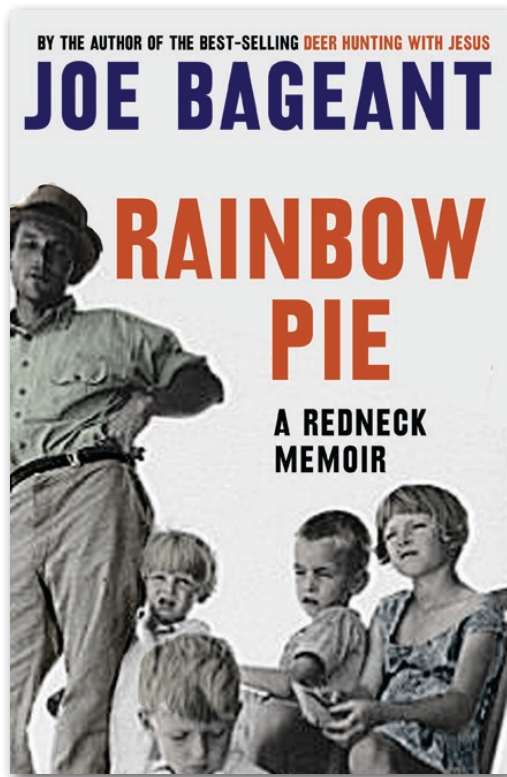


**WALTZING
AT
THE
DOOMSDAY
BALL**

**CAPITALISM
IS DEAD
BUT WE STILL
DANCE WITH
THE CORPSE**

**JOE
BAGEANT**

ColdType



JOE BAGEANT is the author of **Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War**. His newest book, **Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir**, deals with America's permanent white underclass, and how it was intentionally created. To be released in September in Australia and October in the United Kingdom. **Rainbow Pie** is available for preorder from Amazon-UK and Amazon-Canada. In Australia, the book may be pre-ordered at www.scribepublications.com.au

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WALTZING AT THE DOOMSDAY BALL

CAPITALISM IS DEAD BUT WE STILL DANCE WITH THE CORPSE **JOE BAGEANT**

As an Anglo European white guy from a very long line of white guys, I want to thank all the brown, black, yellow and red people for a marvelous three-century joy ride. During the past 300 years of the industrial age, as Europeans, and later as Americans, we have managed to consume infinitely more than we ever produced, thanks to colonialism, crooked deals with despotic potentates and good old gunboats and grapeshot. Yes, we have lived, and still live, extravagant lifestyles far above the rest of you. And so, my sincere thanks to all of you folks around the world working in sweatshops, or living on two bucks a day, even though you sit on vast oil deposits. And to those outside my window here in Mexico this morning, the two guys pruning the retired gringo's hedges with what look like pocket knives, I say, keep up the good work. It's the world's cheap labor guys like you – the black, brown and yellow folks who take it up the shorts – who make capitalism look like it actually works. So keep on humping. Remember: We've got predator drones

After twelve generations of lavish living

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at the expense of the rest of the world, it is understandable that citizens of the so-called developed countries have come to consider it quite normal. In fact, Americans expect it to become plusher in the future, increasingly chocked with techno gadgetry, whiz bang processed foodstuffs, automobiles, entertainments, inordinately large living spaces – forever.

We've had plenty of encouragement, especially in recent times. Before our hyper monetized economy metastasized, things such as housing values went through the sky, and the cost of basics, food etc. went through the basement floor, compared to the rest of the world. The game got so cheap and fast that relative fundamental value went right out the window and hasn't been seen since. For example, it would be very difficult to make Americans understand that a loaf of bread or a dozen eggs have more inherent value than an iPhone. Yet, at ground zero of human species economics, where the only currency is the calorie, that is still true.

Such is the triumph of the money economy that nothing can be valued by

any other measure, despite that nobody knows what money is worth at all these days. This is due in part to the international finance jerk-off, in which the world's governments print truckloads of worthless money, so they can loan it out. The idea here is that incoming repayment in some other, more valuable, currency will cover their own bad paper. In turn, the debtor nations print their own bogus money to repay the loans. So you have institutions loaning money they do not have to institutions unable to repay the loans. All this is based on the bullshit theory that tangible wealth is being created by the world's financial institutions, through interest on the debt. Money making money.

