

**Make Americans Great Again  
Embracing the New Global Reality**

**By**

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Some of you may recall hearing a local news story a few months about a white Gonzaga student who wore a red MAGA cap to class. His professor, an African American man, was understandably disturbed by the display, calling it an “undeniable symbol of white supremacy.” MAGA, as you know, is the acronym for Donald Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again,” which many have translated to mean, “Make America White Again.” Given the number of white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis that have emerged from the shadows and taken to our streets since his election, I’d say there’s good reason for the professor’s assertion.

Still, I don’t believe, having encountered many of them, that everyone who voted for and continues to support Trump did and do so because they are white supremacists. Just a few weeks ago, for example, I was talking to an employee at a hardware store whom I’ve known for the past nine years and have always enjoyed speaking with. Although we’d never talked politics before, on this occasion the topic came up and he told me he’d voted for Trump and liked the job he’s doing. I must admit, the many prejudices I have toward Trump voters erupted within me and my impression of this person, whom I’d always found likeable, immediately began to shift. Still, I pushed back my prejudices and queried him a bit about his decision and what exactly he’s pleased with.

His explanation of what he thinks Trump has accomplished didn’t make much sense to me, but his reason for voting for him did. He said it was because he believed things are going so bad in our country that he wanted “somebody who could go in and shake things up.” I suppose if your goal is shaking things up and you feel your only option is a wrecking ball, you vote for the wrecking ball. Despite what I consider his poor choice, I believe this white male was sincere in his desire for change. I believe, like a lot of us, he resisted the cognitive dissonance apparent within his decision, ignoring all the dehumanizing, misogynistic, racist things Trump has said, because of his more dominant, misguided, and desperate hope for meaningful change. I say this because, to my surprise, he also told me that in the past he had twice voted for another promising change agent, Barak Obama.

Yet I don’t believe it’s really change, at least not just any change, that most people want, whichever side of the political line they are on. Like all creatures, humans are creatures of habit and are biologically evolved to fear and resist change. Habitual behaviors are what define and shape a species. Changing them requires us to fundamentally change what we are and to risk our very lives with untried behaviors unproven by the test of time. Change isn’t something we want, it’s usually something we dread. So, I don’t think Trump’s generic slogan

promising to make America great again was about the desire for change, but about the wish for things to return to usual, whatever that means.

Anxiety is the fastest growing mental health disorder in our country these days, which is coinciding with an era of almost constant and unpredictable economic, cultural, technological, and global change. In their book, *The Power of Pull*, John Hagel and his coauthors refer to this period as the “Big Shift,” which they describe as “a fundamental reordering of the way we live, learn, socialize, play, and work that is now taking place.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, everything is changing. “Our governments are racing to adapt to a world where social and economic changes far outstrip the ability of legislatures and even dictators to maintain control,” *The Power of Pull* says, “It’s a different game now, and many of us have yet to learn to play it. Those who fail to do so will, as individuals, feel increasing stress.”<sup>2</sup>

When this happens, I believe, many tend to recoil, as is the usual response to threatening situations, by attempting to revert to old ways of thinking and behaving. This explains why voters around the world are electing a rising number of authoritarian leaders these days, or are attempting to isolate themselves from the global community as with Brexit, or through the heartbreaking reemergence of white nationalism in the U.S., not to mention the move toward segregationist identity ethics in American academia and other liberal institutions. The widespread inability to cope with change, with the Big Shift that’s happening right now, and the chronic uncertainty about the future all of us must cope with, causes many to revert to our most recent and familiar nationalistic and isolationist paradigms.

But if attempting to do so has proven anything at all, it’s that these desperate and fearful responses are powerless to turn the tide. Brexit hasn’t happened yet, and I don’t believe it ever will, lest it be in name only. For it is no longer possible for any nation to isolate itself from the global community. Likewise, Donald Trump’s demagoguery has only made the U.S. less powerful on the world stage. Reverting to a government that tries to push others around—*push* being the opposite of what is meant by *pull*—is destined to fail in our age of constant Shift. “Many people have an understandable nostalgia for a time when economic and social events were more stable and predictable,” Hagel says. “So they hold onto the push mechanisms to try to maintain that stability. But longing doesn’t make it so. The world is changing around us...”<sup>3</sup>

In the past, when major cultural, social, economic, and global periods of disruption occurred, they were followed by long periods of relative calm and predictability. Not so now. Progress happens exponentially, meaning it keeps happening faster than before. Today we have reached a point of chronic change and it’s only going to accelerate. Rather than fruitlessly

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<sup>1</sup> Hagel III, John, & Brown, John Seeley, & Davidson, Lang, *The Power of Pull*, Basic Books, New York, NY, 2010, 2012. p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.2

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

reverting to past behaviors, those who are going to survive must learn to adapt to living in a world of rapid change and unpredictability. We can no longer swim in calm and familiar waters. We are surfing massive waves that are constantly changing, churning, and carrying us in new directions. To live in such a world means we have to be willing to adapt quickly, to overcome our innate fear of change, to ride the wave, and, most of all, learn to love the thrill and challenge of it all. Instead of considering ourselves as fragile, we must become agile.

