



THE NEXT SYSTEM

A call for national discussion and debate

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**IT'S TIME TO FACE
THE DEPTH
OF THE
SYSTEMIC CRISIS
WE CONFRONT**

THENEXTSYSTEM.ORG

The following statement was developed with input from a small group of initial signatories whose names are included in the statement. They have been joined by many more—activists, policymakers, practitioners, business people, and scholars from across disciplines—in spelling out the systemic nature of the current crisis we face as a society and the urgent need to think in terms of systemic solutions.

It's time for everyone who cares about our troubled country to face the depth of the systemic crisis we now confront as a nation. We must step back from the daily fray and ask: How do we actually get on a path to the kind of society—and world—we'd like now and for future generations? We must begin a real conversation—locally, nationally, and at all levels in between—on how to respond to the profound challenge of our time in history.

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending,” Lincoln said, “we could better judge what to do.” Today’s answer to Lincoln’s charge is grim. If one looks at “where we are” among advanced democracies across more than a score of key indicators of national well-being—including relative poverty, inequality, education, social mobility, health, environment, militarization, democracy, and more—we find ourselves exactly where we don’t want to be: at or near the bottom.

The challenging realities of growing inequality, political stalemate, and climate disruption prompt an important insight. When big problems emerge across the entire spectrum of national life, it cannot be due to small reasons. When the old ways no longer produce the outcomes we are looking for, something deeper is occurring. We have fundamental problems because of fundamental flaws in our economic and political system. The crisis now unfolding in so many ways across our country amounts to a systemic crisis.

Today's political economic system is not programmed to secure the wellbeing of people, place and planet. Instead, its priorities are corporate profits, the growth of GDP, and the projection of national power. If we are to address the manifold challenges we face in a serious way, we need to think through and then build a new political economy that takes us beyond the current system that is failing all around us. However difficult the task, however long it may take, *systemic problems require systemic solutions*.

The social pain arising from the economic crisis, the steady unfolding of the climate calamity, and many other deeply troubling developments have made it possible to pose the question of large-scale system change in a serious fashion in the United States. Yet, despite this new space for a debate about fundamental change, challenges to the system have until recently been constrained by a continuing lack of imagination concerning social, economic and political alternatives. It is said that the existing system is the only possibility, one we must accept and work with—that, as Margaret Thatcher famously insisted, “There is no alternative.” But she had it wrong.

The good news is that the inability of traditional politics and policies to address fundamental challenges has fueled an extraordinary amount of experimentation in communities across the United States—and around the world. It has also generated an increasing number of sophisticated and thoughtful proposals for transformative change. Together these developments suggest that it is possible to build a new and better America beyond the failed systems of the past and present.

Indeed, new terms have begun to gain currency among diverse social movements and activist communities—an indication that the domination of traditional thinking has already started to weaken. Thus we encounter the sharing economy, the caring economy, the solidarity economy, the restorative economy, the regenerative economy, the sustaining economy, the resilient economy, and, of course, the new economy. There is talk of the need for a great transition. Several of these approaches already have significant networks and thoughtful research efforts underway. New thinking by creative scholars and members of the labor movement and community-oriented advocates is also contributing to the ferment.

It is time for Americans to think boldly about what is required to deal with the systemic difficulties facing the United States. It is time to explore genuine alternatives and new models—“the next system.” It is time to debate what it will take to move our country to a very different place, one where outcomes that are truly sustainable, equitable, and democratic are commonplace.

Those of us signing this statement are committed to working towards these ends.

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The Next System Project is an ambitious multi-year initiative aimed at helping Americans think boldly about what is required to deal with the systemic challenges the United States faces now and in coming decades. Responding to real hunger for a new way forward, and building on practical experience with new economic institutions and approaches being developed in communities across the country and around the world, we will use the best research, understanding and strategic thinking to refine and publicize comprehensive alternative political-economic models capable of delivering superior social, economic, and ecological outcomes and put the central idea of system change, and that there can be a “next system,” on the map. For more information, see <http://thenextsystem.org> or write to nextsystem@democracycollaborative.org



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