

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR TRANSCRIPT EP. 231

### CHRIS HEDGES

Steve Skrovan: From the KPFK studios in Southern California, it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host, David Feldman. How are you doing today, David?

David Feldman: I wish today's show was much longer. We need a lot more time for today's guest.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, we do and we will spend plenty of time. We're going to do a deep dive with also the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Um-hum. I couldn't say it better than David. This is going to be a very intensive and I hope galvanizing interview with Chris.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. We're all excited about today's show because our guest is one of the most perceptive and unsparing commentators on the social, political scene today. He pulls no punches. He calls out the powerful. His point of view is informed by his nearly 20 years on the ground as a war correspondent in Central America, Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans. He's witnessed and written about humanity at its worst. He also has a Masters in Divinity, which brings a spiritual dimension to his work. It also enables him to go toe to toe with any right-wing Christians who try to cherry-pick Bible verses by the way. I'm talking about Chris Hedges, a tremendously prolific author who has a new book out called "America: The Farewell Tour". And David I don't think this is not about the '70s soft-rock band. This is a little edgier to say the least.

We're looking forward to spending the bulk of the hours, Chris. In addition, we will get to the latest report about crime in the suites from our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. And if we have time left, we'll work our way through a listener question or two. But right now, let's buckle up people. It's going to be a bumpy ride. David?

David Feldman: Chris Hedges a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author who has written 11 books including "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning", which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction. Mr. Hedges is part of The New York Times team of reporters awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for coverage of global terrorism. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002. He writes a weekly column for the website Truthdig. And his latest book coming out on August 21st is entitled "America: The Farewell Tour". Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Chris Hedges.

Chris Hedges: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Indeed, welcome back, Chris. This book of yours is called "America: The Farewell Tour" and anybody who knows your prior books knows that you go to where you write about. You actually go to the tomato fields in Florida where there's the closest approximation to slave labor probably in the country. You've gone to Camden, New Jersey, incredible poverty of the once industrialized city. You've gone to Native American reservations to see the deprivation and dispossession. And so when I asked this first question, I'm not asking some armchair philosopher, but you call this book "America: The Farewell Tour". The great editor, Norman Cousins, once said, "Nobody's smart enough to be a pessimist." Your response.

Chris Hedges: Well, I don't think the collapse of empire is necessarily a negative. At this point, empire has become a deeply destructive force not only for our own country, but globally. We see with the endless warfare, 17 years of warfare now, in the Middle East, the inability on the part of the corporate state to deal in a rational way with climate change or restrict or control the financial institutions that have become completely predatory and are reconfiguring or already have reconfigured the United States into an oligarchy, where it becomes impossible to vote against the interests of Goldman Sachs, or Citibank, or Raytheon, or any of these other large corporations. So the decline of empire is not necessarily a negative. In fact I would argue the perpetuation of empire in the corporate state means that the human species is terminal.

Ralph Nader: Well, you won't be getting an argument from me on that. But when you were a war correspondent, I mean, you were really in the midst of battle here. You were at tremendous risk both in the Balkans, Central America, Middle East. You also covered the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. What was your most poignant experience on that? And you do it for The New York Times, by the way, listeners. This was not for some small publication.

Chris Hedges: Well I think the most poignant moments are those moments when people who were strangers . . . you know I can . . . for instance . . . I'd give a couple examples, reached out, saw me as another human being albeit one who came from a different culture and was a different skin color and risked themselves on my behalf. I mean, I'll just give one example. I was captured in the first Gulf War in

Basra during the Shiite uprising, was with a Light Armored Battalion for several days. There was quite a bit of fighting. Eventually turned over to the Iraqi secret police who are as murderous as their reputation says they are and held in a room without food or water for 24 hours and it was dawn in Baghdad. And at dawn, the women and children go up—the roofs are flat—to bake bread, and I speak Arabic. And I said I'm an American journalist. I'm a prisoner, I haven't eaten. And they gave loaves of bread to little boys to scamper across the roofs to give to me. So it's moments like that, I think, that are the most poignant when despite the risk, people assert their humanity and their compassion for the other. And that's . . . I've always found that deeply moving and seen it repeatedly and, of course, it transcends religion, ethnicity, and race. There are always people in every society willing to defy the oppressor and stand up on behalf of the oppressed and these are the people that I connect most with.

Ralph Nader: And the flipside of poignant brutality; you had an experience in the Israeli-Palestinian theater.

