

O P I N I O N



Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

After reading Liam Hughes' commentary entitled "What's a little rain?" it is obvious to me that he did not experience the Columbus Day storm in 1962.

I don't think he realized that the October 15, 2016, storm was predicted to have nearly the same intensity. Those of us in western Oregon were encouraged by the press, public agencies, and law enforcement to avoid

travel and to stay home and prepare for potentially long power outages and wind damage. I think that played a huge role in the empty stands at the OSU football game he attended.

It seems it was an example of intelligent people following the advice given them rather than a bunch of "weenies" being afraid to come out in the rain.

Joan Wood

Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 59/32	Sunny 60/37	Chance rain 58/36	Partly sunny 56/36	Chance rain 56/38	Chance rain 57/na

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Robert B. Reich

American Voices

The parallels are striking. In the last decades of the 19th century—the so-called “Gilded Age”—America experienced inequality on a scale it had never before seen, combining wild opulence and searing poverty.

American industry consolidated into a few giant monopolies, or trusts, headed by “robber barons” who wielded enough power to drive out competitors. A few Wall Street titans such as J.P. Morgan controlled the nation's finances.

These men used their huge wealth to rig the system. Their lackeys literally deposited stacks of money on the desks of pliant legislators, prompting the great jurist Louis Brandeis to tell America it had a choice: “We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.”

We face a similar choice today.

Then, America chose democracy. President Theodore Roosevelt, railing against the “malefactors of great wealth,” broke up the trusts. And he pushed Congress to end the most blatant forms of corruption.

His fifth cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, went further—enacting social insurance for the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled; a minimum wage and 40-hour work-week; the right to unionize; compensation for workers injured on the job; and strict limits on Wall Street.

In other words, between 1870 and 1900, American capitalism got off track. Between 1901 and 1937 (the effective end of the New Deal), America put capitalism back on track.

We're now in the Second Gilded Age, and American capitalism is again off track. Inequality is now nearly at the same level it was in the late 19th century. Half of all families are poorer today than they were a decade-and-a-half ago. The pay of CEOs and Wall Street bankers is in the stratosphere. Child poverty is on the rise. Meanwhile, American industry is once again consolidating — this time, into oligopolies dominated by three or four major players. You can see it in pharmaceuticals, high-tech, airlines, food, Internet

service, communications, health insurance and finance.

The biggest Wall Street banks, having brought the nation to the brink of destruction a few years ago, are once again exercising vast economic power. And big money has taken over American politics.

Will we put capitalism back on track, as we did before?

The vile election of 2016 doesn't seem to offer much hope. But future historians looking back on the tumult might see the start of another era of fundamental reform.

Today's uprising against the established order echoes the outrage average Americans felt in the late 19th century when they pushed Congress to enact the Sherman Antitrust Act, and when Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan fulminated against big business and finance.

Some 120 years later, Bernie Sanders — the unlikeliest of presidential candidates — won 22 states and 46 percent of the pledged delegates in the Democratic primaries, and pushed Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party to adopt many of his proposals.

At the same time, Donald Trump, a faux populist, has laid bare the deep discontents of America's white working class, which both parties have long neglected. Not incidentally, Trump has also jeopardized the social fabric of America and nearly destroyed the Republican Party.

Hopefully some of America's current elite will conclude, as elites did at the turn of the last century, that they'd do better with a smaller share of a growing economy fueled by a flourishing middle class, in a society whose members feel the system is basically fair, than in one riven by social and political strife.

History has proven the early generation of reformers correct. While other nations opted for communism or fascism, Americans chose to make capitalism work for the many rather than the few.

The timing is right, and the need is surely as great as it was over a century ago.

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