

Chris Hedges

His new book, "America: The Farewell Tour," lays out in unflinching terms the evidence for our impending doom

BY JOANNE ZUHL
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

What's wrong with us? As a nation, we are riddled with depression and addiction. Hate groups march openly in our streets. School shootings are a frequent occurrence. We imprison people at shocking rates. We wage unwinnable wars against unseen enemies. We willfully poison our land, air and water. We don't believe a thing we say and it doesn't seem to matter.

Who's running this place, anyway?

Not us, says Chris Hedges, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist whose new book, "America: The Farewell Tour," provides a scathing – and urgent – critique of the dire consequences of our nation's unfettered capitalism. As the title suggests, Hedges' book explores the final throes of our corporate empire, indicative of famously failed empires gone before, and the pathologies it manifests.

This is the latest in a series of books by Hedges analyzing the state of America, among them "War Is a Force That Gives Us

Meaning," "American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America" and "Death of the Liberal Class."

Hedges traveled the country researching this book, but his view of America is refined also by nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported for The Christian Science Monitor, National Public Radio, The Dallas Morning News and The New York Times:

Hedges currently writes a weekly column for the website Truthdig, and hosts "On Contact" on the Russian government-funded network, RT America. And as if that weren't enough, he also teaches a class in prison through Rutgers University in New Jersey



PHOTO BY KIM HEDGES

Chris Hedges

and is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

Hedges was in Portland earlier this week to talk about his new book. Tonight, Oct. 5, he's back in town and will be the featured speaker for Democracy Reborn: Communities Resisting. Communities Rising, an event by Oregon Community Rights Network.

Street Roots talked with him over breakfast on Tuesday, and while he speaks calmly and clinically about America's crises, Hedges states frankly that he is genuinely scared – for himself, his family and the planet. And we should be too. Because the problem is bigger than one or even both political parties. This cancer is rooted in our hallowed political and economic systems. And Charlottesville, Kavanaugh and Trump? Those are just the symptoms.

Chris Hedges: What's going on is that the social bonds that make a healthy society possible have been broken. And until those bonds are repaired, things are only going to get worse. And we see a myriad of

symptoms – chronic underemployment and unemployment, homelessness, opioid addictions, a retreat into gambling, suicide, hate groups – we must remember that people who seek to destroy others are driven from a deep desire to annihilate themselves and everything that makes an open society.

It's what the socialist Emile Durkheim called "anomie." The literal translation of anomie is rulelessness. It means the rules don't work anymore, at least the rules as they're presented to society. What are those rules? You work hard, you get a good education, you obey the law, and you get a chance to carve out a meaningful existence with a living wage. That's gone.

There are two sets of rules. There's one set of rules for us, where we have criminalized poverty, created the most monstrous system of mass incarceration in the industrialized world, where wages have remained stagnant. American productivity

Hedges was part of a team of reporters with the New York Times awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for coverage of global terrorism. That same year he received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism.

See HEDGES, page 5