Chris Hedges: Well, yeah, I mean I cover . . . I mostly covered Gaza because I was based in Cairo and because of my Arabic, so, and also because, to be quite honest, The New York Times correspondents of the Jerusalem Bureau didn't really want to go to Gaza. And so . . . I mean one of the things I think that is just so mind-numbing is the way the Israelis lie. They lie like Trump. They will say what is diametrically opposite of what's actually happening on the ground. And I had done a story for Harper's Magazine, I'm just pulling one example with Joe Sacco, the great cartoonist, whose footnotes on Gaza is brilliant, brilliant, powerful book on the Palestine-Israel conflict. And we were in the refugee camp of Han Yunis

And we heard—this is when Jewish settlers were still there—from behind the fences we heard people yelling over the loudspeakers . . . Israeli soldiers yelling in Arabic, "Taal, taal," which means more, you know, all sorts of curse words, "Charobouta" this kind of stuff. And they were inciting these 10-year-old kids to throw rocks and the rocks couldn't barely reach the fence much less the armored jeep. And they stepped out of the jeep and shot them with live rounds. And that was a daily occurrence. So when you witness things like that, it changes your perception of empire. You understand how evil empire is. Of course I covered the wars in Central America, and El Salvador, and Nicaragua and that's why I'm so unforgiving to figures like Barack Obama who are the instruments of empire. I can't . . . it's not a distraction for me.

Ralph Nader: Just very briefly elaborate that, Barack Obama and Honduras.

Chris Hedges: Well, I mean, Barack Obama and Honduras, so, I mean, he installs one of the most murderous governments in Central America. He expands the militarized drone attacks. He reinterprets the 2002 authorization to use Military Force Act as giving the executive branch the right to assassinate American citizens, and in the case of Anwar Al-Awiaki, in Yemen, his 16-year-old son. The expansion of industrial violence, so of course, the disaster that is Libya was cramped up in Hillary Clinton's State

Department and promoted by the Obama White House. So I think when you spend as long as I did on the outer reaches of empire, you have a window into the darkness of empire. And when you come back, you look at those who are the architects of empire in a different way.

You just can't . . . you know this is my problem with Bernie Sanders... you can't be a socialist unless you're anti-imperialist, but I think because of the propaganda—and I include the media, but certainly Hollywood and everything else—very, very few people unless they've been there—have a good sense of the evil that is done around the globe in our name.

Ralph Nader: Well, you've always been very historically contexted. In other words, you don't just describe something now without showing the historical context. For example, Trump just didn't come onto this country out of a UFO or out of some gambling casino that failed in Atlantic City. The predicates for Trump were laid by Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barrack Obama... whether it's empire, military attacks violating the constitution, harassment of women with Clinton. All these just built a receptivity among an altogether too passive electorate that made the Electoral College select Donald Trump. He lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by over three million, but the Electoral College put him in office, something he doesn't want people to be reminded of. Let's go to your book, Chris. And this book . . . and I want to say this because it really is a manifestation of your talents as a writer.

You almost never write the same book. It's always new. It's historically new. It's new in terms of your trips, your observations, the approach you take, and why you've written books, for example, condemning the liberal class and its disastrous foray into corporatism at the expense of the American people. And you've written books documenting horrific poverty with photographs in this country. In this book, I was impressed by the angles that you took. And by the way listeners, do not look at this book online. Do not read this online. You want to read it holding it so you can experience the physical sensation of both trembling with anger and also with excitement about uncovering what you didn't think was the case and what you have to do about it. And so just let me go through the table of contents that I'm going to have you run through. Now the title of the book is "America: The Farewell Tour" by Chris Hedges, and he has seven titles to chapters. The first one is "Decay". The second one is "Heroin". The third one is "Work". The fourth one is "Sadism". The fifth one is "Hate". The sixth one is "Gambling". And the seventh chapter title is "Freedom". Now before you think he's just blaming people who get themselves addicted, who engage in hate practices, that's the difference between Chris and other writers. He never lets us forget the corporate supremacists, the corporate imperialists, the military industrial complex, and the way corporations control people's lives and throw them into hopelessness and deprivation, which they then often turn on themselves and their families. Let's start with "Decay". What do the listeners need to know about Chapter 1 on decay?

Chris Hedges: Well "Decay", which I began in an old, now abandoned lace factory, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, which at one point employed thousands of people and . . . is just a symbol of what happened when...in this process of de-industrializing the country, but of course as you point out, what

I'm most interested in is what it's done to people—what it's done to their lives, what it's done to families, what it's done to communities—and this tail-end of the de-industrialization process, which is writ large now across the United States, has very traumatic personal consequences for the public. And if there's a kind of theme throughout the book, it is chronicling, writing about, and reporting about these consequences...what this rise of a corporate oligarchy and the death of democratic institutions means personally for people.

In every book that I've written has a kind of model. When I wrote that book with Joe Sacco, “Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt”, the model was “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men” by James Agee with photographs by Walker Evans. This book was really kind of born out of the sociologist Emile Durkheim's book on suicide, where in the end of the 19th century, he studied suicides throughout France and talked about—he uses the word “anomie”—but talks about the kind of despair that when people have a sense of worthlessness, when the society no longer values them, when they are stripped of their dignity, there is a propensity to self-destructive behavior. And . . .

Ralph Nader: And the jobs, of course.

Chris Hedges: In jobs, of course, and that's why there's a chapter on work. Work is absolutely vital. And I quote from—I'm not a huge fan of John Paul II—but he had a beautiful encyclical on work. And people should read it, because it's more radical than the people's budget by a progressive Pac that just came out for 2019. And work is much more than the selling of your labor for wages. And the loss of it or the loss of meaningful work, the loss of the ability to earn a sustainable income has deep psychological and emotional ramifications. And the longer that kind of assault continues, the more the pathologies of dysfunction manifest themselves within the culture. And . . .

