



This Buddha survived Tsunamis in 1334, 1369, and 1498.

## THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

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## INTRODUCTION — “WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST” OR LAST?

Is American politics today the new Titanic? Are we steering towards a giant iceberg, or was Nov. 8 2016 the day we actually collided with an iceberg, since when we have been living on a slowly sinking the ship? Such a view of the US government in crisis, regardless of whether the disaster is impending or already underway, is widely shared. Daily headlines increase the alarm. Disaster when Trump meets his NATO allies. Disaster as new tariffs cut farm exports. Disaster in healthcare: Obamacare is being chopped into tiny pieces. Disaster ahead for mass transit – the Koch machine assaults each project’s funding. Disaster at the Trump/Putin press conference.

There are winners and losers in every election but our tradition has always assumed that the patterns would shift and vary over time, ensuring that big, durable decisions can co-exist productively with the short term, finite results of any given 2 or 4 year election cycle. This pamphlet comes out right now because many of us fear that one faction in US politics and public life is attempting end this fluctuating series, to lock us all into a Zero Sum Game, a political system in which the allocation of seats in a Finite Game, namely the next election cycle will get so difficult fundamentally to rearrange that, assuming cooperation from the new Supreme Court, we will never be allowed to return to the fluctuating patterns we call democracy. I am not that pessimistic but there’s more to say about the deeper issues, more to say about the risks and more to say about hopes for this year.

Why does a Zero Sum Game seem to be underway right now? Patriarchy could be one’s pat answer, but it seems too generic and vague. Try “Brute Patriarchy,” a special purpose form of dominance. John Wayne trying to recapture territory from Tom Hanks. The sections on WOMENS WORK and on issues DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS are devoted to women and children because I actually think they represent the critical center of what is at risk in these days. And not just because of Me Too and the moral outrage of immigrant parent/child separation, though these are live right now. The misogyny that astounded my social senses in 1969, the year I first arrived at the University of Pennsylvania has come, over the decades, to feel quite specifically American. Likewise, the cavalier waste of children’s potential in the disaster lurking in so many US public schools. Other people will focus on climate change or trade. I know that. I find myself returning again and again to the fact the it was possible to defeat a highly qualified woman who focused on children’s issues with a celebrity sexist, self evidently lacking in the basic skills to be President, a man with a positively astonishing attitude towards his own wives and children. Would he have won against a man? I really doubt it.

When I can avoid deep pessimism, my capacity to resist the slump rests on a belief in the power of two specific American political traditions, explored in more depth IN REAL LIFE THERE ARE NO INTERMISSIONS.

One is the national commitment to, even love of “checks and balances.” People raised in the US seem to see the idea as so natural that those of us who were or are governed by Parliamentary systems struggle to explain here that the two systems are in some sense opposites. Surely, all democracies pit the different loci of power against each other? Well no. When a party wins power in the British Parliament, it controls both the executive and the legislative. In the UK there wasn’t even a thing used as a Supreme Court until a decade ago. The 2018 elections in the USA matter not only because the worst of Trump must be stopped, but because “checks and balances” must be sustained. A recent poll

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suggests that voters may well turn out this year specifically to reassert that that particular system matters more than any single policy choice. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/poll-economic-satisfaction-under-trump-isn-t-helping-his-party-n880721>

Emphasizing checks and balances has potential in part because it reinforces another important American reality. Though media may try to reduce public differences to a simple polarity, blandly labeled “right” and “left,” (as though anyone with any power in the USA was actually leftwing), in fact there are dozens of different polarities in this country. Elections regularly center on locally powerful differences. In Eastern Washington, traditionally Republican but dependent on wheat exports, Trump’s tariffs are an anathema. If Obamacare turned out to have profound resonance, strong enough to prevent its instant destruction, much of that power rested on guaranteeing coverage for people with what medics call “pre-existing conditions.” That’s Rob with life long asthma, and me with heart issues. That’s one third of the adults in this country whose health insurance was never certain until 2010.

Once again, of course, it is not hard to reaffirm that NONE OF US IS ALONE This time the focus is on China and Japan. Are all three of us pivoting towards that most classic of Zero Sum Games, authoritarian rule? China and Japan do not support the idea of a single global trend. At worst, we are all headed that way in our own particular style. The USA has neither Shoguns (Prime Minister Abe) nor Emperors (Chairman Xi Jinping) in our past. The opposite. The complex governance systems under which we Americans carry out our public lives came into existence in part to make it easier to stand against tyranny, exemplified back then by George III. While no-one in the UK would describe that particular King as a tyrant, Americans did, and here in the USA tyranny remains a system to be feared. Oh there is trouble all over the world but we will do better resisting our own troubles if we clearly identify where they lie and avoid losing our way by assuming what we must do is just what needs to happen in China or Russia or Europe or Japan.

