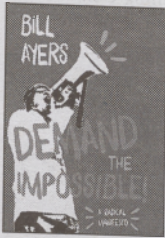
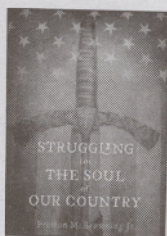


# Inspiration to create societal change



**“Demand the Impossible! A Radical Manifesto”**  
by Bill Ayers



**“Struggling for the Soul of Our Country”**  
by Preston Browning Jr.

*Progressives’ agenda is daunting, but two books empower us to take action*

**BY JOE MARTIN**  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

It’s the stuff of daily news. Christian Parenti, author of 2011’s “Tropic of Chaos”, refers to the “catastrophic convergence” of poverty, violence and climate change. Here in the Northwest, a person with good health, a decent job, family, friends and an affordable residence can feel safely removed from the stresses that upend other lives both here and in other places. That sense of security can be deceiving.

I say deceiving because this is earthquake country. And do not forget the Naval Base Kitsap – especially the Bangor site – with its Trident subs and formidable nuclear arsenal. All told, our locale is a still verdant corner of the planet. There’s no shortage of water. It can be easy to get inured to the media parade of violence and other disturbing events. But anyone paying the slightest attention knows the lamentable list of pressing issues: perpetual wars, racial and ethnic strife, poverty, unemployment, massive displacement, migration and homelessness. *Around and within is the specter of ecocatastrophe.*

While many seem indifferent, lots of conscientious people are engaged politically decrying social injustice and environmental destruction. They give of their time and talent. Some risk imprisonment, bodily harm, even death. Witness the courageous determination of the thousands who have thus far successfully resisted the Dakota Access Pipeline. The same goes for those who have railed against nuclear power and weaponry. A raft of books, articles and film documentaries chronicles threats to ecology and human survival. There are plenty of causes. Choose to do something about any one of them, and you will be occupied for a lifetime.

Bill Ayers once embraced a violent revolutionary faith. He and his cadre hoped to topple the American government when the U.S. was embroiled in the madness of the Vietnam War. Eventually he assumed a different path. Now a retired professor, Ayers remains a leftist immersed in activism from a more measured but no less impassioned perspective. In that spirit, he has authored “Demand the Impossible! A Radical Manifesto.” It is an urgent call to informed and vigorous political action aimed at creating a transformative ethos capable of generating economic democracy, social equality and ecological viability.

Ayers invites the reader to imagine genuine change and vibrant ways to confront political malaise. After analyzing rampant militarism, unbridled consumerism, economic inequities and an arrogant financial industry, constructive responses can follow. He writes, “Questions like these might inspire quixotic daydreaming or curious conjecture, but what if instead they stirred us

to create alternatives, to reach for the spectacular, and to get busy with projects of reframing and repair, movement-making, agitating, educating, community organizing, and action.”

The extent and immediacy of pressing issues demand the attention of all citizens. We can and must be educated and empowered to take on these big challenges. When properly informed and organized, common people have the strength and intelligence to make a more socially egalitarian and ecologically balanced world. Do not despair and be tricked into thinking otherwise. This is the theme of Ayers’ encouraging book.

Another erudite elder, Preston Browning Jr. is a professor of literature and longtime political activist. He refers to himself as a Christian socialist, a designation he defines in a broad ecumenical sense. “Struggling for the Soul of Our Country” is Browning’s gift to his grandchildren, and he hopes that it “will strengthen their determination to struggle for Earth’s health and long life as a home fit for human beings.”

Browning’s books is more wide-ranging than Ayers’ offering. It is like taking an informative and lively course from a passionate well-read college professor, which is what he is. Browning shares the fruit of decades of serious reading and reflection on critical issues of our time. Throughout, he makes his progressive convictions and endorsements clear. His prose teems with references to secular thinkers as well as spiritual visionaries, and to books and journalism relevant to multiple and immediate concerns.