Ralph Nader: Which is what we're going to get to in your book.

Chris Hedges: And so I begin with the decay . . .

Ralph Nader: You also show the backlash against the mobilization of the people in the 1960's on civil rights, women's rights, anti-war, and you cite Harvard Political Scientist Samuel P. Huntington. What's that about? Excess of democracy he charges.

Chris Hedges: Well, and you were one of the prime targets in that whole campaign, but it was the rise of popular movements, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the consumer rights movement that you led. And you know all of these movements terrified the power elites and they organized, especially in 1971 around The Powell Memo, to mount the highly funded, well-concerted campaign that

would seize, and I think they have successfully seized, most institutions where there could be real debate and thought at the universities, the press, and that is what Huntington, as you correctly point out, called the excess of democracy. That excess of democracy was shut down quite effectively. And those who held fast, people such as yourself or Sheldon Wolin, probably our most important contemporary political philosopher, were really shunted aside. Blacklisted would not be too strong a word. When I worked at The New York Times, Abe Rosenthal, the editor, he had actually just left when I arrived. But Abe Rosenthal had—there was a kind of unwritten rule—that Noam Chomsky, certainly one of the most important intellectuals in the country, his name was just not going to appear in The New York Times at all. And . . .

Ralph Nader: In my experience, A. M. Rosenthal, as the Washington Bureau reporters would tell me, when he took over the helm of The New York Times, that they would send up stories about our exposes, about our testimony, about our litigation. And he basically took them off the table and . . .

Chris Hedges: Well, yeah, because . . .

Ralph Nader: and didn't print 'em in The Times. And then, you know, when The Times doesn't cover the consumer and environmental movements with the advent of A.M. Rosenthal, then the network televisions don't, the The Washington Post doesn't cover because they all look at The Times for, you know, what's hot, what's newsworthy.

Chris Hedges: Right. Well remember, Rosenthal bought into that whole neo-liberal - and he had first of all, Rosenthal and the publisher, Sulzberger, every...almost every week, were having lunch with William F. Buckley who was kind of the eminence grise at The New York Times. So that space . . . I mean, The New York Times, there's always . . . and even more so is an elitist publication. But the space for reporting on issues that corporate advertisers didn't want reported on was shut down and remains pretty much shut down. So that assault was quite effective in distorting the society and pushing through this utopian ideology of neo-liberal economics. I know neo-liberal is not a word you like, but . . .

Ralph Nader: Well, neo-liberal, listeners, is really not a very clear word to describe global corporatization and empire and increasing corporate welfare and decreasing the social safety net That was the Washington Consensus, which they imposed on a lot of Third World countries. But, you know, in this chapter on decay, Chris Hedges, you know, you can't really do justice to listeners, but he talks about climate disruption in ways you probably have not read including how the national security state even is worrying about it, talks about what's happened to cities like Scranton, Pennsylvania. He talks about things that weave an understanding by people of what's going on. People don't really know the specifics of how they're controlled. It's not enough for them to know that the big boys run the show and if you control the many.

It's when they realize how their credit is manipulated and invaded is when they realize how their children are induced into obesity by direct advertising, electronic child molesters getting them to, you know, harass their parents to eat more junk food and junk drink if indeed they have to even persuade them. It's the way people lose their jobs due to decisions made in some skyscraper in London or Chicago or New York that gets people more motivated. And so let's go to the "Heroin" chapter. What's that all about?

Chris Hedges: Well, the two cases that I follow, both of them begin with pills. They began with prescriptions, OxyContin, these kinds of powerful heroin derivatives that have made the Sackler family immensely wealthy, Purdue Pharma. And it's an old story now. There was a good book on it, "Dreamland", where he followed this . . . where these pills cost money, a lot of money. Heroin is cheap and it's a gateway into this epidemic of heroin and, of course, overdoses because they put fentanyl in it. And I think one of the things that I found, and this was true in the "Gambling" chapter and everything else, is that there reaches a saturation point in which this despair pushes people to find ways to anesthetize themselves to essentially stop feeling, to become numb. And, of course, it often, especially with opioids will take their life.

Ralph Nader: And, you know, these opioid manufacturers like Purdue Pharmaceuticals putting in the full page ads now in The New York Times saying they're really concerned about it. They were given their sales quotas and bonuses for pushing these deadly drugs for, in effect making money by the extent of addiction that was spreading in the country you described in really human terms naming names of these poor people.

Chris Hedges: Well, they also . . . it was also false advertising and they said that this stuff was not addictive—that you could take the OxyContin and it didn't have the addictive qualities of morphine or other narcotics is completely untrue.

Ralph Nader: Not only that. It . . . this is not a supposition, listeners. Already there've been a number of states, New York State just recently . . . they're filing lawsuits, massive damage lawsuits against Purdue Pharmaceuticals and other companies pushing these deadly drugs on people and not taking care of how they're being distributed and down the line who takes control and pushes them even further. You know, you open this heroin chapter, Chris Hedges, with a long quote from David Foster Wallace in the book, "Infinite Jest", is just breathtaking. Where did you get all these quotes? How many books do you read a year?