As my friend, physicist and political activist George Salzman writes,

“Everyone in these ‘professional’ institutions dealing in money lives a fundamentally dishonest life. Never mind ‘regulating’ interest rates,” he says. “We must do away with interest, with the very idea of ‘money making money’. We must recognize that what is termed ‘Western Civilization’ is in fact an anti-civilization, a global social structure of death and destruction. However, the charade of ever-increasing debt can be kept up only as long as the public remains ignorant. Once ecological limits have been reached the capitalist political game is up.”

You can see why I love this guy.

Boomers and Doomers and XXL bloomers

Capitalism wouldn't be around today, at least not in its current pathogenic form, if it had not caught a couple of lucky breaks. The first of course, was the expansion of bloodsucking colonialism to give it transfusions of unearned wealth, enabling “investors” to profit by artificial means (death,

“**They simply don't have a fucking clue about what is really happening to them and their world. Everything they have been taught about working, money and “quality of life” constitutes the planet's greatest problem – overshoot**

oppression and slavery). But the biggest break was being driven to stratospheric heights by inordinate quantities of available hydrocarbon energy. Inordinate, but never the less finite. Consequently, the 100-year-long oil suckdown that put industrial countries in the tall cotton, now threatens to take back from subsequent beneficiary generation everything it gave. The Hummers, the golf courses, the big box stores, cruising at 35,000 feet over the Atlantic – everything.

You'd never know that, to look around at Americans or Canadians, who have not the slightest qualms about living in that 3,500 square foot vinyl sided fuck box, if they can manage to make the mortgage nut, or unashamedly buying a quadruple X large Raiders Jersey because, hey, a guy's gotta eat, right? Why don't I deserve a nice ride, a swimming pool and a flat screen? I worked for it (sure you did buddy, your \$12,000 Visa/MasterCard tab is proof of that).

The doomers and the peak oilers gag, and they call it American denial. Personally, I think it is somewhat unfair to say that most Americans and Canadians are in denial. They simply don't have a fucking clue about what is really happening to them and their world. Everything they have been taught about working, money and “quality of life” constitutes the planet's greatest problem – overshoot. Understanding this trashes our most basic assumptions, and requires a complete reversal in contemporary thought and practice about how we live in the world. When was the last time you saw any individual, much less an entire nation, do that?

Compounding our ignorance and naïveté are the officials and experts, politicians, media elites, and especially economists, who interpret the world for us and govern the course of things. The go-to guys. They

WALTZING AT THE DOOMSDAY BALL

don't know either. But they've got the lingo down.

Somehow or other, it all has to do with the economy, which none of us understands, despite round the clock media jabbering on the subject. Somehow it has to do with this great big spring on Wall Street called "the market" that's gotta be kept wound up, and interest rates at something called The Fed, which have got to be kept smunched down. The industry of crystal gazing and hairball rubbing surrounding these entities is called economics.

In heaven, there are no jobs

The following may be old news to some who studied economics in college. However, I did not. And, for me at least, this gets at the heart of our dilemma (if dilemma is the right word for economic, environmental and species collapse). Here goes:

The human economy is made up of three parts: nature, work and money. But since nobody would pay people like Allen Greenspan or Milton Friedman millions of dollars if they talked just like the rest of us, economists and academics refer to these three parts as the primary, secondary and tertiary economies.

Of these, nature – the world's ecosystems and natural capital – is by far the most important. It comprises about three quarters of the total value of economic activity (Richard Costanza et al. 1997). To western world economists, nature – when it is even give nature a thought – is considered to be limitless.

The second part, work, is the labor required to produce goods and services from natural resources. Work creates real value through efficient use of both human and natural resource energy. A potato is just a potato until people sweating over belt lines and giant fryers turn it into Tater Tots.



Capitalists hate any sort of cost. It represents money that has somehow escaped their coffers. So when any behemoth corporation hands out thousands of pink slips on a Friday, Wall Street cheers and "the market" goes up

The third economy, the tertiary economy, is the production and exchange of money. This includes anything that can be exchanged for money, whether it is gold, or mortgages bundled as securities, or derivatives. In short, any paperwork device that can be rigged up in such a fashion that money will stick to it. Feel free to take a wild-assed guess which of the three economies causes the most grief in this world.

