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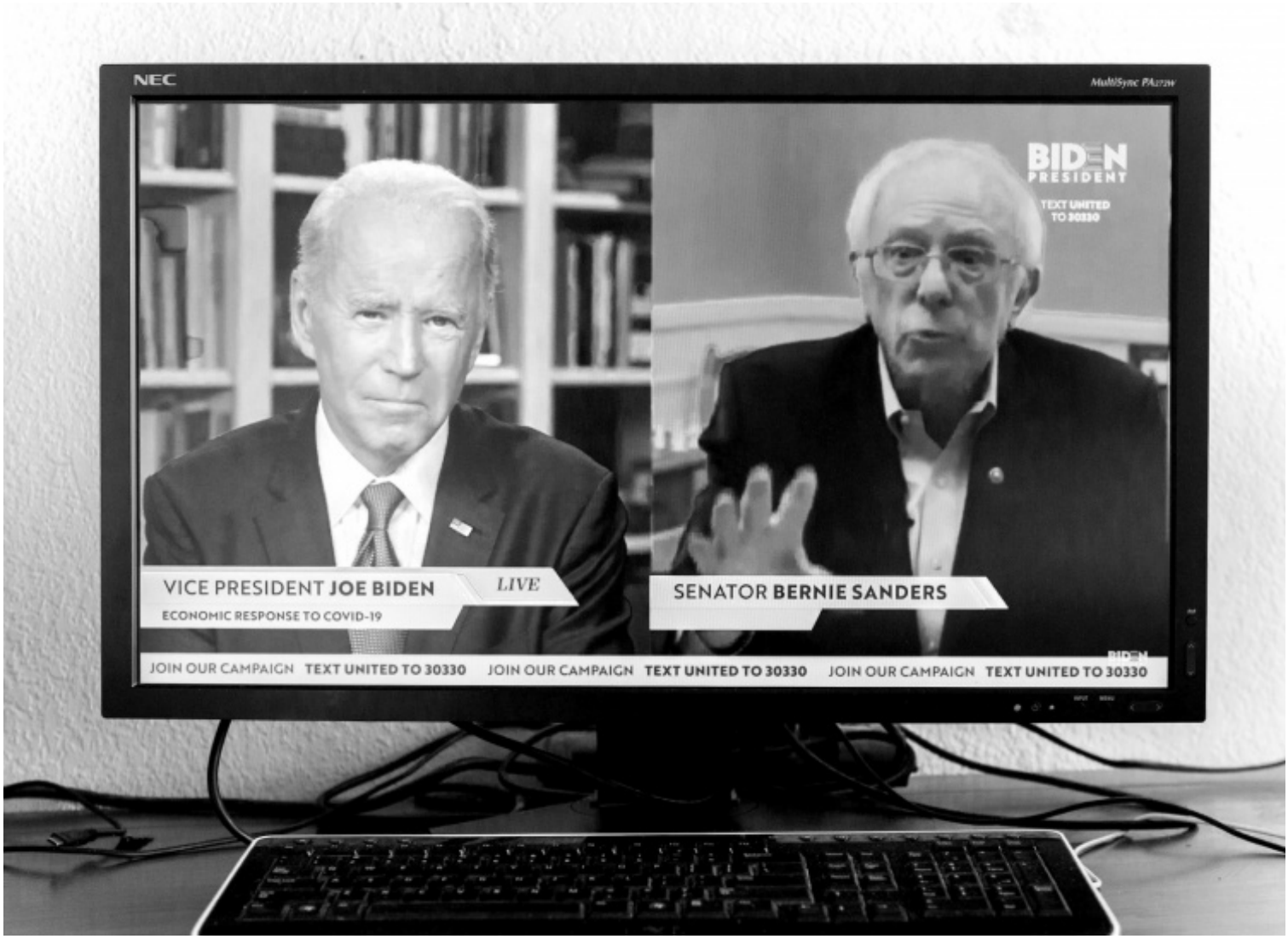

Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders discuss the economic response to COVID-19 and the November election, April 13, 2020. (ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo)

This is the autumn of our disbelief. How can the U.S. president, and sizable portions of the American citizenry, continue to deny the deadly seriousness of a pandemic that has cost more than 160,000 American lives? How can anyone any longer dispute the clear evidence of global climate change? How can the president ignore the consequences of the deepest and quickest economic collapse in U.S. history, consequences particularly catastrophic for the most vulnerable Americans? How can he send federal troops into American cities, against the wishes of governors and mayors, to fight a non-existent crime wave? How can he, for the first time in U.S. history, cast doubt on the legitimacy of this year's election? How can a president who openly foments division and lies multiple times, every day, continue to enjoy the support of 40 percent of the U.S. electorate—including, according to a recent poll, 46

percent of Catholics? How can economic and social inequality in the United States, already worse than at any point in American history since the end of slavery, be allowed to keep growing? How can sexual predators continue to escape justice? How can police officers still get away with murder? When, if ever, will Black Lives Matter?