Chris Hedges: Not as many as Cornell West. But I don't have a TV. I don't . . . I don't know what you're doing Ralph, so I read every night.

Ralph Nader: So let's . . . what's the thrust of heroin . . . your chapter on heroin before we get into the chapter on work?

Chris Hedges: Well, that it's a product of an irresponsible corporate culture that has addicted huge swathes of the American public unwittingly. And that the . . . kind of... it's very hard to break free from heroin because of the chemical composition of heroin. It doesn't wash out of your body. And so that people can withdraw from the drug and yet still get dope sick, you know, have feelings of withdrawal. It's a brutal narcotic.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, that's interesting in your chapter, and our listeners should know that Chris Hedges helps with Alcoholics Anonymous. That's a terrible drug obviously and it kills thousands of people a year. The opioids, by the way, are number two after the leading addiction of smoking cigarettes. They kill over a thousand Americans a week and it's growing, and a lot of them are young with huge years of productive life ahead of them. But you also . . . you do mention that and you . . . you've worked with prison inmates in New Jersey. I mean, you're a hands-on person and you have a spiritual side to you. But someone listening to you may say, "What about all these people—shouldn't they know better? Why are they addicting themselves?"

And what's your answer to that in terms of corporate seduction or any other explanation for not pinning more responsibility on these people especially since they know their friends are dying and getting sick?

Chris Hedges: Most or, you know, huge percentage these people don't start with heroin. They start with pills that are prescribed by their doctor or you know, they set up these pill-mill factories where people . . . doctors would just sit there and get rich seeing patient after patient, writing prescription after prescription. And once you're on it is just very, very hard to shake it. It's a life-long battle in the same way that, you know, one is in recovery from alcoholism their whole life. So, you know, the epidemic of heroin addictions . . . the biggest drug dealer in the country is Purdue Pharma. And the biggest drug pushers in the country, the Sackler family. And . . .

Ralph Nader: And the marketers.

Chris Hedges: Well, yeah.

Ralph Nader: Including some physicians.

Chris Hedges: They manage to hire many physicians to do their dirty work for them. Of course they would invite physicians down for conferences at resorts in Florida and pay for lavish meals and, you know, the collusion of the medical community that decided that money was more important health.

Ralph Nader: Let me ask you this. There'd be some people who do resist seduction and deception by these drug manufacturers like Purdue. They may be members of churches that help them resist even though they have the same economic deprivations and the same personal horrors that you describe in your book. What about that? I mean people who may be members of the Christian Science Church, people who are members of tight communities that resisted this, any comments on that?

Chris Hedges: Well, the phrase that . . . the important phrase is tight community because one of the things that has happened with modern technology is the atomization of the society so that you know more about the Kardashians than you do about your next-door neighbor. You are spending your life alone in front of a screen finding "Friends on Facebook" and this is . . . this atomization, this destruction of community, has wiped out the traditional kinds of support and sense of solidarity; ability to find among others the compassion that all of us need in moments of our lives when we're going through difficult periods. And that's just the way the corporate state wants it. That's by design. And I think that one of the things that you see throughout the book is what corporate capitalism has done quite consciously to community.

And we know from consumer society that the idea is to engender anxiety, feelings of self-abasement or the fact that, you know, we don't . . . we're not quite the way we should be and then, of course, they sell us products and experiences that never solve the problem. It just becomes the kind of stepping stone to selling us new products and experiences. And that's all . . .

Ralph Nader: Yeah. People talk . . . people talk about Trump and his lies and fake news. Madison Avenue long preceded Trump in terms of fake and often extremely harmful advertising. Look at the tobacco companies seducing young kids years ago before they were exposed.

Chris Hedges: And when we . . . and when we talk about life, let's look at Bill Clinton. I mean, go back and read what Clinton promised when he passed NAFTA, or what he promised when he destroyed Glass-Steagall, or what he promised when he destroyed our welfare system (70% of the original recipients of welfare under the old system were children.), or what he promised when he deregulated the FCC. They're slicker and, you know, Trump is vulgar and crude. Our society is utterly awash in lies, but we have been for a long time, and Madison Avenue works on behalf of political dynasties like the Clintons.

Ralph Nader: And of course, your point on individuation being a consumer marketing strategy by these corporations. The last thing they want is to see consumers organized into coops, organized into mutual economic protection associations, organized into trade unions. That's why their puppets in Congress are always trying to break up the consumer and community movements and the courts go along with it. Hang in there, listeners, we're going to get eventually to my 1% approach on how to turn this around, how to first capture the Congress. In your chapter on work, you start with the story of Dale Gustafson in Rockford, Illinois. Tell us about him.