In their book, *Agility*, Leo Tilman and Charles Jacoby, say, “Agile organizations treat disruption and adversity as opportunities.”<sup>4</sup> I think the same is true for us as individuals. The first thing we have to admit to ourselves is things aren’t going to calm down, and we’re never going back to simpler times, and that scares us. Once we face these truths, we can stop miring in wishful or nostalgic thinking and deal with what it means to live in an environment that is constantly changing. Whether we resent it or embrace it makes no difference to the wave that’s already upon us. We can either be overcome by it or try riding it, but we can’t stop it. It’s not about voting for populist authoritarians like Trump. It’s not about voting to withdraw from the rest of the world. It’s not about cloistering together in segregated tribal identities. It’s about overcoming our fear and adapting to the changes, even learning to feel excited about them. As Susan David says in her book, *Emotional Agility*, “The ultimate goal of emotional agility is to keep a sense of challenge and growth alive and well throughout your life.”<sup>5</sup> That’s our challenge in an era of exponential change, fostering feelings of thrill and enthusiasm.

Last week I got a fortune cookie that said, “Better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.” It reminds me of something else I learned recently, that the Chinese ideogram for “crisis” combines the images of “danger” and “opportunity.” That’s where we’re at today. We can be fearful of the changes that are upon us or learn to take advantage of them by getting ahead of the curve and riding the crest of the wave.

Among the most widespread changes occurring today, leading to some of the regressive trends I’ve already mentioned, regards the emerging global community and the demise of the Nation-State. Today everyone in the world shares one environment, one economy, one worldwide web, one global communications system, one international court, and many of the same grand challenges, like global warming, an International refugee crisis, and mass income inequality. Whether it’s proven by kids trapped in a cave in Thailand that captures the concerns of people all over the world, or China’s headlining displeasure over a tweet sent by an American basketball team’s General Manager, the Nation-State is going the way of the dodo.

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<sup>4</sup> Tilman, Leo M., & Jacoby, Charles, *Agility*, Missionday, LLC., Kindle Edition, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> David, Susan, *Emotional Agility*, Avery, A Penguin Publishing Group, New York, NY, Kindle Edition 2016, p. 14.

Since I've spoken of this in detail many times, I'll summarize the matter here by saying, as historian Yuval Harari explains, 12,000 years ago there were many thousands of different human communities living on Earth, few of which knew of each other. 2000 years ago, the number of these "dwarf worlds," as he calls them, had shrunk to just hundreds, or maybe a couple of thousand at most. 500 years ago, "90 percent of humans lived in a single megaworld," Harari says, which included not thousands, not hundreds, but only four distinct societies, the Mesoamerican, the Andean, the Australian, and the Oceanic worlds. And, "Today," he says, "almost all humans share the same geopolitical system... the same economic system... the same legal system; and the same scientific system..."<sup>6</sup> From such a vantage point it becomes crystal clear that history is moving relentlessly towards unity."<sup>7</sup>

Or, as the paleontologist, philosopher, and Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin recognized in the 1940s, "Life moves toward unification..."<sup>8</sup> we can progress only by uniting: this, as we have seen, is the law of Life."<sup>9</sup> As an evolutionist, who considered such unity the penultimate of Life itself, de Chardin also said; "this summit, towards which all our striving must be directed, can only be attained by our drawing together, all of us, more and more closely and in every sense—individually, socially, nationally and racially."<sup>10</sup> He describe this conflict, this choice between fearing change and embracing it, between danger and opportunity, as the choice, in his words, to "unite or perish."<sup>11</sup> Through its process of convergence, evolution is bringing us together, in the same way it brought hydrogen particles together to form the first stars, and stardust to form the elements, and the elements to form the first cells, and the cells to form all manner of complex organisms, and the organisms to form communities, and communities to form today's emerging world community. There's no turning back. There's no backing out. We can't step into the same river twice. Change is the only certainty. The Big Shift today means adapting our ideas and behaviors to this new global reality. It means we must "unite or perish."

This is why MAGA won't work, because it can't work, anymore than England can truly ever Brexit, or foolhardy liberals can drive wedges between the human family with identitarian delusions that are fundamentally contrary to human nature. Still, these attempts to hold back the tide, to prevent acknowledging a new reality that is already upon us, prove how frightening the end of nations is. This isn't to say we won't continue referring to today's countries by their names for some time yet, only that the sovereignty of all nations is diminishing as they are necessarily held more accountable as a whole, just as the individual states comprising the United States have increasingly had to do over the past two hundred years. In 1887, for example, railroad technology resulted in the Interstate Commerce Act,

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<sup>6</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2015, (Kindle version), loc., 2607.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 2562.

