

## The Roots of the Problem

Rita and John Sommers-Flanagan

Problems, like trees, have roots. As Alfred Adler (and many others) would have said, problems are multi-determined, meaning: There's always more than one root. Most of us agree that the United States has big problems. But what are the roots of our troubles?

One side insists that the roots of our troubles include unworthy and illegal immigrants, burdening the rich with taxes, satanic trans folk, welfare fakers, and bleeding hearts. The media picks up this messaging, repeating these highly questionable theories until they sink into our psyches as if they were true.

**But we are being played.**

As they said back in the Watergate era, **follow the money.**

The rare transgender athlete is not to blame for your low wages or the price of food and shelter. Tending to the disabled and disadvantaged is not breaking the bank. Social Security makes us a strong, compassionate society—providing for all of us as we age. Social Security isn't going broke. It's being dismantled and privatized so the wealthy benefit.

We're chopping off our noses to spite our faces. USAID greatly contributed to the health of the poor, the planet, and developing societies trying to recover, survive, and grow. NPR and PBS cost about \$1.50 per person per year. Although their coverage has been leaning right, they work toward being objective, balanced, and accurate. A free press is at the heart of democracy.

Hiding the contributions of people of color from American history involves rewriting reality. What might be the purpose of excluding honorable actions and voices of diverse individuals and groups from our history? There's an African proverb: "Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter." Preserving real history doesn't make us less safe. Massive salaries, bonuses, and advantages given to those mismanaging and/or dismantling our social and financial safety nets is a real danger.

Billionaires have lied so well for so long that many Americans blame poor people and the middle class for government waste and fraud. As everyone admits, government waste and fraud exist, and there are effective strategies for minimizing waste and fraud. One billionaire strategy is this: Get the American people to blame each other for their financial woes. Then, through their tax loopholes, billionaires walk right into the henhouse and steal the country's eggs.

Most billionaires don't become billionaires because of their compassion and generosity. They're billionaires because of miners, farmers, mill workers, steelmakers, refinery workers, teachers,

servers, nurses, doctors, social workers, inventors, and small businesspeople: THESE are the people who make becoming a billionaire possible.

Balanced budgets are possible. Giving billionaires MORE money will not balance the budget. Taxing them more will. A graduated income tax is not the same thing as socialism. Anyone who tells you that taxing the rich and providing a social safety net is socialism or communism either (a) wants YOUR money, (b) is lying, or (c) is ignorant.

Socialism is a political and economic theory advocating that the means of production, distribution of goods, and trade/exchange be owned by the collective. Taxing the wealthy in a proportionate manner is not the same as having the collective or the government take over ownership of their businesses. In a capitalist system, taxes and government regulation function to reduce power imbalance, abuse of the poor by the wealthy, and the development of social safety nets and public health systems that benefit the whole.

The ugly fights we're in now were started purposefully and fueled by lies, phony moral outrage, purchased bots and paid "news" outlets. We've been duped into "culture wars." As if a gay marriage is why you aren't paid fairly. As if God needs guns to defend holiness. As if basic health care for everyone will cost more than our broken system. As if we cannot share bathrooms. We share bathrooms all the time in our homes, while camping, at outdoor sporting events (think porta potties). Our economic and social problems are NOT ABOUT BATHROOMS.

We would say "wake up," but the billionaires have cleverly stolen that concept. They want us asleep. They want us less educated, less compassionate, and more frightened.

Those in power twist science, scripture, economics, virtue, common sense, and the idea of community. But they can't take your soul; they can't eliminate your deep awareness of right and wrong. Only you can do that.

Ask yourselves:

- If climate change caused by humans is wrong, why not clean things up anyway? Powerful people can say "drill baby drill" and it sounds aggressively American, but really, who's pro-pollution? Denying climate change will cost us our planet.
- All religions, including Christianity, advocate for taking care of the poor. Yes, it costs a few shekels. But do we want the alternative? Shall we harden our hearts and let others suffer and die?
- If you believe YOU should have control over your own body and your own sexual decisions, maybe YOU can let others own their bodies and make their own choices as well?

- Science is not a simplistic fact-finding mission. Science is a disciplined process of inquiry. Scientific knowledge has saved millions of lives. Funding science is about progress and having a higher quality of living. Superstition, politicizing, and irrational attacks on science is regressive, ignorant, and dangerous.
- Do you think the Creator expects YOU to force your version of morality onto others? Should you enforce *thou shalt not kill* with weapons? Aren't you busy enough just finding the time and resources to love your neighbor? Care for the poor? Offer your coat to anyone who needs it? It takes a lifetime to remove the log in your eye, so you can see well enough to help someone with a splinter? Isn't God, by definition, omnipotent? We should all stop confusing our will, our interests, and our greed, with God's will.
- We need the rule of law. When people in power disregard and disparage the courts, they're not acting for the common good. If we lose the rule of law, we'll be ruled by outlaws.

Over our long history, humans have been conned, cheated, manipulated, and enslaved many times by the rich, powerful, and depraved. Trusting billionaires and others who are energized by the pursuit of power, greed, and revenge does not end well.