Chris Hedges: Well, suicide . . . the highest percentage of people who commit suicide in the country are middle-aged white men. But I found and I had gone through bereavement groups and actually gotten families who were willing to speak and then at the last minute most of them didn't. But it was an example of when a society cast you aside, says that you have no worth to them in terms of your ability to contribute through work. How devastating that is and why people would take their lives, even people with families. He had, of course, children. So I think that the James Baldwin writes at one point that the reason that suicide rates are higher among white middle-aged men as opposed to black middle-aged men is because white middle-aged men believe in the American dream, believe that . . . or are more susceptible to the myth of the American dream.

And I think there's probably some truth to that. And now we have seen are working class, I think awake to the fact that they will never achieve economically or socially what their parents achieved and what's even worse is they know their children—and I interview kids in the book who are early 20s who are working low wage, menial jobs—are just trapped. There's no way out. So I think that that is one of the cruelest manifestations of corporate capitalism where you create a trained elite of people who go to Princeton and then go to Goldman Sachs. And then you walk into marginal communities and with dysfunctional schools and you give them enough numerical literacy to work at a fast-food store or Walmart or something.

Ralph Nader: You know, the Democratic Party had a great opportunity to represent millions of dispossessed, unemployed workers due to export of U.S. industry to the Third World, fascist or communist regimes. And they blew it, because they wanted to raise more money from the commercial interests, including Wall Street. They blew it and in the process, they blew the country apart, because they didn't landslide the worst Republican Party in history. They allowed the reverse to happen at the state legislature, governor, Congress, the courts, and the White House. I noticed in your chapter on work, you had a marvelous few pages about a common hero of ours, Eugene Debs.

Chris Hedges: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: You had visited in Terre Haute, Indiana, his home, which is now a little museum as I did years ago. Most people listening know about Eugene Debs, because he's in the history you know, his

life's work is very briefly alluded to in school history books. But tell us about this outstanding labor leader.

Chris Hedges: Well, Debs never lost faith and he never sold out. Eugene V. Debs would have never stood up at the Democratic National Committee and endorsed Hillary Clinton. Debs was a fierce anti-militarist, anti-imperialist. Indeed Wilson imprisoned him for denouncing World War I and the draft and he just wouldn't compromise and he was a powerful force. One point, I think was the elections of 1912? - well I can't remember –

Ralph Nader: Twelve.

Chris Hedges: Right, where he pulled nearly a million votes (6% of the popular vote).

Ralph Nader: While h was in prison.

Chris Hedges: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: He spoke out against World War I and Woodrow Wilson's Attorney General prosecuted him.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. And he was eloquent and powerful...it was interesting that certainly a socialist but deeply rooted in the Bible and he was, starting with a Pullman Porter Strike, he was a major figure, and the power elites were terrified of him.

Ralph Nader: Give some idea of how large these crowds were when he addressed them in open field.

Chris Hedges: Ten thousand people. Huge, filling Madison Square Garden.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. One of them and Chicago was over a hundred thousand.

Chris Hedges: Was it?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. So you alluded to someone who endorsed Hillary Clinton at the Democratic National Convention and obviously that was Bernie Sanders. You wrote a very critical piece in Truthdig where you have a weekly column, which I would advise our listeners to read every week, and it's called "Et Tu, Bernie?" Now Bernie is the most progressive politician, probably . . . certainly among the most progressive politicians in the Congress, but you go after him. Why?

Chris Hedges: Because he funnels all of that energy and money back into the Democratic Party, which is why they tolerate him. And his "Political Revolution" was as real as Obama's campaign slogan of "Hope and Change". It was . . . you know as soon as the election was over, everything disintegrated. It was all about his campaign. And we're not going to rid ourselves of corporate tyranny in one election cycle and we're not going to do it through the Democratic Party.

Ralph Nader: What if someone could say, Well, that's his tactic from the inside of trying to push the Democratic Party toward the program that he campaigned on and got tens of millions of votes in the 2016 election, and he would have beat Hillary if it wasn't for the Democratic national shenanigans.

Chris Hedges: But that's the point. The primary elections were stolen from him. They outright stole the Nevada Caucus. You had, what is it, 718 super-delegates who are all lobbyists and party officials who were committed to the Clinton campaign before anyone even cast a vote.

Ralph Nader: Well, if the super-delegates didn't have to be elected...

Chris Hedges: Yeah. They are not elected. They're appointed by the party and the DNC chair is appointed from the super-delegates, which is how we get Paris. You had the DNC committee being run on behalf of the Clinton campaign, we know from Donna Brazile. You had independent voters being banned from voting in the primaries. Although as you have pointed out the primaries are paid for by the taxpayer because young kids don't register Democrat, and so shut out. You had, of course, all of the dark money that came into the Clinton campaign. It was a completely fixed process. And I think that Bernie clearly wants to run again, but he isn't going to find the same kind of enthusiasm that he had before, because he has allowed himself to be Chuck Schumer's puppet.

And I don't know whether he's naïve. I don't know whether he's just . . . he doesn't want to lose the seniority that he has within the Democratic Party and, you know, Schumer has promised him committee chairmanships if they retake the Senate, but he's been endorsing the worst corporate lackeys, Democratic lackeys were running for Congress. I think it's extremely shortsighted. I think he missed his historical moment at the Democratic National Convention when he didn't walk out in Philadelphia. But I think that kind of . . . is . . . he's always had a working relationship with the Democratic Party. People

forget that he went out and campaigned for Clinton and not just when Clinton first ran, but after Clinton had shoved NAFTA down the throat of . . .