To keep focused on contributing to a better time ahead, my strategies include reducing my exposure to those Zero Sum HEADLINES about winners and losers. If checks and balances are our strength, one of our greatest weaknesses is this country’s fascination with “winning.” The topic deserves a whole pamphlet but in these toxic times, with Trump’s constant “winner/loser” tweets and blasts, I find the topic so disturbing I have ducked that writing. You will find allusions to winning scattered throughout this piece, and headlines that show winning’s enormous cultural reach. In addition I have a recommendation: Read someone else’s writing. For a way to think about the positives, there is James Carse’s *Finite and Infinite Games*. Francesco Duina’s *Winning: Reflections on an American Obsession* is more sobering — explaining how the current President’s talk of being a winner is totally in tune with so much of the culture. Sports are just one example: Seattlites adore this season’s Mariner’s baseball, our previous President so happy to join the betting on college basketball’s “March Madness” and High School Friday night football as the center of community solidarity all over the USA. From sports to banking to tax cuts, to —> . . .

When the world of winners and losers gets too present, I sink once again into feeling deeply lost: There are encounters with despair in a world turned upside down. If you chose to follow me around those pathways, turn the last few pages upside down.

## WOMEN'S WORK AND OTHER FUTURES

Did that sentence in the Introduction slip by you? “The misogyny that astounded my social senses in 1969, the year I first arrived at the University of Pennsylvania has come, over the decades, to feel quite specifically American.” Don’t get me wrong. There is plenty of pressure on women all over the world – think Saudi Arabia where women just gained the right to drive a car but not to leave the house without permission from a man. Japan, the UK, Korea, my other long term homes, all have issues.

Still, what happened in the last Presidential election, the rampant sexism in Trump’s everyday demeanor, the brutal media coverage of Hilary Clinton, those feel distinctly American.

More long-standing, more appalling to my European-trained mind, is the constant obsession with women’s bodies; in the abortion-centered world the opposing positions are coyly called “pro-choice” or “pro-life.” How can we be facing yet another Supreme Court nominee who is going to be invited to exert his authority over young wombs nationwide?

What is this?

It’s not the Catholic Church. The people of Ireland, who are mostly still Catholic, just voted overwhelmingly to legalize abortion, perhaps in part because they are thoroughly disillusioned by clergy abuse and the horrors imposed on young mothers who had no husbands. We in this country seem unable to imagine that decades of clergy abuse delegitimizes our Bishops in that same Catholic Church, when they repeatedly assert authority over women’s reproductive systems.

Nor is it fundamentalist Christianity’s biblically derived theology. At the beginning of the last century, most historians say, abortion was considered to be one end of the contraception continuum. With the US Supreme Court’s 2014 Hobby Lobby decision, we have reached the point that contraception – specifically the IUD and the morning-after pill – are now on the abortion continuum because they prevent a pregnancy!! This is theology turned into craziness. The Bible says nothing about IUDs, I am pretty sure, nor fetal pain, nor ultrasounds and heartbeats.

The abortion question in the USA reverberates today because it is as at the core of the “woman question” as they used call it, although issues for women range much wider than reproductive rights. The US women who, in 2015 won their second Soccer World Cup, had no chance whatsoever of getting the kind of €100m soccer contract just awarded to the Portuguese player Ronaldo, despite the fact that his team fell out of contention early in the 2018 Mens’ World Cup. Both Serena Williams and Steffi Graf have won more professional-era tennis Grand Slams than any man to date, a record conveniently ignored by every media commentator who idolizes Roger Federer. As, indeed, do I. What an athlete. Nadal has fewer than the top six women. And it’s not just bodies. Women’s minds are denigrated too. As recently as 2006, Harvard University had a President who, admittedly at serious cost to himself, was able and willing to suggest that women’s minds were not capable of impressive science.

The grotesque stories about predatory American male sexual agendas that have come out since Trump’s presidential run help explain why the “bus tape” did not abruptly end his candidacy. But it would be diversion from considering Women’s Work in the near future to carry on down that tangent. Because Stormy Daniels does feel like a tangent. Sexual assault and seduction by predatory males is not the core issue. The core issue in understanding our national misogyny is that women’s reproductive

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systems, unlike every other organ and limb of every other American human body, are routinely the topic of national public debate.

The 1973 rulings *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, in which the US Supreme Court overruled Texas and Georgia statutes, intended effectively to prohibit abortion, were the very rulings that put women's reproductive system under national public control. They were not simple "protective" rulings, they were also assertive. Women's bodies are not for the women themselves to decide on — the Constitution that controls national politics conferred on our wombs a doubtful and constantly challenged "right to privacy."

In conjunction with the 1960s commitments to nationally enforceable civil rights for African Americans, the two abortion rulings are said to have set in motion a 40-year-long conservative project to redirect jurisprudence in the USA, a project which hopes to put its capstone in place with the confirmation of Judge Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. Conservatives worked for decades, teaching law students their kind of law, procuring their graduates clerkships with prominent judges, arranging prime placements in legal practices, following up with nominations to State and Federal courts.