As we approach one of the most consequential elections in U.S. history, we should be thinking less about the outrages of the daily news and more about the underlying dynamics that have shaped recent U.S. political and economic history. Two books published earlier this year help us do just that. Both E. J. Dionne's *Code Red: How Progressives and Moderates Can Unite to Save Our Country* [1] (St. Martin's Press, $27.99, 272 pp.) and Robert Reich's *The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It* [2] (Knopf, $24, 224 pp.), telegraph their arguments in their subtitles. Dionne, one of America's best known political commentators and a longtime contributor to *Commonweal*, is well known to readers of this magazine. Reich, an equally prolific writer, former secretary of labor under Bill Clinton, and unsuccessful candidate for governor of Massachusetts in 2002, is also familiar to most Americans on the left side of the political spectrum. Dionne and Reich agree that the most urgent issues facing Americans in 2020 are economic justice, racism, sexism, and a political system that fails to reflect popular preferences. Many arguments in their most recent books are congruent. But there is one fundamental difference, and it matters.

First, how did we get here? What are the sources of today's deepening partisan divide, which prompts people to respond to disagreements over politics with anger or even hatred? Political affiliations are no longer considered signs of personal preference. Instead they obstruct friendships, fracture neighborhoods, and splinter parishes. How did it happen?

From a historian's perspective, deep disagreements over politics are as old as the nation itself. Although most Americans encounter James Madison's "Federalist No. 10" at some point in their education, few take to heart its central message. Madison argued in the spring of 1787 and throughout the ratification process that all polities in recorded history have divided along multiple fault lines. It is never simply rich versus poor or, as Marx predicted for the era to come, capital versus labor. Instead Madison argued that factions had formed, and would continue to form, around multiple affiliations. Different religious beliefs were a recurring source of enmity. So was geography. So was property, but in several different ways. Farmers' interests did not align with those of artisans; manufacturers had different interests from merchants. Lenders wanted a fixed money supply; debtors wanted a faster flow of currency. Finally, some people would always show irrational loyalties to particular leaders. All those fissures surfaced almost immediately after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. They intensified with the fracture caused by the French Revolution, which divided erstwhile allies such as Thomas Jefferson, who welcomed the upheaval, from those who sided with Britain, including the formerly red-hot revolutionary John Adams. Decades later, antislavery and pro-education reformers loyal to Adams's son John Quincy reviled the slaveholding Indian fighter elected president as the head of what his critics denounced as "the Jackson Party." Old Hickory's partisans returned fire.

In recent decades we have witnessed Americans dividing along all those lines, over religion, geography, economic interests, and polarizing party leaders. Madison's analysis makes much better sense of contemporary American politics than the temptation to distinguish between rich and poor, a reductionist impulse that leads commentators to wonder why benighted voters back candidates against their economic self-interest. As Madison understood, there is so much more to politics than that. Yet Madison also observed that elected officials, although chosen to search for "the good of the whole," nevertheless tend to side with one or another faction and to champion its interest rather than pursuing "justice and the public good," which he called "the great goal" of government. We have also watched that drama play out in Washington D.C. for decades, with the result that finding common ground now

seems all but impossible and partisanship all but inevitable.

Unyielding opposition to every step in the direction of social democracy is now more than a century old.

Such polarization is hardly a recent phenomenon. Fisticuffs and brawling on the floor of Congress were not unheard of in the early nineteenth century. As conflicts over slavery boiled over across the nation, so did violence in the nation's capitol. Rather than resolving disputes between the sections, the Civil War and the end of slavery merely shifted the tools used to preserve white male supremacy throughout the nation. Both parties shared only the conviction that efforts to root out racism were doomed to failure. After the contested election of 1876, Republicans in Congress agreed to remove troops from the South in exchange for the White House, and Republicans continued to dominate national politics for the next five decades. Populists' efforts to loosen the grip of Northern and Midwestern industrialists and white Democratic "redeemers" in the South foundered on their inability to forge alliances with white laborers or Black sharecroppers. When William Jennings Bryan railed against the bankers whose policies kept impoverished farmers and workers in debt, he failed to rally a majority of voters against the first Republican presidential candidate to use the American flag as his party's symbol. William McKinley's successful campaign against Bryan in 1896 can be seen as the opening salvo in culture wars that have persisted ever since.

