

# The U.S. Is in a Major Upheaval: Trump-eting Tight, the American Right.

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*The United States is in a major upheaval. Trump's cabinet shake-up moves the country into an alarming direction. From the nomination of torturer **Gina Haspel** as the head of the Central Intelligence Agency to **Mike Pompeo**, former CIA Director and a vocal opponent of the nuclear deal with Iran as new secretary of state, his selection exposes the White House's dangerous kill instincts.*

An ultimatum came with the president's appointment of **John Bolton**, the former American ambassador to the United Nations as his 3<sup>rd</sup> national security advisor. Bolton, who served in the George W. Bush administration is notorious for his hawkishness, with a great zeal for military action against Iran and North Korea. This rearranging of the deck chairs in the sinking empire signals the great calamity of foreign policy ahead with potential threats of war.

In this seeming free-fall toward despotism, what can ordinary people do?

Tackling corruption of our political system and averting a doomed future requires us to truly understand the problems we are facing. The crisis of representation didn't just arise with Trump, the new commander in chief. A glimpse of it was shown during the 2008 financial meltdown, which was covered up swiftly by bank bailouts and politics of 'hope and change'. The truth is that seeds for dystopia have been inside this country all along. The roots of the issues that are now emerging in Trump's America go back to the very beginning of this nation.

In its modern formation, the United States inspired the world with its torch of liberty and equality. At the same time, this beacon of light had its darkness within. From the onset, America contained internal contradictions manifested as the founder's hypocrisy and the violation of its own ideals with genocide of natives, slavery of blacks and suppression of women. The Founding Fathers of the United States brought a victory of rejecting the power of the King's monarchy and pioneered a path for one's own self-determination. The concept of "a government of laws, not of men" was groundbreaking at that time. Yet without reconciling its own shadow, this nation of law failed to fully shield the republic from the tyranny of the Old World.

## **Supremacy of (t)reason**

The unredeemed darkness found in America's troubled past was a force inside Western civilization that tries to define history, subjugating other perspectives to its single vision. Europe, with its ethos of separation and objectivity set out to conquer the world, spreading

its influence across many continents. This domineering power of reason found its new front of exploration in the New World.

America, driven by the monotheistic goal of Manifest Destiny, expanded its territory with brutality. It swallowed what is edible, assimilating immigrants one by one to its conception of what is civil, while spitting out those that it considered impalatable, relegating them into three-fifths of a person or exterminating them from the earth altogether as savages.

This maddened head centricity was manifested in the structure of a new government. **Sheldon Wolin**, author of *Democracy Inc* noted how the framers of the Constitution created a so-called managed democracy, a system that favored elite rule and that “the American political system was not born a democracy, but born with a bias against democracy” (2008, p. 228).

The intellectual elites regarded the democratic majority rule as an irrational force and they feared the tyranny of popular majorities. While the faculty of reason positioned itself as a supreme force, a potential to account its autocratic power was found inside America.

### **The sovereign power of *We the People***

Expressed in the preamble of the Constitution “We the People” was faith in the wisdom of ordinary people to govern themselves. This was an intention to shift from the model of government that acts as authority of their lives to one that places power in the hands of ordinary people. In this government established under the rule of the people, the source of legitimacy was not derived from a god or king, but was meant to come from people themselves.

This arrangement of governance was not granted from above. It was first demanded by those who opposed the ratification of the 1787 Constitution that lacked the guarantee of individual liberties. The proponents of the Bill of Rights articulated essential parts of the sovereign power of We the People as a freedom of expression; freedom of speech, religion, assembly and the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. By building upon First Amendment rights, further efforts emerged from below. From abolitionists’ defiance and the women’s suffrage movement to civil rights and free speech movements, people’s determination for individual autonomy persisted.

Assault on this power of ordinary people intensified with the rise of corporate power in the ‘60s. Manifest Destiny is now carried out with Nike’s slogan of “just do it”. With limited liability and having no human beings in charge, the abstraction of the head inside transnational corporations took flight from the communal ground, plundering their way into the globe, without ever having to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Giant corporations became a sponsor for this managed democracy, gaining control over media to manipulate public perception, keeping American voters in hostage with the lesser of the two evils charade politics.