To an economist, work – the stuff that eats up at least a third of our earthly lives, is merely a "factor" called labor. Work is considered an unfortunate cost in creating added value. Added value, along with nature's resources, is the basis for all real world profits. Without labor, the money economy could not gin up on-paper wealth in its virtual economy. Somewhere, somebody's gotta do some real-world work, before bankers and investment brokers can go into their offices and pretend to work at "creating and managing wealth."

Paying the workers in society to produce real wealth costs money. Capitalists hate any sort of cost. It represents money that has somehow escaped their coffers. So when any behemoth corporation hands out thousands of pink slips on a Friday, Wall Street cheers and "the market" goes up. No ordinary mortal has ever seen "the market." But traders on the floor of 11 Wall Street, people who've deemed themselves more than mortal by virtue of their \$110 Vanitas silk undershorts, assure us the market does exist. No tours of the New York Stock exchange are permitted, so we have to take their word for it.

In any case, in the money economy, eliminating costs, even if those costs happen to be feeding human beings, citizens of the empire, is sublime. That is why economists in the tertiary economy can declare a "jobless recovery" with a straight face.

By their lights, the perfect recovery would necessarily be 100% jobless. Human costs of generating profit would be entirely eliminated.

Say what you will about the tertiary “money economy,” but one thing is certain. It’s virulent. Right now finance makes up 42% of GDP, and is rising. Traditionally that figure has been around 9%. Fifty eight percent of the economy is “services.” When it comes to the service economy, most people think of fried chicken buckets and “customer service,” call centers harassing debtors or selling credit cards. However, much of the so-called service economy consists of “services” sub-corporations and entities owned and operated by monopolies in communications, electronic access and energy. They are designed for the sole purpose of robbing the people incrementally. Borrow a microscope and read the back side your cable and electric bill. Billing you is a “service” for which you pay. So is the guy who cuts off your lights if you don’t.

And manufacturing? Ten percent. Mostly big ticket items such as salad shooters, as near as I can tell.

What nature?

Still though, the foundation of the world, including our entire economic structure, is nature. This is clear to anyone who has ever, planted a garden, hiked in the woods, gone fishing or been gnawed on by chiggers. *In vis est exordium quod terminus.*

Yet, not one in a thousand economists takes nature into account. Nature has no place in contemporary economics, or the economic policy of today’s industrial nations. Again, like the general American public, these economists are not in denial. They simply don’t know it’s there. Historically, nature has never been considered even momentarily because economists,

“**Last night I watched an economist on CNN say that if the government had let the free market take care of the BP gulf catastrophe, it would not be the clusterfuck it is now. Now THAT might qualify as denial**

like the public, never figured they would run out of it. With the Gulf oil “spill” at full throttle, the terrible destruction of nature is becoming obvious. But no economist who values his or her career wants to start figuring the cost of ecocide into pricing analysis. For god sake man, it’s a cost!

With industrial society chewing the ass out of Mama Nature for three centuries, something had to give, and it has. Capitalists, however, remain unimpressed by global warming, or melting polar ice caps, or Southwestern desert armadillos showing up in Canada, or hurricanes getting bigger and more numerous every year. They are impressed by the potential dough in the so-called green economy. In fact, last night I watched an economist on CNN say that if the government had let the free market take care of the BP gulf catastrophe, it would not be the clusterfuck it is now. Now THAT might qualify as denial. In the mean time, anthropogenic ecocide and resource depletion, coupled with the pressures of six billion mouths and asses across the globe, have started to produce – surprise surprise, Sheriff Taylor! – very real effects on world economies. (How could they not?) So far though, in the simplistic see-spot-run American mind, it’s all about dead pelicans and oiled up hotel beaches.

Monkey with the paper

When the U.S., and then the world’s money economy started to crumble, the first thing capitalist economists could think of to do was to monkey with the paper. That’s all they knew how to do. It was unthinkable that the tertiary virtual economy, that great backroom fraud of debt manipulation and fiat money, might have finally reached the limits of the material earth to support. That the money economy’s gaming of workers and Mother Nature might itself might be

WALTZING AT THE DOOMSDAY BALL

the problem never occurred to the world's economic movers and shakers. It still hasn't. (Except for Chavez, Morales, Castro and Lula). Jobs disappeared, homes went to foreclosure, and personal debt was at staggering all time highs. America's working folks were taking it square in the face. Not that economists or financial kingpins cared much one way or the other. In the capitalist financial world, everything is an opportunity. Cancer? Build cancer hospital chains. Pollution? Sell pollution credits. The country gone bankrupt?