Ralph Nader: It seems to me he underestimated the decadence of the entrenched apparatchiks that controlled the Democratic Party in Washington, because he thought coming in after the selection of Trump with tens of millions of votes that he got for his candidacy, he would have much greater leverage inside the party, and that was a mistake.

Chris Hedges: Well, we've seen the opposite. They purged all of his people. And I think that we have to remember that, you know, figures like Pelosi and Schumer, they are creations of Wall Street. Without Wall Street money, they wouldn't hold power. And I think that however rattled and broken the ship of state is, they're just not about to give up their first-class cabins. They'd rather bring it down because in an open process without corporate money, in a truly democratic process, they wouldn't hold power.

Ralph Nader: That's for sure. The next chapter is Sadism. In fact, this precedes the chapter on Hate. You want to run through that for our listeners.

Chris Hedges: Well, I spent a lot of time with hate . . . you know, white supremacist hate groups, the alt-right Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, because this is what happens in dysfunctional societies. You have a legitimate rage, and then it gets channeled towards the demonized, in this case, undocumented workers, Muslims. And I watched the same thing in Yugoslavia. You can go back and . . . you saw the same thing in Weimar. I mean people forget that before the economic crash of 1929, the Nazi Party was pulling single digits...7%, 8%. And then after the crash, you had a left-wing socialist government under Ebert who imposed the equivalent of modern austerity measures. I mean, they even canceled unemployment insurance. And so the rage at the system, and this is kind of Trump's ability to garner support, is that at least he expresses the rage.

He belittles the figures like Jeb Bush, and Mitt Romney, and others, the Clintons, who have sold people out. And societies that seize up that are captured by a cabal whether it's communist, fascist, monarchists, or corporates. And this cabal redirects all of the systems of government towards enriching and empowering itself. It, in essence, creates paralysis. The system doesn't function on behalf of the citizenry. In fact, the citizenry are stripped of all power and the oppression just steadily becomes worse and worse and worse, which we've seen with the loss of privacy, and wholesale surveillance, militarized police, etcetera. So that engenders the kind of rage and then there are always these forces that quite effectively channel that rage towards the weak and the vulnerable as if undocumented workers are responsible for the deindustrialization and economic collapse of the United States. And of course the veneration of the military, which as...

Ralph Nader: Veneration you say?

Chris Hedges: Veneration, yeah. I mean, the . . .

Ralph Nader: Of the voluntary army?

Chris Hedges: Well, the veneration of the military establishment, "military virtues" and the . . . at this point, the . . . what is hollowing this country out from the inside is an uncontrolled military budget and this is also characteristic of the death of empires. The Roman Empire was trying to run a million man army at the end and couldn't. So that's characteristic of societies in decay always.

Ralph Nader: Another characteristic of decay is your next chapter titled "Gambling". Senator Lowell Weicker, when he was supposing state-sponsored gambling, once said, "I want a society that builds a future not bets on the future." I've always thought the spread of organized gambling in this country out of Las Vegas and now just about everywhere and here—you got video gambling coming on—is a real sign of decay.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. Well, because people tout it as a form of economic development. It's insane. As you strip the ability of states to bring in tax revenue, they see gambling as an alternative. You know this is why all these states are running lotteries, but it really is just the kind of stealth tax on the poor, desperate people who are about to be foreclosed or lost their job or are not earning a sustainable income and then also you know it caters to . . . it functions as a drug, as I point out in that chapter, and the most gambling now is on slots and you will fall into a kind of zombie-like state in front of the slot machines which are very carefully designed. They call it time-on-device, to keep you there for hours. And as I write about . . . and people . . . I think the highest rate of attempted suicide or among gamblers who can't break free and people lose their homes, their jobs, their marriages.

It's a very dangerous activity and it's one that is now essentially backed by both the federal and local government where . . .

Ralph Nader: Imagine Detroit, Michigan and Springfield, MA touting economic development by bringing casinos...casinos into their city which brings a lot of other bad stuff with it, but on the other side, we have to use BusinessWeek's phrase, "Casino capitalism in Wall Street", using other people's money, trillions of dollars for speculative activities enriching the brokers, and the bankers, and other speculators. And even when the economy crashed in 2008 with 8 million lost jobs and trillions of dollars lost in pension funds and mutual funds, the corporatists went to Washington and made U.S. taxpayers bail them out. So there's two kinds of gambling here. Your last indicates a title of hope, shall we say. It's

a chapter on “Freedom”—how do we fight back; how do we take control of our Congress, which is a good lever to control other autocratic institutions for a more vibrant productive democracy.