### **WikiLeaks, the rise of cryptographic direct action**

In the political winter of the post-911 war on terror, as fear and apathy spread around the globe, a new civic force surfaced online. The waves of whistleblowers began shedding light on the collaborative secrecy of elites that deceive and manipulate the public behind a façade of democracy.



WikiLeaks, with its motto of “privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful”, opened a floodgate of a free flow of information. This world’s first global Fourth Estate embodies the philosophy of cypherpunks– a loosely tied group of online privacy advocates who saw the potential of cryptography to shift the balance of power between individuals and the state. With the idea that cryptography is the “ultimate form of non-violent direct action” (2012, p. 5), WikiLeaks founder and editor in chief **Julian Assange** built the system of scientific journalism that would give everyday people around the world tools to combat military might and confront the madness of fallen reason that censors free speech.

The invention of the anonymous drop box was truly revolutionary. It enabled anyone to send information securely without a trace of his or her identity. Through the robust decentralized infrastructure built around this game changing technology, WikiLeaks was able to provide unprecedented source protection in the history of journalism. Here, the organization that derived its source of inspiration in American founding ideas, freed the First Amendment that had been captured through a corporate monopoly and co-optation of the media, making it available to people all around the world.

It is through WikiLeaks’ adamant commitment to the principle of free press that former U.S. Army intelligence analyst and whistleblower **Chelsea Manning** was able to exercise uncompromising free speech and engage in the American tradition of civil disobedience. Manning, whom the late attorney and President Emeritus of the Center for Constitutional Rights, **Michael Ratner** described as the “conscience of our nation”, let the American public see the US imperialism in action in the Middle East.

In her request for a presidential pardon, Manning stated her commitment to the ideal of America, saying how she was willing to pay the price if it would make this country be “truly conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all women and men are created equal.” Through her non-violent cryptographic direct action, she helped America find its conscience.

One individual’s act of courage brought another. Inspired by Manning, **Edward Snowden** came forward to inform people about the NSA’s mass surveillance. In one of the addresses he made, Snowden also described his act as a public service and connected it with Dr. King’s non-violent civil disobedience. Through his whistleblowing, the former NSA contractor defended individual privacy as fundamental civil rights for all people and tried to preserve the world where people can share creativity, love and friendship freely without every conversation and interaction being monitored and recorded.

## **Whistleblowers and their faith in ordinary people**

From WikiLeaks disruptions to Snowden revelations, courageous act of truth-tellers renewed the faith in the wisdom of ordinary people to govern themselves. Both Manning and Snowden believed in the public's right to know and held a view that when people are informed, they can make changes and determine their own destiny.



Edward Snowden

Faith is different than mere belief. It is not about one blindly trusting or passively accepting something. Faith is an active will that requires one to choose out of themselves to believe in something. When established media and trusted institutions failed, Manning chose to put her trust in the journalistic organization that was little known at that time. When the government's internal mechanisms of accountability were broken, combined with the betrayal of Obama's campaign promises and his war on whistleblowers, Snowden turned to American journalists whom he could trust by his own judgment of the integrity of their work. They placed faith not in political leaders or authority but in fellow men and women.

It is to this faith in the ability for the wise and knowledgeable public to govern themselves that fearless journalism responded. WikiLeaks, the publisher of last resort kept its promise to the source by publishing full archives with maximum political impact and bringing information back to the historical record. By doing so, it has become an enemy of the most powerful government in the world, being subjected to legal and extra-legal pressure. Through honoring Snowden's wishes, journalists **Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras** and **Barton Gellman** broke the story of NSA surveillance and led the Guardian's independent journalism, making the established media fulfill its duty. In the aftermath of Snowden's disclosures, when this young whistleblower was stranded in Hong Kong, WikiLeaks demonstrated its extraordinary source protection with journalist **Sarah Harrison** risking her own liberty to help Snowden attain asylum.

With this faith given by peers, citizens around the world who have been distrusted by their own governments and made powerless began to claim their own power. By recognizing that someone believed in them and sacrificed their lives so that they can be free, they were able to believe in their own ability to protect those they love and preserve rights that they cherish. The will to respond to this faith in one another made it possible for ordinary people to carry out extraordinary acts.