Many Americans know Bryan not as the electrifying boy orator of the Platte, a brawler fighting for the people against the interests, but instead as the champion of fundamentalist Protestants at the 1925 Scopes Trial, a crucial skirmish in our never-ending battle between the past and the future. The 1920s were decisive because they marked the end of the Progressive Era, the last time in U.S. history when both major parties briefly committed themselves to using the government to combat economic inequality. Both the presidencies of Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson brought to fruition reform initiatives that blossomed in states and cities in the 1890s, giving the United States its first regulatory agencies, its national-park system, its first social-welfare laws, the minimum wage, women's suffrage, and the measure that best encapsulated the logic of the reformers' overall agenda, the progressive income tax.

Unsurprisingly, both Dionne and Reich point to the progressives' achievements to illustrate what can be done when majorities form around steps previously dismissed as socialist or un-American. Although progressives failed to achieve many of the more expansive goals set by some reformers, including universal health care and desegregation, and they have been pilloried in recent decades for their failures, they brought about as much positive change as any generation that preceded them. Their gospel was proclaimed by Louis Brandeis in a sentence Reich quotes in his closing chapter: "We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

After World War I, Americans turned away from progressives' reform crusades, which their critics claimed had reached their apex in the overreach that was Prohibition. The nation celebrated "normalcy" by going on a binge that ended only with the stock market crash of 1929. The Great Depression stood as the deepest, sharpest contraction of the U.S. economy ever—at least until this year. In part because Franklin Roosevelt ran in 1932 on the sacred principle of a balanced budget, Walter Lippmann was correct to say that, in retrospect, both candidates were giving each other's speeches. There were only a few indications of the New Deal to come, and most measures enacted during FDR's presidency failed to satisfy aging progressives and his many critics on the Left. In his 2013 book *Fear Itself* [3], Ira Katznelson showed how Southern Democrats' commitment to uphold segregation at all costs limited the reach of reform. Even the most celebrated measure of all, Social Security, excluded those doing agricultural and household labor, not coincidentally the kinds of work done by most African Americans.

FDR announced the most radical program of his presidency, his Second Bill of Rights, in his 1944 State of the Union Address, and he was reelected that year on the proposals laid out in that speech. He called for a raft of measures as ambitious as any enacted anywhere in Northern Europe in the postwar years. “Security,” he proclaimed, meant a living wage and guaranteed rights to a job, housing, education, health care, and, in old age, a stable income. That plan now seems so unrealistic that historians tend to dismiss its significance, or doubt that FDR thought it possible. I have never understood why he would have announced his intentions so boldly—and run successfully for re-election on this plan for an American version of social democracy—if he did not mean what he said.

While historians today might doubt whether FDR really expected his Second Bill of Rights to be enacted, his critics in both parties certainly took him seriously. Both Dionne and Reich focus attention on the steps taken by the Republican Party as it has moved further and further to the right in the last three decades, but the origin of party leaders’ opposition to social democracy must be traced back to both parties’ misgivings about the New Deal. Democrats are right to dismiss as hyperbole Republicans’ repeated claims that Obamacare is socialism, yet unyielding opposition to every step in the direction of social democracy is now more than a century old. Ever since the idea of universal health care was first proposed during the Progressive Era, conservatives have derided such measures as socialist or, in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, communist. How many Americans know there was bipartisan support for universal health care in the years leading up to World War I? Even the American Medical Association endorsed it. But lobbying by the insurance industry, state medical associations, and the American Federation of Labor, which thought that it would threaten benefits unions had secured for their members, combined to kill the idea. Although the public has rallied, after the fact, in support of every step taken in the direction of universal benefits, including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and now the Affordable Care Act, trench warfare waged against each step has been intense and prolonged. Deploying strategies that date from the 1890s, many Republicans have proved as unwilling to concede defeat as those still waving Confederate flags today.

Republicans have moved 150 percent to the right in recent decades, while Democrats have moved only 33 percent further left.

The years from the mid-1940s through the mid-1970s are now often romanticized. Although we have no term as widely accepted for these three decades as the French phrase *les trentes glorieuses*, political commentators often look back to the first two postwar decades as years of relative calm, even consensus. Beneath the surface, however, two powerful waves were building, and we live with their effects. The roots of the cultural upheavals of the 1960s lay in the Black freedom struggle, second-wave feminism, and the countercultural poets, writers, and artists of the 1950s, a little-known story beautifully told by Casey Nelson Blake, Daniel H. Borus, and Howard Brick in *At the Center: American Thought and Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Although often seen simply as an interregnum, the ’50s did not only mark the familiar story of how America became the world’s leading power and congratulated itself for preserving democracy and stability in the face of Hitler’s fascism and Stalin’s communism. At the same time, critics on the Left were revealing the exclusions and suppressions that made possible the appearance of consensus. In the next decade, those pressures exploded into open rebellion.