With elegant irony, headlining a piece about this conservative project, David Brooks, a mixed minded NY Times opinion columnist, chose to echo the title of Hillary Clinton's book about children and education, *It Takes A Village*. He makes his case well. Others have argued that those 1960s and 1970s Supreme Court rulings, were a capstone themselves, by men whose commitments echoed the New Deal, and hence the last straw for those who were dismayed by Roosevelt collaborative, collective even "socialist" public policies. If we are lucky, today's Court, with its seemingly inexorable acquiescence to the right wing agenda, may be mobilizing the converse: a campaign, no matter how long it takes, to swing the pendulum back. The Court, perhaps, is a locus for winning and losing that operates on long, long cycles.

Neither Trump's sexual predations nor the conservative swing in the US Supreme Court seem central here.

I keep being mystified by why/how/on what basis women's reproductive systems have acquired such huge significance in US public life. Is it simple misogyny? I don't think so. I think it is deep and serious misogyny. It is the Founders' misogyny, on a scale that is far too close for comfort to the racism directed back then at Native Americans and African Americans. Our wombs seem to be emblematic of control over an entire society, control that is now slipping away from the traditional dominant culture that has ruled for centuries.

Social controls placed on patterns of family lineage are not unique to the USA of course. But this feels different, not so much a matter of lineage as a matter of power. A winner/loser issue. If a woman can go on her own initiative to arrange an abortion, then the baby's father has no power. If she wins, he loses. Likewise if he wins, she loses. If a woman can abort a baby, then any of one of the men now alive might not have been born. In these Zero Sum terms, it looks as though women may be about to lose, if not nation-wide then at least in a large percentage of the states.

This debate in the USA tells me that we have become devastatingly reductionist in relation to a highly complex human experience, the birth of a new human being. All sides seem willing to reduce human life

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to slogans in search of power. Whose voice speaks the final word “mine” or “theirs?” Knowing there is so much more to the work ahead than a grab for victory in a Zero Sum Game, let me end with a reminder about qualities described in earlier pamphlets as essential to the work ahead for women.

- (1) Decisions need to be negotiated not asserted and women must be at the table. In the streets as well, but definitely at the table. I am pessimistic about women in the room in peace-making, for example in Korea. I am much less so in this case. It will take our presence in the room to resist the huge energy pushing for absolute and final power. We should be booking the rooms ourselves and inviting people in as well, in particular the people with whom we disagree.
- (2) In an interesting essay about Justice Kennedy's jurisprudence, I read that he has been an ardent individualist. In the pamphlet about Native Americans, I drew attention to two particular Indian women leaders for their profoundly collaborative talents. Hillary Clinton was right. Raising a child is a collaborative act. Science now suggests that collaborative parenting is a core component of human evolution. I was part of a team doing just that in New York as Emily was getting an equally collaborative theater production through Tech Week and into Previews and Mark was performing upstate. We should not imagine nor fear that Judge Kavanaugh is all that stands between women and a constructive future. He is in a team on the Court, there are Senators and voters to be engaged and persuaded. Let's avoid fantasizing that one person, good or questionable stands between us and the future. This is shared work.
- (3) In another pamphlet I wrote about Melania Trump and Michelle Obama. They virtually epitomize the Zero Sum visions of women. Once a man becomes President, his wife HAS to be First Lady. And, since the West Wing TV series, acronyms for offices drift through the media and these poor women get to be known as FLOTUS, their very presence there manifest inside the White House surely makes it harder yet to get a woman elected POTUS. Melania's refusal to come to Washington for six months I still think of as good for American women. Women have work to do. The work our spouses chose doesn't govern ours.
- (4) Quoting directly from the first pamphlet, written when despair was pretty real: “As Obama repeatedly reminded us during his first campaign, we must [act for the future] with that most American of instincts: we need to believe there is hope.” One reason for hope is that women's marches have been global and, at very least, have been proud statements of the willingness of so many to care and to take care of one another. We took along our children and grandchildren, I suppose, in part to instill in them our knowledge that a fruitful public life in the American mode depends on action. It is not something one watches from the sidelines.

TO WHAT END?        To strip the Federal Constitution out of women's reproductive rights.

It is so very hard to write that sentence, but I have come to believe that in this, as in so many other surprising areas, the best remedy for America's troubles lies in the complexities of the 50 States with their many different interpretations of their own Rights. This is perhaps a place where I and my opponents on this very issue can actually meet. My money and support would then go to helping women in abortion-hostile states to travel so that they can reach the cities and clinics in which they will find welcome and care and find others with energy to invest in their genuinely private, longterm well being.

## DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS

National elections are approaching fast in the USA. Many states have finished their primary season. Mine just happened. Only the presidential primary comes early in the summer. The rest of the candidates have to wait until August. Shortens the election season they say. Perhaps.

