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Scheduled on December 31, 2025 at 10:20 UTC

Addressing our global crisis in democracy

Transforming our world system from domination to freedom

GLEN T. MARTIN



Democracy's functioning is in crisis

Democracy is in crisis around the world. Its functioning is in crisis, as well as its legitimacy and justification. As a philosopher, I have been working on the theory of democracy for some years, as published, for example, in my 2010 book, *Triumph of Civilization: Democracy, Nonviolence, and the Piloting of Spaceship Earth*. In this short article, I want to focus on a few central issues of the contemporary global crisis in democracy.

That nation of global significance that calls itself “exceptional,” the nation that views itself as “indispensable,” which, like a cancer that metastasizes to the body-politics of planet Earth, has never been a democracy and leads the way worldwide in the global destruction of democracy. Both these epithets (“indispensable” and “exceptional”) were recently used by President Joe Biden in his resounding May Day speech of 2022.

On the 11th September 2001, we were told that the world changed forever. This dramatic announcement defined the mythic framework provided by the USA government and the corporate media for the people of the US and the Earth. The indispensable nation understood that it must take charge of the planet to protect “democracy, freedom, human dignity, and prosperity.” The means to do this included a “global war on terror,” a war with no defined enemy, a war with no temporal or special limits, a war in which the exceptional nation made the rules and executed its victims extrajudicially, without appeal, without recourse, without voice, within a world, as President George W. Bush put it, in which other nations are “either with us, or with the enemy.” There is no third alternative, no neutrality.

[Edit](#) On another May Day in 2003, George W. Bush swept down from the skies in a fighter jet to land upon the aircraft carrier [Text](#) Abraham Lincoln. The commander in chief of a planetary military empire with some 800 bases spread across some 80 nations [Gallery](#) spanning the globe, in a relation of “full spectrum dominance” to all other nations, expounded before a circle of saluting military personnel, the new mythic reality. “Mission accomplished,” he announced. Simultaneously, his administration explained to the

nation and the press (the fourth estate once considered vital to democracy) that they no longer have a role in governing or a democratic voice in “the way the world works”: “We are an empire now, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality — judiciously as you will — we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study, too... We are history’s actors... and you, all of you, will be left to study what we do.” The voice of totalitarianism spoke out loud and clear.

In his 2017 book *Trump and a Post-Truth World*, Ken Wilber provides an analysis of yet another US President and a nation that appears to have abandoned the concept of truth altogether. The concept of empirically verifiable facts and evidence has been abandoned by this President and his army of followers, including media outlets, who no longer distinguish mere belief from knowledge. They profess: “What I passionately believe can be called the truth. What our rulers decide as the center of global power becomes the truth. We create our own reality. Any news I disagree with is ‘fake news.’ Any group I disagree with can be subject to my domination and attack. There are no binding guidelines on human behavior other than my beliefs, impulses, and emotions.” Power and the will to power replace dialogue, debate, and collective decision-making. Wilber calls this phenomenon “nihilism and narcissism... aperspectival madness.”

Wilber’s analysis embraces the idea of *human growth and development* that has emerged from leading thinkers over the past century. Human civilization and individual persons live within a dynamic of growth that can be studied and articulated clearly within an amazing consensus among a broad spectrum of psychologists, philosophers, and spiritual thinkers. He calls this broad pattern and consensus “integral theory.” Democracy, if it is going to be viable, must be framed within the context of human and civilizational evolutionary growth.

Yet there are deeper roots to the problem Wilber addresses with his analysis of post-modern relativism and skepticism. Thinkers from Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard to the unmitigated pluralism and narcissism of contemporary civilization and culture reflect entrapment at an immature level of growth, badly in need of transcending to a more mature engagement with reality. This may well be true. However, these deeper roots lie within the history of unrestrained capitalism and its colonization of nation-state power.

In *If You Love This Planet*, Helen Caldicott details the discovery of the power of mass propaganda during the First World War. The US population was firmly isolationist and against any US involvement in that war. But the elites running the US government wanted war. Using the new technologies of mass media, primarily radio and newspapers, the government was able in a very short time to transform the views of the US population into mass haters of Germany and advocates for US involvement in a huge war mobilization. Noam Chomsky gives a similar account in *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*.