The origins of the New Right can be traced to the same decade, and that is the wave that has submerged social democracy for the past forty years. Wendy Wall’s superb study *Inventing the American Way* [4] shows in detail the struggle between Left and Right to capture the postwar era. Against the efforts of insurgents and organized labor, groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers succeeded in yoking Americanism to free enterprise, and

defining “rights” not as FDR did in 1944 but instead as the rights of citizens (especially businessmen) to be protected from government. As Angus Burgin made clear in *The Great Persuasion*, conservative economists on both sides of the Atlantic were mobilizing to reestablish the gospel of laissez-faire. In the wake of wartime activist governments and the threat represented by triumphant social-democratic governments emerging across Europe, followers of Friedrich Hayek such as Frank Knight at the University of Chicago worked to spread their brand of neoclassical economics. When the murders at Kent State and the chaos that followed prompted the reaction that David Paul Kuhn recounts in *The Hardhat Riot: Nixon, New York City, and the Dawn of the White Working-Class Revolution* [5], both the Left and the Right had formed battle lines that have endured into the present.

A washed-up actor and television pitchman seized the moment. Speaking four years earlier, in support of Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential bid, Ronald Reagan marshaled conservatives’ simmering anger. His speech “A Time for Choosing” linked opposition to two threats to American freedom, Communism abroad and progressive initiatives at home. It also catapulted Reagan into national prominence. Reagan is now remembered, by both his fans and his critics, as the leading spokesman for Republicans’ crusade against government, the California governor who launched the war against taxes, the president who launched the war against unions, the man who gave us phrases such as “welfare queen” and “government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem.” Yet as Dionne observes, compared with the rhetoric and the policies currently popular among Republicans, Reagan was a moderate. Dionne points to research showing that Republicans have moved 150 percent to the right in recent decades, while Democrats have moved only 33 percent further left. Why?

Evidence now points toward Newt Gingrich. A new book by Julian Zelizer, *Burning Down the House* [6], shows how Gingrich transformed American politics from the comparatively mild partisan fights of the 1980s into the inferno of hyperbolic charges and counter charges it has become. Years before the 1994 Contract for America cemented Republicans’ commitment to strategies of denunciation and recalcitrance, Gingrich honed his rhetorical knives by bringing down the deal-making Democratic Speaker of the House, Texan Jim Wright. Gingrich adopted the anti-corruption mantras of the post-Watergate years but rejected the norms of civility that had prevailed even during the investigation of the Nixon White House. Savvy about exploiting the emerging media landscape, skilled at character assassination, and shameless at self-promotion, Gingrich became the face of a new no-holds-barred politics. The seeds sown in the battles over the Clinton presidency, fertilized by the president’s own sleazy behavior, have blossomed into the bright lies now broadcast daily by Fox News, the alt-right, and President Donald Trump.

To their credit, both Dionne and Reich have seen it coming. In Dionne’s first book, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, he showed how both parties had veered away from the center, where most Americans located themselves, by fashioning a politics of false choices. Ever since the Democratic Party adopted new nominating procedures, designed to wrest power from insiders (correctly) deemed racist and sexist, and selected George McGovern to run against Richard Nixon in 1972, Democrats have moved away from the New Deal and concentrated increasingly on the previously ignored issues of gender, race, and ethnicity. That focus, long overdue, antagonized large segments of the previously Democratic electorate. At the same time, Republicans capitalized on appeals to law and order, free enterprise, family, and tradition that often masked darker biases propping up white male supremacy. As the parties moved away from problem solving and toward gestural politics, people inclined toward a politics of both/and rather than either/or found themselves marginalized from battles between the partisans at both ends of the political spectrum. Americans longed, as Dionne argued in his 2012 book *Our Divided Political Heart*, for both freedom and community, for self-reliance and generosity toward their struggling fellow citizens. Although elements of both parties’ programs resonated with most Americans, the strident appeals to the left and right poles of opinion meant that a majority felt unsatisfied with the

choices being offered.

Clinton's presidency played an outsize role in putting us in the mess we're in now. Trying to recapture a majority by "triangulating," or moving toward the center, Clinton capitulated to Republicans on crucial issues. Having failed to achieve universal health care for many reasons, including both substantive overreach and strategic blunders, Clinton raced to the right. It should not have been such a surprise. He had campaigned to "end welfare as we know it," and he crowed that "the era of big government is over." He agreed with Wall Street bankers about the need to deregulate the financial sector, which made possible the fancy new financial instruments, such as debt swaps and derivatives, that paved the way to the devastating collapse of 2008. His crime bill fueled the school-to-prison pipeline that has become one of the nation's most serious problems. His secretary of labor during his first term, Robert Reich, who had known Clinton since they were together at Oxford, chafed under his boss's retreat from the social-democratic principles and policies that Reich thought they shared. Reich had laid out his position in a string of widely read books and articles making the case for economic and social equality. In his angry and entertaining book, *Locked in the Cabinet*, Reich explained why he had withdrawn from the Clinton administration and issued a stinging indictment of Democrats' appeasement of Gingrich's now-never-satisfied Republicans. As indebted to big money as the Republicans, Democrats were no longer the party of the common man and woman. They had become the party of technocrats.