Friends all over the country are emailing back and forth, saying how much elections matter and they do. More on that later in the INTERMISSIONS. But here I must confess, I tossed my primary ballot in the bin.

It felt more fitting to grieve the suffering of children than to do the informed reading needed to vote.

These pamphlets are normally written from the analytical and public sides of my work. This particular segment emanates from personal experience too. I'm an immigrant and also the daughter of a refugee, so Trump on our border makes me want to howl. Of course it did not require personal refugee experience to react intensely to the news that American Border Patrol officers were separating parents and children as they "captured" them crossing into the country. Though relatively few of us track the day to day nightmares unfolding at the frontier, enough of my close-in family still have or have in the past had issues with US immigration, that I always assume, on the border, that suffering will be happening every single day, and among all kinds of people. Not of course, to Trump's in-laws who this week became citizens thanks to "chain migration."

The millions outraged by family separations have responded both because it is so deeply dreadful that it is our government doing this and also because there is really no moral ambiguity at all. Separating children from their parents without cause is simply wrong. No need to spell out the reasons. We can all see it and we know that the seeds of deep suffering have now been sown in the hearts of several thousand randomly selected people. Add language difficulties and bureaucratic rigidity to primal anxiety and it's clear that easy repair of this kind of damage is impossible.

Let's not move on too quickly here. The policy has been reversed of course, the courts are ruling as fast as they can that Trump's executive branch has taken the wrong steps, and three quarters of the somewhat over 2000 families are almost certainly back together, but there is more to this organized decision to separate children from their parents than a brief contemporary evil.

Slavery rested on private businesses and government legislation purposely separating children, a policy that lasted from the earliest colonial days right up to the end of the Civil War. This is history most Americans now recognize as devastating. It was a shameful nightmare — a black child sold for profit by the white family which owned her. But in the 21st century, as a consequence of mass incarceration — a system clearly connected to prior patterns of race-based suffering — parent-child separation continues, disproportionately experienced in the African American community.

Official policy also wrenched Native American children away, placing them in boarding schools in order to "take the native out of the child." This program is less well known than the slave auction, but it lasted until very, very recently. The Christian missionary "educational project" also reaches right back to the founding colonies, although it accelerated dramatically after the Civil War and the Indian wars. Astonishingly, the number of students taken from their families did not peak until 1973. In my lifetime. Well into my lifetime, indeed into the time I have lived in this country. Those who were children in those schools live among us today, victims too of a government policy that took children from their parents without cause.

Contrast this wrenching separation with pretty standard patterns of parenting today. All the young women I know love it when they get "text" reports of what their children are up to while they are away



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at a job. It helps those working women to focus on their work, confident that their children are at peace with the world. And it helps repeatedly. Day after day. Just as we did, parents today get careful recommendations about pre-schools and pediatricians, the right kind of baby monitor and the best kind of car seat.

Those who parent actively, still disproportionately the women in this society, work to make sure their children are well cared for. What a nightmare then to see pictures of children like yours in cages. Tents in the desert. Fences, locks and men in uniform. Men employed in for-profit companies to “guard” the children, to make sure their parent’s cannot get to them. Recently, during dinner with friends in New York we learned that around the corner from the apartment, the police standing in front an anonymous storefront were “guarding” another small “detention center.” It’s a prison. Let’s not beat around the bush. These children who had not been charged with a crime were in prison.

And supposing children go to their own neighborhood school. What then?

Suffering and grief abound their too. I have been a college teacher who’s seen too much anguish among her students and like many of my colleagues I have recently been saying “it’s getting worse you know.” Mental health, concentration issues etc. Media pundits blame teen obsessions with social media. I can’t deny that effect but I would rather draw attention to these students as a generation in whose schooling the adults abandoned teaching and learning, instead replacing them with drill for mastery in repeated cycles of testing.

Decades ago, when our twins were in fourth grade, the State of Washington instituted “mandatory” testing. Much like George Bush’s No Child Left Behind 20 years later, our schools were to produce evidence that they were effectively educating the children they had in their care.

That was the point, as it has been ever since. What was being tested was the SCHOOL. Nothing in the testing process was being done for the sake of any given child. As an academic, and a social scientist no less, I was able to smell social science research being done without the informed consent of the subjects. So we told our twins and their teachers that the children would chose whether or not to be tested. One did. The other did not. It was so early in the “testing will solve everything” era that our opt-out approach went by without much challenge. By the time George Bush had had his say our kids were done, college sophomores with their own very different ways of learning shaping two quite distinctive and different adult lives. There is nothing like a pair of fraternal twins for evidence of the intricate interactions of nature and nurture.

In focusing on No Child tests, I don’t want to suggest that teaching and learning were perfect before. Rather I want to say that a system with plenty of weaknesses, decided to address its weaknesses using strategies and tools that made the bad and the mediocre much worse.