Both thinkers note the fundamental cooperation between the big corporations and government propaganda efforts, as well as the great interest the corporations took in the power of mass communications for influencing people’s beliefs. The corporations, whose bottom line was private profit for their wealthy owners, understood that truth was irrelevant to private profit. Mass media could make people believe almost anything, and the criterion for that ‘anything’ that people could be made to believe was the maximization of private profit.

The drive for maximizing private profit was even then in the process of globalizing itself along with US military power that protected and enforced the ideological framework of a ‘free market’ worldwide. Naomi Klein, in *The Shock Doctrine and the Rise of Disaster Capitalism* chronicles the use of US imperial military and economic power after the Second World War to destroy the economies in country after country by imposing on them the ‘shock’ of abandoning all controls on the market that attempt to protect the poor, or the free press, or democracy.

The lying ideology that ‘free’ profit maximization is the foundation of human prosperity and well-being (through a mythic ‘invisible hand’) involved, in the words of Sheldon Wolin, “an unceasing search for what might be exploitable, and soon that meant virtually anything, from religion, to politics, to human wellbeing. Very little, if anything, was taboo, as before long change became the object of premeditated strategies for maximizing profits.”

Communications via advertising, the framing of news, the articulation of world struggles and dynamics devolved into “strategic, instrumental, and manipulative forms,” almost entirely ignoring what Jürgen Habermas called “communicative discourse,” that is, “discourse directed toward mutual understanding.” Democracy, Habermas shows, requires forms of communication in which people participate in governing through dialogue, debate, presenting verifiable statistics and evidence, all within a framework of good will, respect, and mutual concern for a community working together for the common good of all.

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So-called capitalist democracies operate inevitably as oligarchies in which corporate and governmental powers collaborate in the drive to maximize profit and engineer “consent of the governed” through promoting mythic frameworks that depower, marginalize, and dehumanize citizens. As President Bush and his Cabinet declared: they create the reality. All citizens may do is study and record the reality created for them by the powerful, by the empire, by the globalized confluence of corporate, governmental, and military power.

Democracy as a mass movement based on theoretical premises emerged most clearly in 18th century Europe. Sometimes called the Age of Reason, it was perceived that reason and intelligence were widely distributed among human beings and not limited to traditional ruling classes or castes. Immanuel Kant in the 18th century argued that the only legitimate form of government was a “republic” that protected the “liberty, equality, and independence” of citizens.

Kant argued that this form of government would encourage the growth of citizens over time toward a “kingdom of ends” in which all persons would treat one another as ends in themselves. Hence, republican government was predicated upon a moral and cognitive growth process in which people progressively engaged in communicative discourse in contrast to strategic, instrumental, and manipulative forms of discourse that tend to dehumanize people, treating them as a means to be used in the service of power and profit rather than as ends having dignity and immeasurable value in themselves.

In the early 20th century, philosopher John Dewey elaborated the concept of democracy as a “moral ideal” for humanity. He declared an ideal of democracy as a theory of all human relationships that is much larger than mere political democracy. We must work, he asserted, for global forms of democracy (beyond the limitations of nation-states), as well as economic democracy in which workers own and run their own factories, and ever more vibrant forms of political democracy. Here Dewey has in mind forms of communication later elaborated by Habermas. Democracy means people working together for the freedom of each flourishing within the common good of all, which requires communicative dialogue directed not toward strategic manipulation, but rather genuine mutual understanding directed to the common good. Dewey understands human progress as growth in our understanding and our institutions toward this objective moral ideal.

Late 20th century philosopher Sidney Hook also treated democracy as an ethical ideal centered on human “equality of concern or consideration.” Democracy, in this sense, he argues, is equivalent to the moral ideal of social justice” that includes “political, economic, and educational democracy.” He declares that this “emphasis upon respect for the personality of all individuals, the attitude which treats the personality not as something fixed but as a growing, developing pattern, is unique to the philosophy of democracy.”