Chris Hedges: Well, I think all resistance is local. I think we have to rebuild from the ground up. We have to build, in essence, parallel structures that protect our communities from the environmental assault, from the financial assault, that means sustainable agriculture breaking free from the tentacles of corporate power. And corporate power, of course, is everywhere. Breaking free from the tentacles of the consumer society, rebuilding community and the only way we're going to do that is face-to-face. It's never going to be done through a computer screen. It's never going to be done electronically. And I write about this amazing group of young people in their early 20s who've created in a very poor section of Anderson, Indiana—the two leaders of the group, a husband and the wife came out of the Catholic Worker movement, but they create a space at night.

With no money, they bought an old warehouse for \$20,000 and converted into a place where they built eight bedrooms. But people read their poetry. People begin to become more than the minimum-wage job, the mind-numbing minimum-wage job that they've been slotted into. And I think that we almost have to begin from scratch. We have to begin, you know, within our own communities. We have to shut off electronic devices. I know you agree with me on this.

Ralph Nader: We can't be too local. We have to grab Congress and bring it down to the local areas . . .

Chris Hedges: Well, sure, but that . . .

Ralph Nader: . . . where people live, work, and raise their families.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. But that . . .

Ralph Nader: . . . that control Congress. So it . . .

Chris Hedges: Right, but that . . . yeah.

Ralph Nader: You know, sometimes, a lot of these movements at the local level, stay local. And they don't seem to quite appreciate it. Their efforts are limited because all the power and money in Congress, which is bought and sold, is not being civilized—to use the generic word—and being taken away from its

corporate tentacles that control Capitol Hill. In your chapter on freedom, you devote some pages to one of the greatest and pragmatic theorists of neighborhood community organizing. And he's written on this, tell us about Mr. Deacon.

Chris Hedges: Right, So he comes out of the old Saul Alinsky Institute that the Industrial Areas Foundation has been organizing for decades and has done amazing work. And as you said, you have to pit power against power that you build . . . and I'm in full agreement with you in terms of Congress, but we have to build bases of power locally in order to retake Congress. And he . . . I think he . . . there's a quote in there Alinsky used to use, "There's no permanent allies, only permanent power." We have to talk to people who . . . we can't demonize the 'deplorables.' We have to talk to people whose political viewpoints may even be repugnant to us. But I think as you have often pointed out, which is true, if you walk into a Walmart and say we're organizing for \$15 minimum-wage, you're still going to have Trump supporters that are going to back you.

Ralph Nader: Of course.

Chris Hedges: And I think that that's right. I think . . . when I wrote my book, *The Christian Right*, which I spent two years on American Fascists, I came to the conclusion that the only way to blunt this form of magical thinking . . . and by the way, this very frightening Christian fascism, this ideology, is filling the ideological vacuum of the Trump White House perpetuated by Mike Pence. These people have systems of indoctrination including schools and broadcasting. They have mega churches . . .

Ralph Nader: And law schools.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. Laws . . . like liberty and . . . yeah. So they organized when we didn't and they're very, very frightening. I don't . . . did not use the word fascism lightly. But I came to the conclusion that we would only break the movement by re-integrating these people back into the economy.

Ralph Nader: Not only that, but you don't just see commercialism as short-range profiteering, gouging. You see it in a Titanic struggle against historic spiritual religious and civic values. And it's the subordination of these latter values by giant corporatism that is producing the coarseness, the divide and rule, the desperation, the turning on oneself. And I really love the way you end this book. On page 310, readers, he quotes, after talking about the theologian Paul Tillich and Kierkegaard defining sin as an estrangement. And Tillich said, "It's our deepest existential dilemma. Sin was our separation from the forces that give us ultimate meaning and purpose in life. This separation fosters the alienation, anxiety, meaningless, and despair that are preyed upon by mass culture." We're talking to Chris Hedges, author of the brand new book, *America: The Farewell Tour*, produced by Simon & Schuster and the great editor, Bob Bender. And hear are your words, "Resistance is not only about battling the forces of

darkness. It is about becoming a complete human being. It is about overcoming estrangement. It is about our neighbor. It is about honoring the sacred. It is about dignity. It is about sacrifice. It is about courage. It is about freedom. It is about the capacity to love. Resistance must become our vocation." Chris Hedges. Steve, David, any final questions or comments?

David Feldman: Well, I know that Martin Luther King often said that segregation was a sin theologically. Can you talk to me about consumerism among liberals? I'm stunned by the consumerism of progressive liberals and we're approaching one trillion dollars in credit-card debt. Those are pre-crash levels. How do people listening decide what exactly they need and what they don't need? How do we tell people it's not whether or not you can afford this; it's whether or not you approve of this, to just to stop buying things?

Chris Hedges: Well, it gets back to the spiritual impoverishment within the country, where corporations, which have engineered the spiritual impoverishment because it's good, just good for profit. You sell people experiences and items that are somehow going to make them feel loved, complete, wanted, important, give them status. And I, you know, I look back at my time in divinity school. We were taught biblically the danger of worshipping the Golden Calf. Worshipping idols was not only that it called for the sacrifice of others, but in the end idols always demanded that you sacrifice yourself--that there always came a point when you would get trotted out on the altar and sacrificed. And that's the real danger of idolatry and we are an idolatrous culture in that sense.