When policy makers decided to change the system, children were never consulted. Nor were their parents, although there were parents and children all over the country who knew that their particular schools were not up to par. 2018’s reports of decrepit buildings and faded textbooks in schools, where the students are disproportionately poor, immigrant or African American, demonstrate clearly that No Child has not substantially improved the worst schools in the country.

What it has done is to substantially alter all the ordinary schools. All 20 year-olds in college in 2018 were three years old when Bush and Congress passed the No Child Act. Every year of their school education has been shaped by testing. Children are drilled that success means being able to discern the “best” one

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line answer to a complex question. They are required to abandon long term thinking, and ways to accumulate knowledge from year to year. Society tells them everyone needs identical “basic” knowledge: predefined sets of topics with labels from discretely separate academic disciplines: English, Math and Science. Kids have no obligation to take up history or civic life or justice or art or culture. Nor do they have time for adventurous, self-motivated learning.

How did I experience these changes in college teaching? Early on I and most of my Evergreen colleagues banned personal digital equipment, so intensification of social media was not a factor in class. Faculty colleagues widely agreed so our students routinely came to class with pens and notebooks, just as they had in the old days. We put assignments on the board, spoke them out loud and then posted them on a website.

A critical change showed up in how long any particular piece of work seemed relevant. It used to be that one could lay out a quarter-long syllabus knowing that was learned at the beginning would still largely be there at the end. Not any more. Success depended on explicitly stated links from week to week: “don’t forget that you will need this week 1 material again in week 4 and week 7.” Long time horizons, repeated questioning and a natural desire to see how things connect – all skills perfectly evident still in our small grandchildren whose learning strategies are instinctive, had been chopped up into smaller and smaller pieces by testing routines year after year.

Evergreen State College is also suffering from test-driven education. The words interdisciplinary and coordinated no longer appear in our public materials. Apparently for potential applicants, integrating ones thoughts across complex patterns of reality has very little appeal. What appeals about Evergreen is the individualism we seem to promise: No graduation requirements except a summative essay. Then the individualism bumps up against the realities the curriculum still tries to explore – that everything and everyone is interdependent, that chemistry and biology are not discrete phenomena, that justice cannot be separated from “classroom management.” So retention suffers and the College’s faculty keeps wondering how to make what they do seem more familiar.

Back in the high school world, one venue is seemingly unchanged by testing: sport. The simple world of winner/loser takes budgetary, curricular and social precedence. In early summer, they renew the turf in time for August practice season. Girls are playing soccer, but on a side field, while the boys grab the news headlines and monopolize screen-time on the light-up reader board. Finite Games dominate. For Thurston county as a whole, any given year’s results may well be part of an infinite series of shifting inter-school power. For any given boy on the team, the impact is final. The season is a winner or a loser. He is a State Champion or not. He gets a full scholarship to play at the U. Or not. He will have been told that the game is the epitome of the best in education, but any future as an athlete faces steep odds: 600:1 against any professional football future at all with an average career length that lasts under 4 years.

It is not hard to weep for the child in that ICE cage, but I also grieve for that high school football player. Like so many of his peers he has learned too little in school and has developed too little skill in how to learn. Make immigrants welcome. Inspire great teaching and learning. Both epitomize the joy and complexity of a life fully lived. It is not enough simply to work so our side will win the next electoral Finite Game.

## NONE OF US IS ALONE

In each pamphlet, I try to check out the issues in more than one setting. Concerned as I am now about winner/loser risks and the rise in authoritarian rule, there are far too many options. For my purposes right now, China and Japan serve as valuable “others.” Let me be clear however. I may have a good deal of experience working in Japan but I am no expert in the political traditions on which either place rests. I know more about Japan than about China, but I am raising these examples here not to set down new thinking about those two countries but rather to deepen understanding of the distinctive qualities of our own, US political system.

Just like politics in the USA, leaders in Japan and China keep referring back across the last two centuries. In China the reference point is Chairman Mao, in Japan the Meiji “restoration.” Each represents for their nation the founding of the modern era, just as the creation of the US Constitution here represents repudiation of a colonized past and the opening of our own modern era.

Mao went unchallenged for decades, perhaps partly because he did not represent a complete break with the past. China had had Emperors and was therefore entirely familiar with government in the name of a single, dominant leader. Mao even established his headquarters and home in Zhongnanhai, an enclave literally adjacent to the former Imperial Palace, the Forbidden City.

That the current Chinese leader is reverting to the cult of personality on which Mao rested is no longer in doubt. His sayings, in his version of a “Little Red Book” are being taught in school. He rests a good deal of his power on implying an implacable hostility to one of Mao’s personal enemies – the USA. He controls thinking in China with the same ferocity the Chairman used during the Cultural Revolution. These two police officers aren’t fiddling with their sun glasses for vanity, they are using a Chinese version of Google Glass to conduct digital facial recognition on the people all around them.