<sup>8</sup> de Chardin, Pierre Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1959, 1964, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236

regulating this emerging industry for the good of the entire Nation. It was also during the 1800s various court decisions, including the Supreme Court, upheld the rights of U.S. citizens to move freely between states, a decision that had to be solidified in 1941, due to the Dust Bowl refugee crisis, during which the Supreme Court ruled individual States have no right to restrict interstate migration.

Today, new information and transportation technologies and new refugee and migrant worker crises are forcing all of us to address these same issues on a global scale. Trump's policies, representing an attempt to reclaim our country's national independence by starting a trade war, preventing immigrants from crossing the Southern border, or stopping people from entering the U.S. based upon their religion or ethnicity, hasn't worked well. This is largely because it can't, because our global relationships are too complicated and interdependent for us to disrupt without global ramifications.

This isn't to suggest our national identities haven't served us well in the past. It was only after World War I, "when component nationalities decided they could no longer live together in a common political structure..." as Francis Fukuyama points out in his book, *Identity*, that "National identity got a bad name... precisely because it came to be associated with an exclusive, ethnically based sense of belonging known as ethno-nationalism."<sup>12</sup> In the U.S., ethno-nationalism manifested as white-nationalism and white supremacy, in the beliefs, that is, that being an American means being white, and in institutions and laws favoring those who are. "The problem, however, was not with the idea of national identity itself," Fukuyama says, "the problem was the narrow, ethnically based, intolerant, and deeply illiberal form that national identity took."<sup>13</sup>

The recent book, *Empty Planet*, about the sudden and unexpected global population decline, points out it's now necessary for countries to adopt liberal immigration policies if they want to remain vibrant. Holding up their own country as an example, its Canadian authors, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson explain, "For decades now, Canada has brought in more people, on a per capita basis, than any other major developed nation, with little of the ethnic tensions, ghettos, and fierce debate that other countries face."<sup>14</sup> They explain this is partly "because it embraces multiculturalism: the shared right to celebrate your native culture within the Canadian mosaic, which has produced a peaceful, prosperous, polyglot society, among the most fortunate on earth." So, where ethno-nationalism hasn't occurred, Nationalism has worked well in bonding diverse societies of people together. In places where such identity hasn't been fostered, as in the former U.S.S.R., or in Iraq, or Syria, and so on, civil war tends to break out among those disparate groups with tribal identities during regime changes.

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<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama, Francis, *Identity*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, NY, 2018, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Bricker, Darrell, and Ibbitson, John, *Empty Planet*, Crown/Archetype, New York, NY, (Kindle Edition), 2019, p. 5.

Unfortunately, in the U.S., the declining Era of the Nation-State has left us more divided than united. This began after the end of the Cold War, when conservatives needed a new enemy to maintain political power, turning their hostilities inward toward other Americans they've since been demonizing and dehumanizing as "Liberals." Liberals, having lost their political strength as a result, began retreating into academia in the 1980s, along with a few other liberal institutions, like Unitarian Universalism, and have been promoting identity politics and identity ethics ever since. This neo-tribalistic mentality has been further and increasingly driving wedges between Americans by convincing too many the arbitrary differences between us are so great we can't possibly relate to each other. This neo-liberal ethic, however, in my opinion, may become as divisive as ethno-Nationalism has been.

But, again, these regressive responses, whether from conservatives or progressives, will ultimately fail because they are flawed attempts to turn back a tide that's already sweeping over us. Even if we wanted to harness the stabilizing benefits of National Identity, like security, stable government, economic strength, welfare programs, and democracy, we can't. For the time of Nations is already being displaced by an emerging global identity.

My hope and suggestion, rather, is that those of us in positions to influence others, wherever they are from, begin promoting human identity and humanistic ethics. This means, wherever we're from, whatever our culture, whatever our skin tone, our sexuality, our gender, our class, and so forth, that we see ourselves as part of one species, one human family that transcends all our differences. It also means our ethic must be about taking responsibility for each other's well-being and unfolding. It's no longer about making America great again, or any other nation for that matter. It's about making Americans great, all of us, not again, but for the first time, by making sure our government and economy works well for all of us, regardless of our individual identities. Moreover, in a global community, it can't be only about making life great for Americans, but for everyone, for all of our neighbors around the world. Leading this unifying humanitarian charge would truly make Americans great.

Today's technologies already allows us to connect with people all over the world. Within the next two to five years, augmented reality will allow us to be in the presence of people from everywhere without going anywhere. We're no longer locked within borders, we're no longer confined to nationalistic identities, and we can now see, if we transcend the current paradigm, that we are no longer merely Americans, or Russians, or Chinese, or Mexicans, or Iranians, or North Koreans, or any other Nationalism. We are Earthlings. We are part of one emerging global family, the human family. I pray we can acknowledge this, embrace it, and start acting like it.