In several recent books, including *Saving Capitalism* and *The Common Good*, Reich has sounded chords that harmonize with some of the themes in Dionne's work. Both of them call on both parties to attend to the genuine problems facing the 90 percent of Americans who have been running in place for four decades. Both insist that the economy is now run by, and for the benefit of, the other 10 percent, and neither party has shown a willingness to address that central fact of twenty-first-century American life. Invoking tired nostrums rather than undertaking reforms consistent with the longstanding American commitment to equality as well as freedom, and commitment to the common good or the "general welfare" clause of the Constitution rather than the self-interest of the wealthy, both parties have abandoned the people and adopted a politics of sloganeering instead of problem-solving. Their strategies play well with their party bases, but they never challenge the power of those in control.

What is to be done? This is where Reich's *The System* diverges from Dionne's *Code Red*. Reich presents considerable evidence sustaining the case he and others have been making for years now. Since the 1970s, when new economic theories displaced Keynesianism, champions of the so-called "free market" have claimed that regulation strangles innovation, taxes stifle initiative, and only by giving corporations free rein over their decision-making can America retain its position as the world's most powerful economy. This new orthodoxy justified breaking unions, resisting environmental controls, and outsourcing manufacturing, all in service to the mantra of maximizing "shareholder value" instead of the previous commitment to "stakeholder value." Reich shows that CEOs in the 1950s were concerned with the well-being of their workers and communities, and content with incomes a mere twenty times those of the average workers in their firms. Today CEOs earn more than three hundred times as much as their typical workers, and the portion of the nation's wealth gobbled up by financial services has expanded from 2.5 to 8.3 percent. Reich singles out Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, for especially sharp criticism because he, and other members of the Business Roundtable, now claim to be committed to greater equality. But those words, Reich contends, ring hollow because CEOs have done nothing to put their pious claims into action.

Stampeding inequality did not begin recently. The ideological shift underlying it started in the 1970s. That's when Michael Jensen and William Meckling offered an influential new "theory of the firm" that justified concentrating on shareholder rather than stakeholder value. In his book *The Great Risk Shift*,

Jacob Hacker also showed the influence of an article on “moral hazard” by Mark Pauly and studies on the overarching need for “efficiency” by economists such as Martin Feldstein, who became an important member of Reagan’s Council of Economic Advisers. Armed with these new ideas, Republicans began arguing on a new basis for some of the same policies that conservatives had embraced since the 1920s. Now “personal responsibility” justified retrenchment of government, because welfare programs were said to offer incentives to laziness and economic regulations to hamstring individualism and entrepreneurship. Charles Murray and George Gilder popularized this new orthodoxy. In Murray’s words, “Any social transfer increases the net value of being in the condition that prompted the transfer.” So the government should stop its handouts. Businesses should become “lean.”

Any enterprise that failed to follow the new rules was vulnerable to corporate raiders like Carl Icahn, who used junk bonds to finance taking over companies and ripping them apart, workers and their communities be damned. The 1970s saw only 13 hostile takeovers; in the 1980s there were 150. Entrepreneurs and corporate executives could now be said to be contributing to the common good by enlarging their corporations’ wealth—and their own. “The easiest way to lift share value,” Reich writes, was “to hold down wages, roll back regulations, find ever-cheaper places around the world to produce products and services, fight unions, and secure giant tax cuts that result in less money for education, health care, and everything else most Americans need.” The Reagan administration smiled on the takeovers, which were characterized as necessary exercises in “cutting the fat.”

After Jensen had moved from the University of Rochester to Harvard Business School in 1984, he contended that the mushrooming takeovers disciplined “inefficient firms” that paid their workers too much and paid too much attention to their current locations. Opportunities for cost-cutting lay elsewhere. As Reich puts it, more value could be “extracted” from firms by “streamlining their operations, by which Jensen meant cutting payrolls and abandoning communities for new ones.” That added value, Reich points out, has gone to those at the top, while income and wealth have been subtracted from everyone else.

In the mid-1950s, more than a third of all private-sector workers in the United States were unionized. In 2020, just over 6 percent are. Today a higher portion of national income goes into profits, and a smaller portion into wages, than at any time since World War II. Americans have developed several coping strategies, Reich argues, to deal with the shrinking slices of the pie they have been offered since the 1970s. A majority of women, including those with young children, have left home to work primarily in the service sector rather than in higher-paid professions, in part because the lack of affordable top-quality childcare makes them want flexible hours. Workers overall are spending more time at work, especially compared with workers in other nations, and they increasingly work more than one job to make ends meet. Finally, household debt has exploded: the typical American household now owes almost 150 percent of its after-tax annual income.