Capitalism today dominates the world, including all governments that claim to be democratic. As an institution, it does not know dialogue directed toward mutual understanding. It only knows strategic forms of communication. Hence it does not, and cannot, know democracy. Since capitalism insists on unlimited accumulation of private wealth, these immense concentrations of wealth and power naturally colonize every government that claims to be democratic.

Similarly, the system of so-called ‘sovereign’ nation-states divides the people of Earth into absolute territorial cages systemically in competition and suspicion with one another. The ‘security’ systems of each of these territories defeats democracy both within and without. The people cannot know the security secrets of their government, which involve secret cooperation between the big corporations and military elites that, in effect, determine the foreign policy and propaganda stance of each country.

As Habermas, Dewey, and Hook all suggested, we need to *globalize democracy* if we are to have any future at all on this planet. Capitalism is globalized, and the “exceptional” nation has globalized its military and propaganda domination over our planet. They “create the reality” and all that is left to citizens is to study what they do. If we want to end war, protect universal human rights, or preserve the planetary ecosystem (see Martin 2021), we need to globalize democratic government, for the first time in history, predicated on the equal rights and dignity of everyone on Earth.

That is precisely what the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* does. It makes authentic democracy possible because it creates a government with *effective authority over the corporations and all individual nations*. Without the people of Earth effectively represented by a World Parliament with sufficient enforcement powers, neither truth, nor democracy will prevail in human affairs. For both militarized nation-states and capitalist corporations know only strategic communication.

[Edit](#) [Text](#) [Gallery](#) The *Earth Constitution* establishes government directly on human rights and dignity — the freedom of each within the common good of all. Because it is above the corporations and the competing individual nations, it makes possible dialogue directed toward mutual understanding, that is, genuine democracy premised on the moral and intellectual growth, development, and ever greater forms of community and solidarity. Our very survival depends on our ability to ratify this *Earth Constitution*.

Notes

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Glen T. Martin

Glen T. Martin, Ph.D., is an author of twelve books and hundreds of articles concerning global issues, human spirituality, and democratic world government. A recipient of many peace awards, he is the longtime President of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA).

[Author profile](#)