"Nothing to do," cried the mad hatters of finance, "but print more money, and give gobs of cash to the banks! Yes, yes, yes! Borrow astronomical amounts of the stuff and bribe every fat cat financial corporation up and down The Street!" All of which came down to creating more debt for the common people to work off. They seem willing enough to do it too – if only they had jobs.

Along with the EU, Japan and the rest of the industrial world, the US continues to flood the market with cheap credit. That would be hunky dory, if was actually wealth for anybody but a banker. The real problems are debt and fraud, and tripling the debt in order to cover up the fraud. And pretending there no natural costs of our actions, that we do not have to rob the natural world to crank up the money world through debt.

No matter what economists tell us about getting the credit industry moving again, papering over debt with more debt will not pollinate our food crops when the last honeybee is dead. I suggest that we put the economists out there in the fields, hand-pollinating crops like they do in China. They seem to know all about the subject, and have placed a monetary value of \$12 billion on the pollination accomplished by bees in the US. Can you imagine the



Anyway, if we cannot use the economists for pollinators (odds are they are too damned whacked to do that job), we could also stuff them down the blowhole of the Deepwater Horizon spill. For the first time in history, economists would be visibly useful

fucking arrogance? All bees do is make our fruit and vegetable supply possible. Anyway, if we cannot use the economists for pollinators (odds are they are too damned whacked to do that job), we could also stuff them down the blowhole of the Deepwater Horizon spill. For the first time in history, economists would be visibly useful.

Speaking of China: Since there is no way to pick up the turd of American capitalism by the clean end, much less polish it, American economists have pointed east, and set up a yow-yow about China as "the emerging giant." The "next global industrial superpower." Many Chinese are willing to ride their bicycles 10 miles to work through poisonous yellow-green air, and others in the "emerging middle class" are willing to wade into debt up to their nipples; this is offered as evidence of the viability of industrial capitalism. All it proves is that governments and economists never learn. In the quest of getting something for nothing, China follows the previous fools right into the industrial smog and off the cliff.

Sumthin' fer nuthin'

The main feature of capitalism is the seductive assertion that you can get something for nothing in this world. That you can manufacture wealth through money manipulation, and that it is OK to steal and hold captive the people's medium of exchange, then charge them out the ass for access. That you can do so with a clear conscience. Which you can, if you are the kind of sleazy prick who has inherited or stolen enough wealth to get into the game.

Even so, to keep a rigged game going, you must keep the suckers believing they can, and eventually will, benefit from the game. Also, that it is the only game in town. Legitimizing public theft means indoctri-

nating the public with all sorts of market mystique and hocus-pocus. They must be convinced there is such a thing as an “investment” for the average schmuck drawing a paycheck (and there is, sort of, between the crashes and the bubbles). It requires a unified economic rationale for government and industry policies, and it is the economist’s job to pump out this rationale. Historically, they have seldom hesitated to get down on their knees and do so.

It ain’t robbery, it’s a business cycle

Capitalism is about one thing: aggregating the surplus productive value of the public for private interests. As we have said, it is about creating state sanctioned “investments” for the workers who produce the real wealth. Things like home “ownership” and mortgages, or stock investments and funds to absorb their retirement savings. That crushing 30-year mortgage with two refis is an investment. So is that 401K melting like a snowcone the beach.

As the people’s wealth accumulates, it is steadily siphoned off by government and elite private forces. From time to time, it is openly plundered for their benefit by way of various bubbles, depressions or recessions and other forms of theft passed off as unavoidable acts of nature/god. These periodic raids and draw downs of the people’s wealth are attributed to “business cycles.” Past periodic raids and thefts are heralded as being proof of the rationale. “See folks, it comes and goes, so it’s a cycle!” Economic raids and busts become “market adjustments.” Public blackmail and plundering through bailouts become a “necessary rescue packages.” Giveaways



When the public staggers to its feet again and manages to carry more debt, buy more poker chips on credit to play again, it’s called a recovery. They are back in the game

to corporations under the guise of public works and creating employment become “stimulus.” The chief responsibility of economists is to name things in accordance with government and corporate interests. The function of the public is to acquire debt and maintain “consumer confidence.” When the public staggers to its feet again and manages to carry more debt, buy more poker chips on credit to play again, it’s called a recovery. They are back in the game.