Reich characterizes our current condition as oligarchy, and he argues that it rests, as oligarchies always have, on a legitimating myth. Earlier forms depended on fictions such as the divine right of kings. Ours rests on the fictions of market fundamentalism and meritocracy. Libertarian justifications for the dog-eat-dog economy, characterized as inescapable due to the pressures of globalization, are merely the latest in a long line of efforts, as John Kenneth Galbraith put it, to find “a superior moral justification for selfishness.” Americans with resources can now buy not only goods and services but also opportunities for their offspring, thereby facilitating the inheritance of wealth on a scale unknown since progressives enacted the estate tax in 1916. Yet thanks to the fiction of meritocracy, such advantages can be stylized as “merit” rather than privilege. How do oligarchs maintain their status in a democracy? They manufacture enemies, Reich concludes, and then stoke xenophobia and racism to distract the masses from the real source of their problems. Those to blame are not the perceived “line cutters” that Trump voters told Arlie Russell Hochschild had turned their animosities against minorities

and immigrants. They are the oligarchs.

One of the most effective ways to blunt arguments for the inevitability of market fundamentalism and claims that automation and globalization are to blame for workers' woes is to compare the United States to European nations. There unions and workers' wages remain strong, in part because workers are represented on corporate boards. There they can push back against outsourcing and secure retraining programs when jobs disappear. There programs of social provision are so thoroughly entrenched that parties on the right have been forced to adopt them as their own, abandoning anti-social-democratic positions in favor of xenophobic and racist appeals to protect "our people" from "outsiders." There corporations remain competitive on a global scale, and national economies are as robust as any despite the considerably larger share of income that goes to taxes that fund universal social programs. Nations such as Germany, Sweden, and Denmark are American conservatives' nightmare because they demonstrate that prosperity can be widely shared. The gap between the top 1 percent and the bottom 20 percent need not be so great. CEOs and hedge-fund managers need not receive such lavish pay to remain productive or creative. Generous, universal provision of education, health care, job training, housing, old-age pensions, and the other benefits envisioned in FDR's Second Bill of Rights need not prevent corporations from being so successful that they attract investors from other nations, including, increasingly, the United States.

Reich's prescription for change is straightforward: "Forget left versus right. It's democracy or oligarchy. The most powerful force in American politics today is anti-establishment fury at a rigged system. There are no longer moderates. There's no longer a center. There's either authoritarian populism (Trump) or democratic populism (represented in 2016 by Bernie's 'political revolution')." A loyal member of Bernie's insurgency and an adviser to his campaign, Reich contends that mainstream Democrats have sold out to Wall Street. For that reason neither Clinton nor Obama accomplished much (except Clinton's Earned Income Tax Credit and Obama's Affordable Care Act), even though both enjoyed majorities in the House and Senate during their first two years. Centrist Democrats' reliance on big money also explains Trump's victory. He succeeded in persuading millions of disaffected Americans, Reich argues, that he was an outsider, as fed up with a corrupt system as they were. Hillary Clinton, by contrast, was seen by many as the embodiment of the power structure that so many Americans either distrust or hate, for very good reasons.

After having painted such a grim picture, Reich concludes with a surprisingly upbeat final chapter, "Why Democracy Will Prevail." If we can reactivate the movements that brought about change, from the progressives and New Dealers through the Civil Rights movement and the successful campaign for LGBTQ rights, then we the people can retake control from the oligarchy. To do so, though, we will need a new party, a third party free from Wall Street's domination. We will also need a widespread return to sustained civic engagement, as Reich has been arguing for years. Readers persuaded by the first thirteen chapters of *The System*, and who know that Joe Biden and and Kamala Harris, not Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, will do battle with Donald Trump in November, might be mystified by Reich's apparent hopefulness that democracy, against all odds and facing an all-powerful oligarchy, can indeed prevail. For such readers, Dionne's *Code Red* presents an alternative worth considering.

Polls indicate that public opinion has shifted left on many issues, from universal health care and LGBTQ rights to climate change and gun control. Yet that shift has not moved the legislative needle.

Dionne contends, in stark contrast to Reich, that in this "Code Red moment," when nothing matters more than defeating Trump, holding the House, and retaking the Senate, "moderates" of the "center-left" must unite with "progressives" drawn toward Sanders or Warren. They are natural allies who agree

on “freedom, fairness, and the future.” Although longtime Dionne readers will find his equanimity familiar, this book is no rehash of his earlier work. Instead he harvests much recent social-science research and political analysis in support of his thesis: if Democrats want to win this year, they simply cannot afford the divisiveness and infighting that marked the 2016 campaign. He offers the 2018 election as evidence that moderates and progressives can and should unite. Together they provided a powerful rebuke to Trump and the Republican Party, reversing the results of many of the elections two years earlier and bringing to Congress new voices, new energy, and new ideas.