### **Bitcoin, Innovation without Permission**

Contagious courage lit by people's faith created a fellowship that can withstand the state violence. It began to shift the balance of power, replacing the source of legitimacy from trusted institutions to ordinary people's trust in one another. As the network of resistance grew, new attacks emerged. Following the release of U.S. diplomatic cables in 2010,

WikiLeaks faced the unlawful financial blockade imposed by Bank of America, VISA, MasterCard, PayPal and Western Union. When this economic sanction starved the whistleblowing site, destroying 95% of their revenue, the flow of autonomy that helped the organization circumvent economic censorship came from fellow cypherpunks.

Bitcoin, as a peer-to-peer electronic cash was the holy grail of cypherpunks. With its defining feature of censorship resistance and permissionlessness, Bitcoin makes free speech an app that can be distributed across borders and used by anyone regardless of nationality, religion, race, gender or economic status. Here, imagination from computer science redeemed the reason that lost its connection to the heart, by synthesizing bits of isolated knowledge that had created separation and injustice, transforming them into a higher order of unification.

Networks of equal peers emerging around this invention opened up a new avenue of dissent in a form of decentralization. **Adam Back**, notable cryptographer whose work was cited in the Bitcoin white paper, described cypherpunks as “a state of mind” and explained its philosophy of “writing code” as a “proactive approach to societal change by doing: building and deploying tech - rather than by lobbying politicians or asking permission.”

This path toward decentralization was first taken by the creator of this technology. The anonymity of Satoshi Nakamoto represents the power of ordinary people. Through an act of publishing the white paper under a pseudonymous name and making the protocol open source, the mysterious author gave up ownership and simultaneously gave users control of the software, making it possible for each individual to use it as a tool to govern themselves.

What is enshrined in a piece of mathematics is wisdom of ordinary people that understands that man is corruptible, as well as perfectible and recognizes the security holes inherent in the existing model of governance that requires trust in third parties. It is the wisdom of history that teaches us how the best way to secure the system is not to have levers of control in the first place through which power concentrates, leading to despotism. With a consensus algorithm placed as a foundation, laws can be built that is more immune to man’s fallen nature. With this, idea of a government of laws, not of men can be truly realized. Governance of We the People now becomes possible, where rules of law are validated by consensus of ordinary people as opposed to elected officials having power over them.



**Andreas Antonopoulos**, a technologist and one of the respected figures in Bitcoin, in his talk titled “Courage to Innovate”, captured new enthusiasm and passion ignited around this technology in a phrase “innovation without permission” and connected it with civil disobedience. He reminded the audience how “almost every important innovation in history starts out being illegal or unregulated” and interesting technology started out with people

who forgot to ask permission. Describing technology's core invention as a platform to scale trust, Antonopoulos described how this is a system that makes it possible for people to make social decisions without hierarchy, whether it is government bureaucracy, corporations or any other institution. This system Antonopoulos characterized as "rules without rulers" is being built by people around the world without central coordination.

### **Claiming our revolutionary spirit**

Our Founding Fathers, no matter how imperfect they were, brought us ideas conceived in a revolutionary spirit. The genius of the Constitution is that it makes fundamental laws and principles of government amendable. The highest law of the land preserved space for people to not accept authority imposed on them and even to revolt against it when it is necessary, by giving ordinary people means to change rules. America indeed was founded on rebelliousness and distrust of their own government, demonstrated in the Declaration that reads

"whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive... it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and institute a new Government..."

The government brought by our forebears not only allowed dissent, but depended on our rebellion. The realization of the Constitution as the fulfillment of ideals in the Declaration required individuals with a strong and independent mind. It demanded people to develop moral courage to defend these ideals against special interests of single groups or nations and any adversarial forces that try to deny them.

From the civil rights movement to whistleblowers at the frontier of digital liberation, we have seen the awakening of revolutionary spirit in people's courageous civic action upholding the ideals of this country. The networks from below expands, converging together to build a new global civil society. Bitcoin developers around the world put their knowledge and skills together, making improvement proposals and fixing bugs, striving to meet the demands of all users.

Innovation without permission is enlivening entrepreneurship. Instead of waiting for problems to be solved by politicians or corporate CEOs, working class began to have faith in their ability to make changes, finding strength and resources within themselves. Around this currency, a new economy is now being bootstrapped, with startups and new businesses hiring people and providing them with skills and knowledge, while many other industries are stagnating.

Solutions to the crisis of representation are within us. Ordinary people, through freely associating with one another, can now give birth to the rule of a real democracy, securing Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness for all.

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