Police officers wearing A.I.-powered smart glasses in Linying. Reuters

The China of the Imperial era always allowed petitions to the government from ordinary people. This government too allows protests of a limited and local kind. What it does not do is allow organized opposition or the building of communities of solidarity across entire regions, let alone across the entire country. So the Chinese government blocks all kinds of social media in all sorts of ways. They have 1.4 billion people. Anything that requires lots of human effort, and monitoring social media depends ultimately on people not on algorithms, is easy for Chinese officials to manage.

Will authoritarianism in China thrive? Here my lack of expertise really shows. I rarely make predictions even in areas like war and peace where I might have a claim to be above average in guessing. About China, I cannot possibly guess.

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I can say that where the Chinese government is actively using Google Glass, we ordinary Americans were so intuitively appalled by the idea when it first became a consumer option in 2012 that even private and personal use of the technology never took off. (It is in use now in industrial settings, as an assistive technology for people doing complex work where extra guidance helps.)

Core resistance to tyranny in the USA rests on what others might see as an exaggerated commitment to the right to privacy. Whether exaggerated or not, the commitment is here. Unlike the UK, this is not a land of government controlled cameras on every street corner. If a traffic ticket is to be issued to a car on the basis of a photo, there has to be a physical sign warning drivers that this is so. We require the police to wear body cameras not so that they can monitor us but so that we can monitor them. I am not naive about this. The USA endured the McCarthy “red scare” when everyone wondered who was watching whom, but even then the most serious investigations happened in public, in Congressional hearing rooms. Authoritarianism of the covert Chinese style is not in the American repertoire and I am guessing that it likely never will be. Among the people in this country with whom I am in the deepest disagreement politically are many self-described libertarians, but we would be united in our opposition to police wearing Google Glass to monitor us. The elders in among us are probably even united in our opposition to the website tracking Google and the corporate world uses to send advertising onto our computers.

If Chinese authoritarianism seems unlikely here, what about the Japanese version? Japan actually has two founding stories for its modern state. There was the Meiji period, whose identification with “restoring” the Emperor I always find a bit ironic. Yes, there was an Emperor Meiji and the central government in Tokyo made huge changes in his name. They created a modern constitution and modern government ministries. They created a system of mass public education and mass transport. The country industrialized. And in a frightening echo of Weimar Germany in the 1920s, the political left was overthrown by a militaristic and expansionist right wing.

In fact, Japan’s Emperors have never been politically powerful in the way that British Kings and Queens were. Americans are right to associate George III as one source of their political discontent, but that would not have been true in Japan. In Japan the “restoration,” in 1868, which took place 15 years after the forcible entry of Americans into a trading status with Japan, represented a triumph of an internationalized form of modernization over an isolated, indigenous one. It was the isolationist Tokugawa Shogunate that was overthrown and what was “restored” was a Japan willing to face outward to the world.

Right now, the Japanese government is indubitably curtailing some of democratic freedoms imposed during the US occupation in 1945, including freedom of the press. Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe seems genuinely interested in creating the kind of internationalized global status his militarizing Meiji predecessors yearned for and achieved. Japanese victories back then, against the Chinese 1895 and the Russians 1906 astonished the global powers. But in reality, Japan today has no such capacity even compared to smaller countries like the UK and France. The huge ship in Yokohama harbor may look like an aircraft carrier but it is a helicopter carrier, a sitting duck for any neighboring military like the one in North Korea armed with long range missiles. Their amazing “see through the clouds” weather satellite, which undoubtedly has military as well as forecasting purposes, failed dismally this summer to help Japan either predict or cope with catastrophic rain storms.

## NONE OF US IS ALONE

No. The changes going on in Japan right now seem simultaneously to point toward two contradictory versions of authoritarian rule. Prime Minister Abe might wish to mimic his Meiji predecessors, but the wider population probably continues to back his leadership in part because he seems to offer a return to the Tokugawa era. What was that time? A period of striking prosperity for many. Tokyo then was one of the largest cities in the world, life rich in arts and culture, and it is still known as The Great Peace. Japan may have been isolated but it was managing its own domestic life reasonably well.

After the Americans broke down the wall in 1853, dissatisfactions with isolation spread widely, but not before. So Japan's histories offer little in the way of indigenous commitments to democracy and popular participatory politics. They also offer little in the way of international engagement. Japanese people today do not invite in immigrants, not even the most desperately needy refugees. They are well aware that they face a declining population but few young Japanese I know want to resolve that problem by adding to the complexities of the social mix. The news coverage fretting about a rising resident population of young Chinese in Japan, frets about the presence of less than a million people, who can read many of the characters used in Japanese language, in a population of over approximately 127 million. Also unlike the Japan of the Tokugawa era, Japan today allows those who prefer an internationalized existence to leave.

Will Japan develop a Meiji style authoritarianism? Once again I cannot predict, but if I had to guess, I would say that the most likely version of an undemocratic leadership will be more in the Tokugawa style, closed, quite self-satisfied and interested mostly in its internal affairs. This Japan will be allowing dissenters to leave but, just as it always has, it will not consider any returnee truly Japanese any more.