But Democrats must avoid litmus tests. Although they share goals, they should concede the legitimacy of disagreements about means. All Democrats agree on the need for “economic justice.” They share commitments to affordable health care; better wages, benefits, and schools; affordable colleges and better training programs; universal access to the vote; a stable social security program; and safety from gun violence. They should also agree that a problem-solving approach to governance is preferable to noisy proclamations of principle that antagonize many Americans while having no chance of being translated into legislation. Moderates are right about the complexity of issues. Progressives are right that moderates caved in too much to Reaganomics in the 1980s and 1990s. While moderates must beware, as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, of “the tranquilizing drug of gradualism,” progressives must avoid the “unseemly moralism that feeds political superiority complexes” and accept instead the wise counsel of one of Dionne’s heroes, Reinhold Niebuhr: “seek the truth in our opponent’s error, and the error in our own truth.”

Strategic considerations alone should alert progressives to the challenges facing Democrats. Voters’ self-descriptions are sobering. Only 27 percent of voters call themselves liberal, while 36 percent describe themselves as conservative, and 37 percent as moderate. Although that 27 percent is double what it was when Clinton was elected in 1992, turning one quarter into more than one half is a precondition for accomplishing anything in Washington. That will require both persuasion and mobilization on the scale of 2018, when turnout was exceptionally high for a midterm election and suburbs as well as cities voted for Democrats. The media spotlight has illuminated fresh faces such as that of progressive Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, but moderates such as Ohio’s Sherrod Brown and Michigan’s Gretchen Whitmer share the goals of “the Squad” despite pundits’ efforts to draw lines between them. If Democrats want to establish a durable majority in Congress and in the electorate, they must bring together Sanders’s voters with Biden’s. The alternative is four more years enduring the unhinged rants, misguided policies, and impulsive executive orders of an incompetent aspiring autocrat, a no-longer-comical clown who has so thoroughly blurred the distinction between facts and fake news that he seems unable to recognize the difference.

Democrats can peel moderates away from the Republican Party precisely because Republicans have veered so far to the right. The party’s roots, Dionne reminds readers, extend back to the Radical Republicans who wanted to snuff out the embers of slavery during Reconstruction. They failed, yet their forward-looking wing created over one hundred universities through the Morrill Act, gave farmers land through the Homestead Act, and inaugurated conservation through the national-park system. Plenty of mid-twentieth century Republicans made peace with the achievements of the New Deal. Dwight Eisenhower, for example, wrote in exasperation to his brother Edgar in 1954, “the federal government cannot avoid or escape responsibilities which the mass of the people firmly believe should be undertaken by it.” That was why Ike insisted on moderation. If a political party tried “to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history.” He admitted that “a tiny splinter group,” including H. L. Hunt and “a few other Texas oil millionaires,” believed they could rewind the clock to the 1920s. But, Ike assured his brother, “Their number is negligible and they are stupid.” Eisenhower himself expanded federal funding for science education and gave the nation its last large-scale infrastructure project, the

interstate highway system.

Beginning with the 1964 Goldwater campaign, however, the Republican Party moved steadily toward the views that Ike dismissed as stupid. Some Republicans in Congress continued to work with Democrats, and many signed on to the signature achievements of Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, as well as war on poverty programs. But the party's center of gravity was shifting. As president, Reagan enacted as much of the program laid out in his 1964 speeches as he could. He cemented the alliance, or "fusion," between market fundamentalists and Evangelical Christians—between God and mammon—that post–World War II Republicans had sought but failed to achieve. Gingrich, whom Dionne accurately describes as "the most partisan Speaker of the postwar period," led the Republicans to the obdurate obstructionism that has been their approach to Democratic initiatives ever since. It is just that recalcitrance, Dionne argues, that makes Republicans vulnerable in 2020. No one could have predicted the nightmare of COVID-19, but the willingness of Trump, his favorite Fox News commentators, and so many Republican officials to downplay the seriousness of the virus and temporize on the steps necessary to contain it has eroded support for Republican candidates across the nation.

Is Sanders's so-called "democratic socialism" the best way for Democrats to seize the opportunity they have been given in 2020? Dionne points to striking generational differences in understandings of and attitudes toward "socialism." Younger Americans take the term to mean, essentially, the social democracy of Northern Europe, a regulated market economy with generous social provision. Whereas many older Americans still associate the word "socialism" with nationalizing the means of production and hear echoes of Stalin, the rising generation thinks of Denmark. Yet this is not merely a question of semantics. Disagreements persist. The influential editor of *Jacobin* Bhaskar Sunkara concedes that Sanders is nothing but a social democrat, but Sunkara continues to envision that merely as a "way station on the path to socialism." From Dionne's perspective, and my own, it makes more sense to acknowledge that the "line between social democracy and progressive forms of capitalism is thin to the point of vanishing." What we need now is social democracy or, to use the phrase preferred by venerable champions of the Left such as Robert Kuttner, founding editor the *American Prospect*, and Michael Kazin, the longtime editor of *Dissent*, "moral capitalism."