Dealer, hit me with two more cards,. I feel lucky.

Does it hurt yet?

To anyone who is paying attention, things look doomed. Fortunately for American capitalism, nobody is paying attention. They never have. Even given the unemployment numbers, foreclosures and bankruptcies, most Americans are still not feeling enough pain yet to demand change. Not that they will. Demand change, I mean. We haven’t the slightest idea of any other options, outside those provided by the corporate managed state. So in a chorus well-schooled by the media the public demands “reform,” of the present system, the systemic pathogenic system based on exploitation of the many by the few, the one presently eating our society from the inside out. How do you reform that?

We are clueless, and the state sees to it that we stay that way. Take the price of gas, about which Americans are obsessive. In one way or another, petroleum is the subject of much news coverage, nearly as much as pissing matches between egomaniacs in Hollywood or o Capitol Hill. So one might think that by now Americans would have a realistic grasp of the petroleum business and things like

WALTZING AT THE DOOMSDAY BALL

oil and gasoline prices.

Hah, think again! This is America, this is Strawberry Fields, where nothing is real and the skies are not cloudy all day. We're stewed in a consumer hallucination called the American Dream and riding a digital virtual money economy nobody can even prove exists.

Is there an economy out there or not?

If we decide to believe the money economy still exists, and that debt is indeed wealth, then we damned sure know where to go looking for the wealth. Globally, forty percent of it is in the paws of the wealthiest one percent. Nearly all of that one percent are connected to the largest and richest corporations. Just before the economy blew out, these elites held slightly less than \$80 trillion. After the blowout/bailout, their combined investment wealth was estimated at a little over \$83 trillion. To give some idea, this is four years of the gross output of all the human beings on earth. It is only logical that these elites say the only way to revive the economy, which to them consists entirely of the money economy, out is to continue to borrow money from them.

However, the unasked question still hangs in the air: Does the money economy even exist anymore? Is it still there? (was it ever?) Or are we all blindly going through the motions because:

A: we do not understand that, for all practical historical purposes, it's over;

B: we do not know how to do anything else so we keep dancing with the corpse of the hyper-capitalist economy;

C: the right calamity has not come down the pike to knock us loose from the spell of the dance,

or D: we're so friggin brain dead, com-



Personally, I believe we are participating in a modern extension of the feudal system, with bankers as the new feudal barons and credit demographics as their turf. But then, I drink and take drug

modities engorged and internally colonized by capitalist industrialism that nobody cares, and therefore it no longer matters.

This is multiple choice, and it counts ten points toward survival, come the collapse.

If there is no economy left, what the hell are we all participating in? A mirage? The zombie ball? The short answer is: Because the economy is a belief system, you are participating in whatever you believe you are. Personally, I believe we are participating in a modern extension of the feudal system, with bankers as the new feudal barons and credit demographics as their turf. But then, I drink and take drugs. Whatever it is, the money economy is the only game in town until the collapse, after which chickens and firewood may become the national currency. The Masai use cattle don't they?

At the same time, even dumb people are starting to feel an undefined fear in their bones. When I was back in the States last month, an old high school chum, a sluggard who seldom has forward thought beyond the next beer and Lotto scratch ticket, confides in me:

"Joey, I can't shake the feeling that something big and awful is going to happen. And by awful I mean awful."

"Happen to what?"

"Money, work, our country. Shit, I dunno."

"Probably all three," I opined. "Plus the environment."

"Cheerful fuck, ain't ya?"

"That's what they pay me for, Bubba."

Some in the herd are starting to feel a big chill in the air, the first winds of the approaching storm. Yes, something is happening, and you don't know what it is, dooooo yew, Mistah Jones?

However, the most adept economists

and other court sorcerers are going along as if nothing too unusual is happening – calling it a recession, or more recently a double-dip recession (don't you love these turd-balls, making it sound as harmless as an ice cream cone – gimme a double dip please!) or even a depression. But no matter what it is, they smugly assure us, there is nothing happening that the world has never seen before. Including the insider scams that ignited the catastrophe. It's just a matter of size. Extent.

