

# The Politicians Who Destroyed Our Democracy Want Us to Vote for Them to Save It. Chris Hedges

We should have walked out on the Democratic Party and mounted a serious opposition movement while we still had a chance.

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*The bipartisan project of dismantling our democracy, which took place over the last few decades on behalf of corporations and the rich, has left only the outward shell of democracy. The courts, legislative bodies, the executive branch and the media, including public broadcasting, are captive to corporate power. There is no institution left that can be considered authentically democratic. The corporate coup d'état is over. They won. We lost.*

The wreckage of this neoliberal project is appalling: endless and futile wars to enrich a military-industrial-complex that bleeds the U.S. Treasury of half of all discretionary spending; deindustrialization that has turned U.S. cities into decayed ruins; the slashing and privatization of social programs, including education, utility services and health care – which saw over [one million Americans](#) account for one-fifth of global deaths from Covid, although we are 4 percent of the world's population; draconian forms of social control embodied in militarized police, functioning as lethal armies of occupation in poor urban areas; the largest prison system in the world; a virtual tax boycott by the richest individuals and corporations; money-saturated elections that perpetuate our system of legalized bribery; and the most intrusive state surveillance of the citizenry in our history.

In "The United States of Amnesia," to quote Gore Vidal, the corporate press and the ruling class create fictional feel-good personas for candidates, treat all political campaigns as if it is a day at the races and gloss over the fact that on every major issue, from trade deals to war, there is very little difference between Democrats and Republicans. The Democratic Party and Joe Biden are not the lesser evil, but rather, as [Glen Ford pointed](#) out, "the more effective evil."

Biden [supported](#) the campaign to discredit and humiliate Anita Hill to appoint Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. He was one of the principal architects of the endless wars in

the Middle East, [calling for](#) “taking Saddam down” five years before the invasion of Iraq. He [rehabilitated](#) the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, after [vowing](#) to make the country a pariah because of the assassination of the Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Biden is a fervent [supporter](#) of Israel, [calling](#) the apartheid state “the single greatest strength America has in the Middle East” and declaring “I am a Zionist. You don’t have to be a Jew to be a Zionist.” His campaigns have been lavishly [funded](#) by the Israel lobby for at least two decades.

In the 1970s, he fought school busing, [arguing](#) that segregation was beneficial for Blacks. He and South Carolina’s racist senator, Strom Thurmond, [sponsored](#) the Comprehensive Crime Control Act, which [eliminated](#) parole for federal prisoners and limited the amount of time sentences could be reduced for good behavior. Biden [sponsored](#) and aggressively pushed the [1994 crime bill](#), which he also helped [draft](#), [calling](#) for its passage because “We have predators on our streets that society has in fact, in part because of its neglect, created.” The bill [expanded](#) the death penalty for dozens of existing and new federal crimes and mandated life imprisonment for a third violent felony, also known as the “three strikes and you’re out” rule, more than [doubling](#) the nation’s prison population. The bill [provided](#) funds to add 100,000 new police officers and build new prisons, on the condition that prisoners serve their entire sentences. He [pushed](#) through the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which [gutted](#) the federal writ of habeas corpus, abolished the rights of death row prisoners and mandated harsh federal sentencing rules.

Biden [takes](#) credit for writing the 2001 Patriot Act, which [expanded](#) the government’s ability to monitor anyone’s phone and email communications, collect bank and credit reporting records, and track activity on the Internet. He backed austerity programs, including the [destruction](#) of welfare and [cuts](#) to Social Security. He [fought for](#) NAFTA and other “free trade” deals which [fueled](#) inequality, deindustrialization, a significant drop in wages and the offshoring of millions of manufacturing jobs to underpaid workers who toil in sweatshops in countries like Mexico, Malaysia, China or Vietnam.

He also [backed](#) the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act that, as Human Rights Watch [writes](#), “eliminated key defenses against deportation and subjected many more immigrants, including legal permanent residents, to detention and deportation.”

Biden long opposed abortion, [writing](#) in a letter to a constituent: “Those of us who are opposed to abortion should not be compelled to pay for them. As you may know, I have consistently — on no fewer than 50 occasions — voted against federal funding of abortions.”

He was at the forefront of [deregulating](#) the banking industry and the [abolition of Glass-Steagall](#), which contributed to the global financial meltdown, including the [collapse](#) of nearly 500 banks, in 2007 and 2008. He is a favorite of the for-profit insurance and pharmaceutical industry, which [contributed](#) \$6.3 million to his 2020 presidential campaign, almost four times more money than they channeled to Donald Trump’s campaign. Biden and the Democrats annually increase the military budget, [approving](#) \$813 billion for fiscal year 2023. He and the Democrats have [provided](#) over \$60 billion in military aid and assistance to the war in Ukraine, with no end in sight. In the Senate, Biden abjectly [served](#) the interests of MBNA, the largest independent credit card company headquartered in Delaware, which also employed Biden’s son Hunter.