Trump is a manifestation of all of the sick kinds of pathologies that we worship. You see it on any reality television show—celebrity incapacity for remorse or empathy, a penchant for manipulation, dishonesty—because wealth is its own virtue. It doesn't matter how you get it as long as you get it. And, you know, Trump is in a kind of very frightening way, us. I speak collectively as a society. So severing yourself from the sacred, severing yourself or lacking the understanding that there are living things and entities that have an intrinsic value beyond a monetary value. When you commodify everything including the natural world, as Karl Polanyi pointed out, then you exploit it until exhaustion or collapse and that's precisely what's happening.

And I think that as Ralph correctly pointed out, running throughout this book is a kind of understanding that part of the deep malaise of American society is a severance from the sacred, a lack of . . . and I don't . . . I don't speak in an Orthodox way, but a lack of, kind of a religious impulse that can come in secular form. But it means connecting with the non-rational forces—beauty, truth, the search for meaning, the struggle for our own mortality—all the things that go into making a complete life. And if you don't get it, you're a stunted, in many ways, kind of deformed human beings. And creation of stunted, deformed human beings is good for corporate profit and corporate power, but very bad for us.

Ralph Nader: I put it another way with the same spirit. You know when you're in sports, the coach says, "Believe in yourself." And when you're in music and the arts, your tutor, your teacher says, "Believe in yourself." We have to say to the American people, "Believe in yourself as citizens; you're the sovereign." As I've said many times, the Constitution starts with "We the people," not "We, the Congress," not "We the corporation." You're the sovereign and you've given up the power to the few so they dominate you and you've got to get it back and it's pretty good. You got the Constitution on your side. That's the pretty good start. Thank you very much, Chris Hedges. Unfortunately, we're out of time, but for those of you who want more Chris Hedges, the book called "American: The Farewell Tour", is just out and Chris is going to be speaking at various colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. And you can get his weekly column from the online magazine Truthdig. Thank you very much, Chris Hedges.

Chris Hedges: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking to journalist and author Chris Hedges. His new book is "America: The Farewell Tour". We will link to that and other work by Chris Hedges at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Ralph, you used to be known as a consumer advocate asking Americans to pay attention to what they consume. You're not really known anymore as a consumer advocate. We've stopped paying attention to what we consume--your original vision.

Ralph Nader: Well, the original approach was consumers should be informed and mobilized, so they buy what they need and want and they don't buy fraudulent and deceptive and harmful products. And when we took that effort up to the overriding issue of corporate power in America, the mass media lost interest. So as long as we're talking about recalling defective cars or fat and frankfurters, they would report it. But then they lost interest when we went to more fundamental transformations of our political economy.

David Feldman: Yeah. It's what we consume on a daily basis I'm fighting with so many people right now about. You don't need this. Stop. Stop buying things. We . . . you don't need this. And . . . anyway.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. I once worked with the Random House author on a school kit for middle schools that was called "To Buy or Not to Buy."

David Feldman: And what happens to the economy? Two-thirds of what we buy is our GDP. So what happens if we become smarter consumers? Does that tank the economy or turn our economy into a tank that can't be destroyed?

Ralph Nader: Well, if we have a labor movement, people can get a living wage to begin with, so that if you shrink some of the harmful industries like the tobacco industry or the credit-life insurance industry or other deceptive, harmful, useless industries, and you rationalize the taxes when you're going to have quite a few unemployed people, so you have to have a conversion process. And when people save money because they're smart consumers, they're not going to have much problem figuring out how much they should save for their future budget needs, which now is not enough and what other good things they can buy that they haven't been able to buy because they spent money on stuff that was gouging them.

Steve Skrovan: Let's take a short break and check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter Russell Mokhiber. You're listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Back in exactly one minute.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Thursday, August 16, 2018. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Google wants to know where you go so badly that it records your movements even when you explicitly tell it not to. An Associated Press Investigation found that many Google services on Android devices and iPhones store your location data even if you've used a privacy setting that says it will prevent Google from doing so. For the most part, Google is upfront about asking permission to use your location information. An app like Google Maps will remind you to allow access to location if you use it for navigation. Google will let you pause the setting called location history.

Google support page says you can turn off location history at any time. "With location history off, the places you go are no longer safe," Google says. But the Associated Press reports that isn't true. Even with location history paused, some Google apps automatically store time-stamped location data without asking. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Well that's our show. For those of you listening on the radio, we're going to cut out now. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call the wrap-up.

David Feldman: For Ralph Nader's weekly column, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

Steve Skrovan: Visit the American Museum of Tort Law and go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org) and check out the Tort Museum Bookstore from Grossing Books and Memorabilia.

David Feldman: The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marin. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music Stand Up, Rise Up was written and performed by Kemp Harris.

David Feldman: Join us next week when we welcome Jack Luzkow, author of “Monopoly Restored - How the Super-Rich Robbed Main Street” and Constitutional Law Professor Corey Brettschneider who is going to tell us what presidents should know about the Constitution. Thanks, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, listeners, mobilized. It's going to be an exciting fall before the November election. Let's look for a justice wave.