If the multiple crises of our day give Democrats an opening, they also present dangers. Despite moderates' and progressives' agreement on goals, multiple paths lead toward economic and racial justice, arresting or at least slowing climate change, and diminishing sexism and homophobia. Dionne asks readers to consider several of the divisive issues in the primary campaigns. He points out that the world contains many forms of universal health care, all of which should be assessed and considered before we adopt Medicare for All as the only solution. The Green New Deal likewise offers many ideas worth considering, but it is premature to assume that it contains the answer, especially when researchers are uncovering so many new dimensions of the problem and others are experimenting with a wide range of possible solutions.

Finally, the idea that free college for everyone is the solution to the problem of rising tuition—and rising debt—ignores other ways of thinking about the problem. Many university systems in the world charge little or no tuition for those inclined toward, and qualified for, higher education, and they also offer a wide range of alternatives to college. Americans should remember that, prior to the tax revolts of the 1970s that set off the persistent mania for cutting taxes, state legislatures directed more funds to public universities, which charged fees low enough that interested students could attend school without incurring much, if any, debt. Dionne points toward Elizabeth Warren's "mid-course correction" on health care as an illustration of the sensibility Democrats need, a willingness to hold positions provisionally

and yield to the force of the better argument.

Moderates often bristle at what they deride as “identity politics”; many progressives believe issues of identity must be at the forefront of Democrats’ concerns. In response to both groups, Dionne offers political theorist Nancy Fraser’s dual emphasis on “recognition” and “redistribution.” Long-suffering groups such as women, African Americans, Latinos, the LGBTQ community, and other underrepresented minorities should continue to insist on recognition. Those focused on economic justice should continue to insist on greater equality of wealth and income. Neither recognition nor redistribution alone is adequate. Moderates must awaken from the amnesia that prevents them from remembering that none of these groups chose the status assigned to them by the most powerful forces in American history.

Channeling the political scientist Rogers Smith, Dionne quotes Stacey Abrams:“the marginalized did not create identity politics: their identities have been forced on them by dominant groups, and politics is the most effective method of revolt.” Effectively marshaling one of his signature arguments to conclude his treatment of this vexed issue, Dionne calls for “solidarity across the lines of our division” and “empathy toward those unlike us.”

In international affairs, Dionne endorses what he calls an “inclusive patriotism” and “progressive realism.” Liberals have been too quick to praise the virtues of cosmopolitanism and too slow to acknowledge the costs of free trade and international cooperation for American citizens, particularly those left out by the economic transformations of recent decades. He quotes Jill Lepore: “To confuse nationalism with patriotism is to mistake contempt for love and fear for valor.” Americans on the Left have blundered by rejecting patriotism. Opposition to the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq has too easily bled into a denial that Americans have legitimate national interests. Americans on the Left as well as the Right have plenty of reasons to love their nation and feel pride in their flag, even when—or perhaps especially when—they choose to focus attention on the nation’s persistent shortcomings.

In sum, Dionne’s analysis points toward the productive steps moderate and progressive Democrats can take together to regain control of the political center of gravity. Polls indicate that public opinion has shifted left on many issues, from universal health care and LGBTQ rights to climate change and gun control. Yet that shift has not moved the legislative needle. We remain stuck with a status quo that offers lavish rewards to those at the top and treats the consequences for everyone else as collateral damage. Reich portrays corporate America as a monolith and dismisses as naive the possibility that it might ever change. Yet his own evidence makes clear that a half-century ago there were CEOs who felt responsibility toward their workers and their communities. Dionne, by contrast, sees reasons for hope. The Business Roundtable has endorsed a shift from the interests of shareholders back to the more encompassing interests of stakeholders. It has endorsed the principle of environmental sustainability. Jennifer Harris of the Hewlett Foundation has urged CEOs to alter their perspective and embrace responsibility for their American workers. Talk is cheap, but even that sort of talk is a welcome change. If the prospects for democratic change in the United States depend on an alliance between the moderate left and progressives, a change that requires reapplying what Dionne calls the “civic glue” that holds us together, is it reasonable to expect such a change—or a renewed commitment to the civic engagement that Reich insists is necessary—unless businesses as well as religious communities also step forward to demand it? Max Weber was right that politics is the slow boring of hard boards. That project goes better when we see our neighbors as potential allies instead of enemies in waiting. The persistent inclination of so many on the Left to form what Dionne appropriately calls “circular firing squads” has limited reformers’ success again and again in the past century. Will we let it happen again?

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