The decisions of politicians like Biden have a staggering human cost, not only for the poor, workers and the [shrinking](#) middle class but for millions of people in the Middle East, millions of families ripped apart by mass incarceration, millions more forced into bankruptcy by our mercenary for-profit medical system where corporations are legally permitted to hold sick children hostage while their frantic parents bankrupt themselves to save them, millions who became addicted to opioids and hundreds of thousands who died from them, millions denied welfare assistance, and all of us barreling toward extinction because of a refusal to curb the greed and destructive power of the fossil fuel industry, which has [raked](#) in \$2.8 billion a day in profit over the last 50 years.

Biden, morally vacuous and of limited intelligence, is responsible for more suffering and death at home and abroad than Donald Trump. But the victims in our Punch-and-Judy media shows are rendered invisible. And that is why the victims despise the whole superstructure and want to tear it down.

These establishment politicians and their appointed judges promulgated laws that permitted the top 1 percent to loot \$54 trillion from the bottom 90 percent, from 1975 to 2022, at [a rate](#) of \$2.5 trillion a year, [according](#) to a study by the RAND corporation. The fertile ground of our political, economic, cultural and social wreckage spawned an array of neo-fascists, con artists, racists, criminals, charlatans, conspiracy theorists, right-wing militias and demagogues that will soon take power.

Decayed societies, such as [Weimar](#) Germany or the former Yugoslavia, which I covered for The New York Times, always vomit up political deformities who express the hatred a betrayed public feel for a corrupt ruling class and bankrupt liberalism. The twilight of the Greek, Roman, Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires were no different.

These political deformities play the role of the Snopes clan in William Faulkner's [trilogy](#) "The Hamlet," "The Town" and "The Mansion." The Snopeses wrested control in the South from a degenerate aristocratic elite. Flem Snopes and his extended family — which includes a killer, a pedophile, a bigamist, an arsonist, a mentally disabled man who copulates with a cow, and a relative who sells tickets to witness the bestiality — are fictional representations of the scum that hijacked the Republican Party.

"The usual reference to 'amorality,' while accurate, is not sufficiently distinctive and by itself does not allow us to place them, as they should be placed, in a historical moment," the critic Irving Howe wrote of the Snopeses. "Perhaps the most important thing to be said is that they are what comes afterwards: the creatures that emerge from the devastation, with the slime still upon their lips."

"Let a world collapse, in the South or Russia, and there appear figures of coarse ambition driving their way up from beneath the social bottom, men to whom moral claims are not so much absurd as incomprehensible, sons of bushwhackers or *muzhiks* drifting in from nowhere and taking over through the sheer outrageousness of their monolithic force," Howe wrote. "They become presidents of local banks and chairmen of party regional committees, and later, a trifle slicked up, they muscle their way into Congress or the Politburo. Scavengers without inhibition, they need not believe in the crumbling official code of their society; they need only learn to mimic its sounds."

Biden and other establishment politicians are not actually calling for democracy. They are calling for civility. They have no intention of extracting the knife thrust into our backs. They

hope to paper over the rot and the pain with the decorum of the polite, measured talk they used to sell us the con of [neoliberalism](#). The political correctness and inclusivity imposed by college-educated elites, unfortunately, has now become associated with the corporate assault, as if a woman CEO or a Black police officer is going to mitigate the exploitation and abuse. Minorities are always welcome, as they were in other species of colonialism, if they serve the dictates of the masters. This is how Barack Obama, whom Cornel West [called](#) “a Black mascot for Wall Street,” became President.

Freedom for millions of enraged Americans has become the freedom to hate, the freedom to use words like “nigger,” “kike,” “spic,” “chink,” “raghead” and “fag;” the freedom to physically assault Muslims, undocumented workers, women, African-Americans, homosexuals and anyone who dares criticize their Christian fascism; the freedom to celebrate historical movements and figures that the college-educated elites condemn, including the Ku Klux Klan and the Confederacy; the freedom to ridicule and dismiss intellectuals, ideas, science and culture; the freedom to silence those who have been telling them how to behave; the freedom to revel in hypermasculinity, racism, sexism, violence and patriarchy.

These crypto-fascists have always been part of the American landscape, but the disenfranchisement of millions of Americans, especially white Americans, has inflamed these hatreds. Voting for the architects of what political philosopher [Sheldon Wolin calls](#) our system of “inverted totalitarianism” will not make them go away; in fact, it will further discredit liberal ideas and liberal democracy. This puts liberals in a terrible bind. They have every right to fear the far right. All the dark scenarios are correct. But by backing Biden and the ruling corporate party, they ensure their political irrelevance.

The Democratic Party has [spent](#) millions funding far-right “pied piper” candidates assuming they would be easier to defeat, a tactic foolishly copied from the Clinton campaign, which secretly “[elevated](#)” Trump in the hopes that he would win the Republican nomination. They have worked to censor critics from the left and the right on social media. They claim they are the last bulwark against tyranny. None of these subterfuges will work. America will descend into a [Viktor Orbán-type of authoritarianism](#) without profound political, social and economic reform.

After the Iraq war went sour, I, as someone who publicly opposed the invasion and had been the Middle East Bureau Chief for The New York Times, was often asked what we should do now. I answered that Iraq could no longer be put back together. It was broken. We broke it. Those who ask if we should support the Democrats as a tactic to halt our descent into tyranny are in a similar dilemma. My answer is no different. We should have walked out on the Democratic Party while we still had a chance.

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