All this means I don't believe we can look either to Japan or to China to help us understand the risks we here in the USA face as authoritarianism rises in those two places. It is often said that the USA is radically individualist, a claim that is hard to argue with. But it is also radically committed to an individualism that gives huge scope for free choice. If I want to challenge Federal power by taking over an Oregon Wildlife Refuge, I will gather a group of friends and do it. If I want support the salmon, I challenge Federal power by advocating the destruction of Washington State's Elwha dam and power plant. I gather my legal experts and the dam comes down. If I want to see more homeless people with housing I set up a protest tent camp in a city-owned parking lot. Three years later they will have a village of tiny houses. If I want to create a hit musical I will turn that tyrant King George III into a laughing stock, not a stupid clown, but a man clearly out of touch with the times.

America's risk lies in our love of simple slogans: The notion, supported by those dreadful school tests, that EVERY complex idea can be reduced to a one-line answer. The notion that all our health challenges can disappear if only we would exercise in just the right way. The notion that every intricate political choice can be reduced to a simple win/lose proposition. Donald Trump and his 140 characters embody our problem.

To which I respond, also with a one-liner: Checks and Balances. There is nothing simple or win/lose in that phrase. It is, by definition a system of specific win/lose games but each one is played out within a larger framework of many contrasting states and localities.

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## IN REAL LIFE THERE ARE NO INTERMISSIONS

In prior pamphlets, I have devoted a good deal of space to this section – the image (originally from the intermission in the musical Hamilton) that in real life politics just carry on and on. There is never an intermission. And surely that is as true now as it ever has been. Trump has been holding campaign rallies for himself for 2020 ever since his first months in office. Most of the rest of us are focused on the nearer electoral prospect, the mid-terms, with the added fear that a new Supreme Court Justice, going through the confirmation process right now, makes a change in power in the House and Senate particularly urgent. Sure.

Although I am no “constitutional originalist” in the style of the late Antonin Scalia, when writing or reflecting about politics here I do tend to think back to conditions that pertained when the USA came into existence. Schools teach “checks and balances” as though the phrase were used verbatim the Constitution. It is not. Its more formal name, the “separation of powers,” is also not mentioned. However, the powers enumerated in the various Articles are distinctly separated and do create balance, between the three branches of the Federal government – the executive, legislative and judicial – as well as between the State governments and the Federal. Furthermore, every State has its own Constitution in which it spells out for itself vast amounts of power, defining local purposes and structures for managing education, health care, birth/marriage/death, crime, transport, elections, ecology, taxation, even economic development and employment rights.

When the horrifying “balance” struck by the founding fathers between slave and non-slave states tipped into Civil War, secessionist states, fearing that the institution on which their local economies rested was likely to be destroyed for ever, fought to get out of the balancing act completely. And they were right of course. They lost the institution for good because the non-slave states “won.” Slave states may have reinstated most of the powers allocated to white people pretty quickly but legal ownership of another person was gone for ever.

Once again the intricacy and and complexity of our system of governance feels as though it under serious under attack. Special interests and billionaires on the conservative side have been working tirelessly for decades, via judicial appointments, gerrymandered legislative districts and an endless cycle of tax cuts, every element of their plans seemingly directed towards an enduring “Conservative win” outcome. I and others likeminded are intended to be “losers” for decades to come.

So are our fears well grounded, like those of the Southern States in the lead up to the Civil War? Do we risk having progressive agendas gutted forever? Though the fears seem to be as big, the risks I’d say are not. Partly because, though the media and others may love to describe this country in terms of binaries, with rare exceptions like slavery, it never has been a binary place. Susan F. Martin’s *A Nation of Immigrants*, makes a convincing case that even back then the original settlers were divided not into two halves, South/North, but into three major segments: the Moral Purity of New England, the Radical Exploitation of Labor in the Slave States, and the Trade/Merchant orientation of the mid-Atlantic, particularly Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania resonates today too. Though the nation as a whole may focus on the US Supreme Court, the separation of powers in government also depends on State Supreme Courts. The State Supreme Court in Pennsylvania has just used its power to overturn that State Legislature’s

## IN REAL LIFE THERE ARE NO INTERMISSIONS

gerrymandered congressional district inequalities, basing their decision on the Pennsylvania's own State Constitution. Connor Lamb was able to win his Congressional seat on the basis of issues that resonated in SW Pennsylvania. His issues will not be the same as the ones which resonate in the election ahead in the open seat in Washington's 8th, where suburban tech meets mountain life and big agriculture.

Election dynamics everywhere are far more complex than a "right/left" polarity: Mormon/not, rural/urban, immigrant/native, immigrant/settler, men/women, recreational marijuana legal (20% of the population)/alcohol prohibition (10% of the population), large military installations/no military presence, international airline connections/only local air service etc. etc. Every one of these deep differences holds within it the justification for a political system with meaningful checks and balances on any single strand of political power.

