WHAT WOULD RECOVERY LOOK LIKE?

In the horror and grief of Wednesday, November 9, my natural response was to look for somewhere to place the blame. And there's so much blame to go around. There were the blue collar workers of Michigan who voted for Trump in spite of the fact that they wouldn't have jobs if it weren't for President Obama saving the auto industry, against the wishes of all the congressional Republicans and a good number of Democrats. (The current unemployment rate in Michigan is 4.9%.) There were the avenging college students and Bernie fans who voted for Jill Stein or "What is Aleppo?" Johnson, even though Clinton embraced virtually all of the Sanders agenda and Trump will demolish the progress in the areas that concern them most. There were also the ethnic minorities and women who, in spite of his vilification of them, voted for Trump in far larger numbers than the polls indicated. Nor can we forget FBI director Comey's treasonous intrusions into a presidential campaign. However, most egregious of all were the broadcast, cable, and print media,

who spent a year telling us that Hillary Clinton was untrustworthy (Emails? Really?) and giggling at Trump's outrageous statements, any one of which would have disqualified any previous presidential candidate. They wanted that advertising revenue so much they decided to abrogate their responsibility to the nation. When they finally decided to do their jobs, late in the campaign, the damage was irreversible. And then there were Facebook and Google with Mark Zuckerberg and Sunar Pichai promoting fake news intrusions on their sites, making huge amounts of money and perpetuating the ridiculous and obscene propaganda of the ultra-right. Finally, the ultimate Orwellian nightmare: "chatbots" that slipped disinformation into the online conversations of Democrats while appearing to be sympathetic with the Clinton campaign. I have no patience with any of these people when they wring their hands and ask "How could it have gone so wrong?"

You look at the U.S. electoral map, with its huge swath of angry red

framed by blue on the west and northeast coasts, and you begin to understand the physical nature of our country's divide: the big cosmopolitan cities and their environs vs. the rest of the country. Clinton believed a campaign centered on social justice would re-energize the Obama coalition that carried him in '08 and '12. Not only did that not happen to the extent she had hoped, but she didn't foresee the large defection of white working class Obama Democrats to Trump, especially in the Rust Belt. Those people listened to the siren call of populism (left or right): orgies of racism and xenophobia directed at people who are often in the exact same predicament as the haters. This is not to deny that rural and small-town America has legitimate grievances, but what was most clearly articulated at Trump rallies was racial, ethnic, and religious hatred—and misogyny. That happened in the Depression thirties too, most notably with the populist Father Coughlin's movement. At first he supported FDR's New Deal, but then embraced Nazism and Fascism. He used the radio, the

only mass medium of that time, to gather a following of millions with his frequent anti-semitic diatribes. FDR's answer to that growing ugliness, which actually preceded Coughlin, was to create building programs of all sorts that gave people jobs and physical examples of progress, as modest as they might have been, in projects like the WPA and TVA. Now employed, they could turn their populist anger against the rich instead of scapegoating other people who were struggling to survive.

In the summer of 2015, when I first watched Trump harangue a crowd, then fold his arms across his chest and thrust out his chin, I said, "My God, he thinks he's Mussolini!" I remembered the old newsreels of Mussolini on the balcony in the Piazza Venezia in Rome, promising a return to the glory of the Roman Empire, with the remains of that empire all around for the cheering crowd to see. Obviously Trump saw the same newsreels. Trump has also promised to bring back the glory days of empire. (A New York Times article cited a poll stating that 7 of 10 Trump voters said they would prefer to live in the 1950s, the post-WWII era when we became the most important country in the world.) Beyond the swagger of Mussolini, Trump must also have been impressed by the dictator's use of grand building projects and monuments as propaganda. I took Trump at his word when he promised infra-structure projects that will be "second to none" in his victory speech. But unlike FDR's building programs, Trump's will be about personal aggrandizement: not so much practical as stunningly gaudy. The question remains: will the congressional Republicans, who have blocked Obama's infrastructure plans at every turn, be willing to fund Trump's?

I've written in the past about imminent threats, such as global warming, but the Trump presidency is a current threat. It presents the same level of danger to the republic as the Great Depression or the Civil War did. There is still a chance that in four years all of Trump's racist pandering will not be enough to satisfy the people who elected him, since his choices for major positions have already shown that he will renege on every populist promise he has made. In that case, a competent president might be elected and pull us back from the brink. But the great problems that have loomed for years will still be there, and we'll have lost four years that could have been spent dealing with those problems. It is useless to imagine that steel mills, tunnel mines of all sorts, cotton mills, and all of the industries that employed Americans for more than a century will come back as major employers. That world in the U.S. is going fast, and in many cases has already gone.

In a presidential debate with Ronald Reagan in 1984, Walter Mondale said Reagan's policies would lead to America's children and grandchildren having no options other than sweeping up around computers or working at McDonalds. Mondale was wrong: even those jobs are gone, or soon will be. You can't sweep up around a supercomputer that is small enough to sit on a desk or be held in one hand. And McDonalds has just announced that they are introducing "digital self-serve." Guess those jobs will be gone too. These losses have nothing to do with NAFTA or TPP. They are about automation and a corporate culture that doesn't give a damn about working people. (Their attitude has always astonished me; if people don't have jobs, where are they going to get the money to buy all that stuff?) Keynesian economics works, but only in the short term. Even converting to solar and wind will provide jobs for only a limited time. If the old industrial paradigm is dead, then it is imperative that we invent a new one—and fast. An enlightened U.S. president and a congress willing to forego obstruction could ease the transition, but there has to be a new mechanism to create jobs that pay fairly. If the wealth of the 1% were redistributed to the rest of us through tax reform, it would be a nice bonus check, but it would not last long. We need a new economic engine as different from the industrial one it will replace as the old industrial engine was from the agricultural one it replaced. I wish I had an answer, an ability to describe what this recovery would look like, but I don't. I call on all forward-thinking philanthropists to pool their money and make this search the great project of our time. If we could solve this problem in our country, surely that would improve the lives of people around the world, in both developing and developed nations. No government commissions: this brainstorming needs to be done outside the Beltway. If a solution is found, it needs to be presented to the people directly, so that they in turn can force governmental action. Let Warren Buffett, Bill and Melinda Gates, George Soros, and many others step forward, and let the best minds available (regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity) step forward and get to work!