate Political Complex back into the hands of the people. *That* is what the **Nader movement** is all about. Corporate sponsored candidates, however meaningful their promises and charming their personalities, are not able to accomplish this simply because there is no counter pressure to demand it happens unless *you* provide it; which you don’t when you give away your vote so cheaply. People like Obama are forever trapped in the existing power box, because that non-democratic box is what got them where they are. It will not let them redefine the box or break out of its shackles and bring down the walls that prevent participation.

Borgmann illustrates an example that clearly elucidates how a predefined worldview “frames in” what even some of the most creative people in history imagine to be in the realm of their consideration and possible influence. “Consider democracy,” Borgmann poses. “It is the only viable form of government today, but it was not such for Shakespeare. The plays that deal with the rise and fall of kings, the so-called histories, do not challenge the notion of kingship. Shakespeare’s question is not whether kingship is an acceptable form of government, but rather what a weak king is, a good king, a murderous king, an ambitious pretender to kingship, and so forth. Some of us may be able to empathize with the validity of monarchy, but no one of consequence would think of embracing any form of government but democracy.” Addressing the norms that shape our imagination, Borgmann says, “Every epoch in history has its uniquely characteristic and valid norms... which are clearest and most authoritative when they are violated. It’s this moral fact that reveals the rise and force of epochal moral norms... When prejudices of old have lost their power, we are witnessing a new epoch.” So, what is it that is so

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precious about freedom and democracy that we need to stand up for as moral norms at this moment in history? It cannot be “what kind of D is best produced from the system;” or “what kind of R does the most damage” (or vice-versa). It must be, “what can we envision for ourselves and our country beyond the R&D Party mold that anchors our politics to the past?”

When we speak of “liberties” what liberties do we speak of in our contemporary world? “Contemporary culture has given us unprecedented liberty and prosperity,” Borgmann writes. “But it also needs to be understood that the characteristic liberty of American society is real and personal, not political. *Real liberty* is the freedom from the burdens of reality, from hunger, cold, disease, and confinement.” Neither the R nor the D candidates utter a word about this kind of liberty; their R&D Party representing the Corporate Political Complex does not permit it. They stick with how the corporate profit system can be tweaked this way or that way in order to “encourage” more of a compassionate device behavior in an effort to “improve its performance.” Never is the morality of the profit motive, say, questioned when it comes to what a society can do to address *real liberty*, especially as it relates to profiting off of human suffering. The profit motive is taken as the “deep given” of the belief system of the R&D Party; and that is what sustains the ideological tumor at the core of the Corporate Political Complex.

“*Personal liberty* is freedom from the demands and annoyances of persons.” It is defined by our technological paradigm, but personal liberty does not compel the kind of moral attention that real liberty commands. It is characterized by a never-ending proliferation of perceived and manufactured needs, which are sated through commodification and consumption. But both “real and personal liberties began in earnest with the Industrial Revolution and have since become a broad and diverse phenomenon, so much so that we may despair of getting a grip on it and taking responsibility for it.” How is it that the primary status of real liberty for those who suffer is to penetrate the consciousness of the middle class’s focus on personal liberty and the political discourse that patronizes it to the exclusion of the tens of millions of working class families who suffer the struggle of daily life?

“To be sure, *political liberty*, freedom from oppression and for self-determination, is fundamental. Without it nothing much matters except survival.” But it is well understood that “political liberty needs constant vigilance and protection” in order to flourish. The essential paradigm of the Corporate Political Complex is to diminish true political or civic liberty, as it is meant in terms of participating in power; and to pacify it with the appearance of participation in an election process that stifles national political dialog and whose ultimate choices are controlled and limited to the two “approved” representatives who eventually rise through the staged processes of the corporate R&D Party.

Meaningful political liberty and civic freedom are at peril in America. That is not an opinion; it is a fact that can be drawn from the experience we have submitted to in what we call our “national political process.” All we have to do is open our eyes, expand our awareness, and witness it. Then, once we see clearly and internalize that in fact, *real democracy* — deep in its essence — is in peril in America, we must come face-to-face with the question that *real ethics* demands of us: What moral responsibility does *my* citizenship in *my* country compel of *me*? Who are “We the People...” that the first three words of our Constitution calls forth? If not *you*, then who? If not *now*, then when?

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As both Ralph Nader and Matt Gonzalez continually point out: “The pioneering voters in America have always been the voters of conscience... You should have high expectation levels for a government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

No one in American politics, especially the two R&D candidates for president, has done more for the American people than **Ralph Nader**. He deserves your vote; and you deserve what he has to offer you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Root". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "R" and a trailing flourish.

Root Routledge, PhD
Durango, Colorado