“First and foremost, we need a vision, a picture, if you will, of what a society fit for human beings would look like,” he writes. “No rigidly structured blueprint, mind you, no infallible Marxist prescription for creating a workers’ paradise, but a set of ideas and principles on which a more just, compassionate, peaceful, and sustainable global society might be built.”

In his fashion, Browning echoes the adjuration of Ayers when he asserts “the peril and the opportunity of our moment in history demand thinking so bold, so creative that only ideas once dismissed derisively as ‘hopelessly utopian’ can answer the longing of

billions of our brothers and sisters on the Earth for a just, peaceful and sustainable planetary society – and answer the call of the cosmos itself.”

As he delineates the outline of a hopeful and radical shift in our collective will and consciousness needed to avoid disaster here and elsewhere, Browning admits the enormity and uncertainty of the task. He writes, “I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that America is headed inexorably toward a crack-up of some sort or, at the very least, transformation into a society ruled by oligarchs and military brass.” Are we there yet? If not, we are well on the way.

Both books appeared before the November election. Both resonate in their call for awareness and action.

The time has arrived for a galvanized movement of citizen activists to arise and face bravely the forces of militarism, greed and exploitation. Economic democracy, racial justice and environmental sanity won’t fall from

**“Questions like these might inspire quixotic daydreaming or curious conjecture, but what if instead they stirred us to create alternatives, to reach for the spectacular, and to get busy with projects of reframing and repair, movement-making, agitating, educating, community organizing, and action.”**

**BILL AYERS,**  
AUTHOR OF ‘DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE!’

the sky. From the bottom up, energized citizens must educate, organize and then mobilize to make the world anew. Ayers and Browning will be there.

*Courtesy of Street Roots sister paper Real Change News, Seattle.*

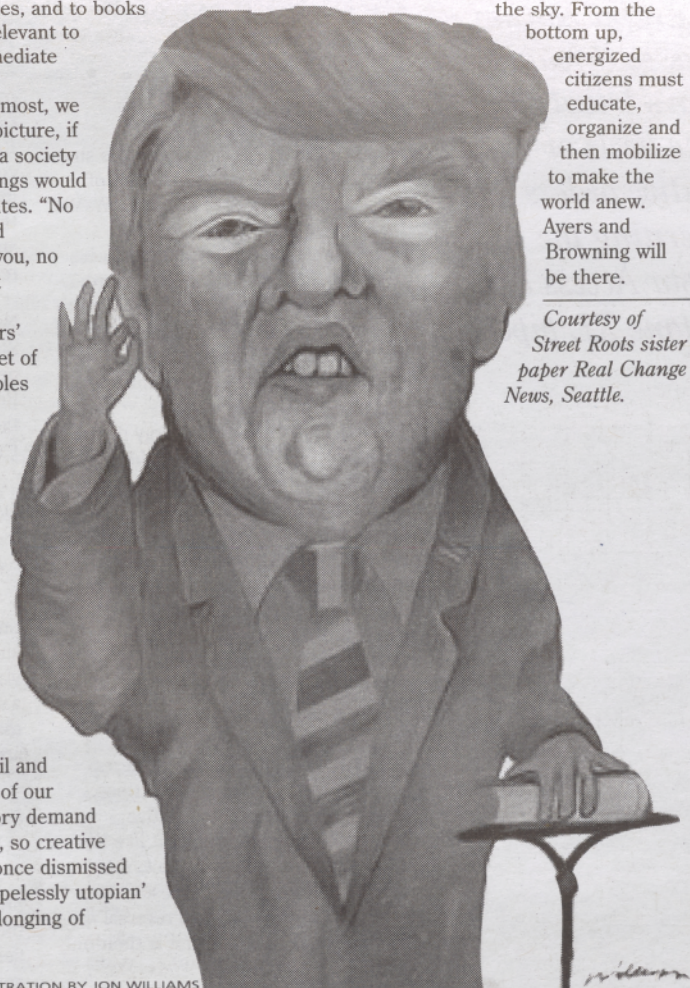


ILLUSTRATION BY JON WILLIAMS