For those who find it hard to imagine that anyone still believes in checks and balances let me bring in another of my favorite books, Murray Edelman's *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. Even thirty years ago when his book came out Edelman seemed somewhat despairing: our public life was more like a circus than a forum for deliberating about intricate policy choices. Trump is no doubt making Edelman turn in his grave.

But Edelman was no simple-minded pessimist. He also argued that when citizens hold a consensus opinion about the situation they are living in, they then recognize that themselves to be at a fruitful starting point for change. Oppositions, he said, tend to be static, holding themselves in tension one against the other. It is consensus that can bring new options over the horizon.

Despite all the energies of the Koch brothers, we do have an implied consensus in favor of "checks and balances." A repeating electoral pattern shows that the first mid-term election in a Presidency in recent decades voters have tended to strip the President of whatever Congressional unity he had on coming into office. 2018 may well see the same. Even more important, ever increasing numbers of voters describe themselves as independent. They are the very people who would be most alarmed at the thought that either political party had given itself the power to lock them out of government decisions for the indefinite future.

What am I arguing for here? I think it is an approach to crafting electoral slogans that can appeal across many binaries: I am no electioneering wordsmith but these are the two key ideas:

American politics has always depended on checks and balances, on the separation of powers. It's right there in the original constitution. Keep that tradition vibrant and effective by testing House and Senate majorities.

We sought independence to block the tyranny of George III. Today we still support independent thinking and values, and will block power from being concentrated a single ideology in the President, one Party, one Court.



## WILD GEESE

BY MARY OLIVER

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

## IN REAL LIFE THERE ARE NO INTERMISSIONS — SHADOW VERSION

Despair mine, yours, whoever is in the midst of anguish.

As you know by now, I can write for pages and pages about the hopes inherent in checks and balances, about my faith in Americans' well considered doubts about simple majorities — all those taxes and decisions that only come into effect if a "super-majority" approves. I really do hold the views I espoused with confidence when the world is the other way up.

AND YET when the world is seen from this way up the sensation closest to the surface is despair. Everyone keeps talking about "winning" and "losing" and I cannot see either as real.

Despair that even if elections this fall change the balance of powers in the USA in some small way, the deeper damage already effected by Trumpian and pre-Trumpian politics will not be easy to overturn.

Despair that "employment" here in the USA, so carefully designed and organized to exploit human skills/labor without much regard for the needs of families and children, will march on reverberating to simple minded notions: bottom line and shareholder value.

Despair that the concept "intelligence" has been reduced to structures replicable by computers capable of self-programming and perhaps even self-replication.

Despair that forests burning in California, hillsides washed away by the rains in Japan and islands drowning in Bangladesh signal a "climate" whose troubles will haunt my young grandchildren their entire lives.

Despair that none of us is alone in these difficulties. From this perspective Denmark's Burka law, Israel's Jewish citizenship law, China luring Google into self-censorship, India's sexual violence and the racism that even New Zealand has to acknowledge, together combine to blind me to hope.

I follow Cornel West in this: Optimism is only possible with a willful denial of the data, but hope is a stance, the result of a posture in the world. It should be possible to maintain hope by simple spiritual and mental effort. When despair is foremost, hope weakens.

At my best, even in despair, I can remember that Despair and Empowerment are soulmates. I learned that from Joanna Macy in the midst of the Cold War, while Ronald Reagan was yattering on about "winnable nuclear wars." Denying the despair is what causes paralyzes. Feeling the despair is one part of becoming able to act. Today, this week, these last few minutes, it's been as much as I can do to finish this piece.

Simple logistics argue "get it mailed before we leave for England." Despair says "that's hard." Despair also says "do it. For the women, for the children, for the men and their brothers and the earth."

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## Bio

Helena Meyer-Knapp is a scholar/activist, an immigrant who came to the USA in 1969. Her work centers on peace-making.

She earned a BA in History at Oxford in the UK, and an MA in Communications and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Political Studies in the USA.

Her scholarly work includes Dangerous Peace-Making, a book published in 2003. It covers seven cases in different countries where serious attempts at peace-making were underway. The

book ends with the challenge of post war justice and reconciliation. Dr. Meyer-Knapp also publishes essays on college teaching, on applied ethics, and on the links between national heritage-narratives and personal identity.

She worked steadily as a member of the faculty at the Evergreen State College, (international relations and political studies) from 1984 - 2017. Since 2001 her research projects have taken her regularly to NE Asia, most often to Japan but also to South Korea.

An activist in international affairs, in the 1980s she focused most of her efforts on local and national elections and referenda in support of the Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze. Her college teaching has also centered on public life, encouraging students to gather the materials, the skills and the momentum they need to participate in the community on their own behalf.

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Live pamphlet web-links can be found at [Peacemakerpress.com](http://Peacemakerpress.com)





This Buddha survived Tsunamis in 1334, 1369, and 1498.

# THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

AUGUST 2018

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