OK, it's a matter of scale. Like the Gulf oil spill. We've seen spills before, just not this big. But over the next couple of years as the poison crud circulates the world's oceans, the Deep Horizon spill will prove to be a global game changer, whether economists and court wizards acknowledge it or don't. Anything of global scale, whether it is in finance, energy, foreign aid, world health or war contracting, is accompanied by unimaginable complexity. That makes it perfect cover for criminal activity. Particularly finance, where you are always close to the money.

Jim Kunstler, never at a loss to describe a ludicrous situation, sums up the paper economy's engineering of our collapse nicely:

“Wall Street – in particular the biggest ‘banks’ – packaged up and sold enough swindles to unwind 2500 years of western civilization. You simply cannot imagine the amount of bad financial paper out there right now in every vault and portfolio on the planet ... the people fabricating things like synthetic collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) had no idea what the fuck they were doing – besides deliberately creating documents that nobody would ever understand, that would never be unraveled by teams of law clerks ... and were guaranteed to



What does a good capitalist do after having stolen all there is to steal from the living, then stolen the nation's future wealth from the unborn through debt both public and private?

place in jeopardy every operation of the world economy above the barter level.”

Phew!

So, for \$5,000 and an all expense paid trip to Rio: What does a good capitalist do after having stolen all there is to steal from the living, then stolen the nation's future wealth from the unborn through debt both public and private?

Tick tock, tick tock. The wheel spins.

Blaaaaaamp!

“Your answer please.”

“A good capitalist would “invest” his haul in some other racket, some other scam in the money economy.”

“Vanna, a pie in the kisser for this guy, please.”

The problem with the answer is that economy is now toxed out. Radioactive. Crawling with paper vermin and all manner of vermin, especially toxic derivatives – about \$1.4 quadrillion worth (even as we are still trying to get used to hearing the term trillions), according to the Bank of National Settlements. That is 1,000 trillion, or \$190 for every human being on the planet. There is not now, and never will be, enough wealth to cover that puppy – because there is not enough natural world under the puppy to create it. Not the way capitalism creates wealth.

Defenders of capitalism who say it can and must be saved must also admit that there is not enough money left to work with, to invest. There is only debt. Oh, yeah, we forgot; debt is wealth to a banker. Well then, all we gotta do is collect \$190 per head from people in Sudan and Haiti and the rest of the planet.

Naw, that's too hard. Elite capital's best bet is a good old fashioned money raid on the serfs; create another bubble that will buy enough time before it pops to make the already rich a few billion richer. To that end, the G-8 is blowing

WALTZING AT THE DOOMSDAY BALL

one last bounder out there in the hyperspace where the economy is alleged to be surviving. Naturally, they are doing it in order to “save the world economy.” The tough part is figuring out what to base the next bubble on.

May I suggest Soylent Green?

Under God, with fees and compound interest for all

From the outset, capitalism was always about the theft of the people’s sustenance. It was bound to lead to the ultimate theft – the final looting of the source of their sustenance – nature. Now that capitalism has eaten its own seed corn, the show is just about over, with the nastiest scenes yet to play out around water, carbon energy (or anything that expends energy), soil and oxygen. For the near future however, it will continue to play out around money.

As the economy slowly implodes, money will become more volatile stuff than it already is. The value and availability of money is sure to fluctuate wildly. Most



Now that capitalism has eaten its own seed corn, the show is just about over, with the nastiest scenes yet to play out around water, carbon energy (or anything that expends energy), soil and oxygen

people don’t have the luxury of escaping the money economy, so they will be held hostage and milked hard again by the same people who just drained them in the bailouts. As usual, the government will be right there to see that everybody plays by the rules. Those who have always benefited by capitalism’s rules will benefit more. That cadre of “money professionals” which holds captive the nation’s money supply, and runs things according to the rules of money, can never lose money. It writes the rules. And rewrites them when it suits the money elite’s interests. Capitalism, the Christian god, democracy, the Constitution.

It’s all one ball of wax, one set of rules in the American national psyche. Thus, the money masters behind the curtain will write The New Rules, the new tablets of supreme law, and call them Reform. There will be rejoicing that “the will of the people” has once again moved upon the land, and that the democracy’s scripture has once again been delivered by the unseen hand of God.

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