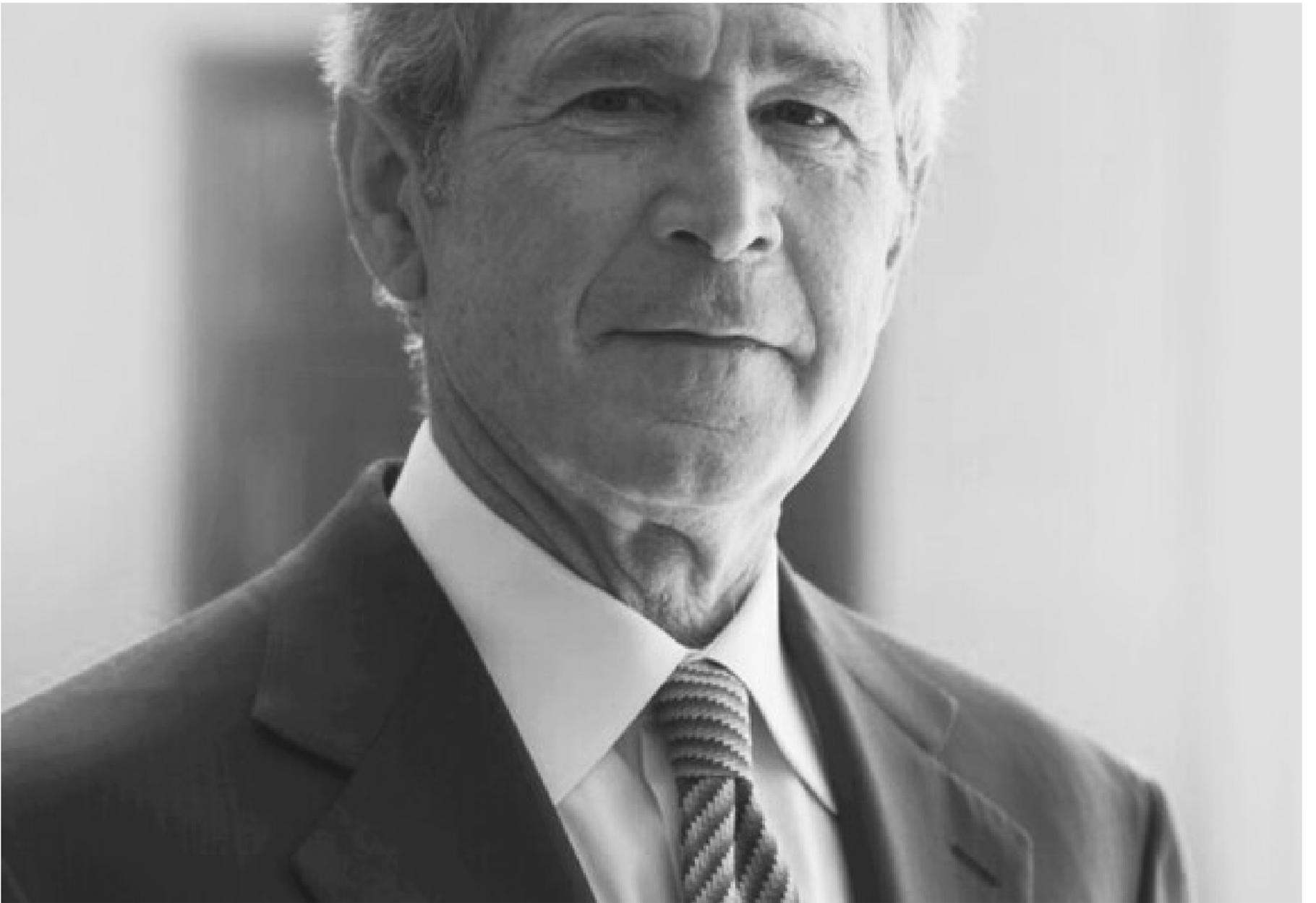
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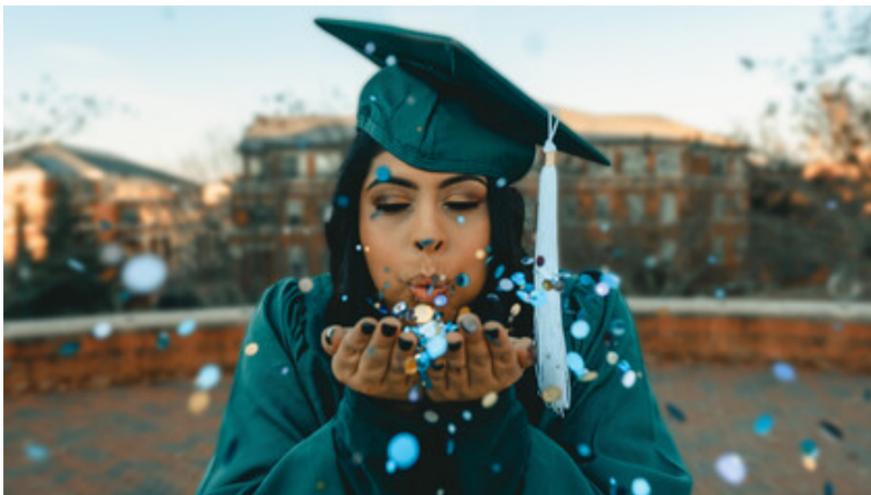


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1. John Dewey: the philosopher declared democracy as a theory of all human relationships, much larger than political democracy
2. Globalizing democracy: without a World Parliament with sufficient enforcement powers, neither truth, nor democracy will prevail in human affairs
3. George W. Bush, during his Presidential term, claimed people and the press no longer have a democratic voice in the way the world works
4. Protests in Tunisia: citizens fighting for a democratic system
5. US President Joe Biden, labeled the US as 'exceptional' and 'indispensable'
6. Voice of society: democracy must be framed within the context of human and civilizational evolutionary growth

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