THE CHICAGO DEAL

A MESSAGE FROM THE STREETS

THE STREETS OF CHICAGO

THE CHICAGO DEAL

THE JIG IS UP.

America, we have something to tell you.

Born in Chicago. Led by the people who lived it.
Built for everybody.

AUTHORS

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HONORED BROTHER

Mack Mecca

David Penn · In Memoriam

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THE CHICAGO DEAL

THE JIG IS UP.

MOVEMENT ONE

The Argument Keeps Changing

America, would somebody please turn that damn noise down?

Seriously.

The television. The phone. The robocalls in the middle of dinner. The yard signs. The mailers stacked up by the front door. The text messages from candidates who somehow got your number and talk to you like they've known you since grade school.

Has everybody had enough?

Because something is terribly wrong with the way we're living in this country, and every time somebody tries to figure out what it is, another political emergency comes screaming across the television telling us who to blame.

Everybody's angry.

Everybody's got somebody to blame.

Everybody's got an explanation.

And apparently, everybody's got somebody they want us to hate.

Well, we've got something to say about that.

The jig is up.

God is standing right here beside us. And as God is our witness, we're going to tell you what we've discovered.

Now, before another politician gets on television to explain why the entire future of the United States depends on the outcome of the next election, we'd like to establish something that ought to be settled.

The United States of America is a constitutional republic.

Our Constitution begins with three words.

We the People.

Remember that?

Those words didn't expire when the political parties were established. They don't disappear when Congress goes into session. And they certainly don't stop meaning what they mean every time somebody starts another election campaign.

The People established the government.

The People own the institutions.

And the people elected to public office are entrusted with the responsibility of serving us under the Constitution.

Not the other way around.

Now turn on the television.

Our democracy is on the line!

Our democracy is in danger!

We must save our democracy!

Again?

Come on now.

Both sides say it's in danger. Both sides say the other side is the danger. And both sides would like twenty-five dollars from you to save it.

We're a constitutional republic. That ought to mean something.

Elections matter. They determine who exercises real constitutional authority. They can change laws, policies, and the direction of the country.

But an election does not transfer ownership of the government from the People to the winning political party.

And losing an election does not make the Americans who voted for somebody else enemies of the republic.

Yet look at what happens every couple of years.

We're told the country is falling apart. We're told our neighbors are dangerous. We're told the other political party is destroying everything. We're told our children won't have a future unless the right people win.

And everybody's got a message designed to make us angry enough, frightened enough, or desperate enough to do something about it.

Check your phone.

URGENT.

FINAL NOTICE.

We've never asked you before.

They asked you yesterday.

Your triple match expires at midnight!

Your membership is about to lapse.

What membership?

Are you still with us? We noticed you haven't given.

They noticed.

The polls are tightening!

We're being outspent three to one!

Funny thing. The other side is sending the exact same email. They're being outspent three to one too.

Dear friend, I'm writing to you personally.

You and four million other personal friends.

This is the most important election of our lifetime.

They said that last time.

And the time before that.

And the time before that.

Watch this.

Click here.

Share that.

Chip in five dollars before midnight, or we lose everything.

Apparently midnight is a very dangerous time in American politics.

Every night at 11:59, the entire country is about to collapse.

And every morning at seven o'clock, somehow, it's still standing.

Just in time for the next email explaining why it's going to collapse again by Friday.

We've been on the final deadline in this country for about forty years.

And here's the best part.

Both parties will tell you money is ruining American politics.

Then both of them will ask you for money.

Before midnight.

And while we're laughing, something serious is happening.

People who love one another are fighting over political personalities they've never met.

Families are carrying arguments into their homes that somebody else manufactured for an audience.

Thanksgiving tables turned into cable news panels. Group chats turned into battlefields. Brothers who haven't spoken since the last election.

Americans who agree on far more about ordinary human life than they realize are being encouraged to recognize one another by political labels before they recognize one another as people.

And when the election is over?

Somebody announces the next emergency.

That's disrespect.

We have a country to live in.

Children to raise. Parents getting older. Businesses to run. Work to accomplish. People we love who deserve our attention. A future we're trying to build.

And somehow we're expected to organize our entire emotional lives around a political fight that never seems to end.

How much anger can one country carry?

And what, exactly, are we accomplishing with all of it?

Because after generations of elections, promises, accusations, celebrations, investigations, and political victories, millions of Americans are still asking the same fundamental questions.

Why is it so hard to build a stable life?

Why does everything cost so much?

Why can somebody work for decades and still have so little ownership to show for it?

Why do the institutions responsible for correcting problems seem to survive longer than the problems were ever supposed to last?

And why does every explanation eventually bring us right back to another election?

Now we're getting somewhere.

Because those are the kinds of questions we've been asking in Chicago for a very long time.

Oh, Chicago.

Here we go.

We can almost hear somebody reaching for the remote.

Believe us, we've heard what America thinks about Chicago.

For generations, our city has been political ammunition. Whenever somebody wants to show the country what happens when government fails, there's a good chance somebody's going to bring up Chicago.

The gangs. The murders. The corruption. The poverty. The politicians.

We've heard all of it.

Politicians who have never set foot on our blocks can describe them in great detail on national television.

And apparently, we've become the most dependable source of material in America for people who want to explain why their political opponents shouldn't be trusted.

If Chicago charged a licensing fee every time somebody used us in a campaign ad, we could replace the lead pipes ourselves.

Well, isn't that interesting?

Because after nearly a century of mayors affiliated with the same political party, after generations of public programs, development announcements, appropriations, studies, and promises, the people who actually live in our neighborhoods have developed a few questions of our own.

And we think the rest of America might want to hear the answers.

You've heard about the hundreds of millions of dollars.

So have we.

You've heard about the programs.

So have we.

You've heard about the investments, the initiatives, the accomplishments, and all the wonderful things that were supposed to happen.

We've been listening to those announcements our entire lives.

Now here's what we'd like to know.

What actually happened?

Where did the resources go?

Who controlled the decisions?

Who received the contracts?

Who acquired the property?

Who built the enterprises?

Who owns what remains?

And what happened to the original human problems all that activity was supposed to correct?

Those aren't unreasonable questions.

They're the questions anybody ought to ask when something important has been promised and the promised result hasn't arrived.

But in Chicago, those questions have an additional significance.

Because generations of our families have lived through the consequences.

And while everybody else was studying the conditions, explaining the conditions, debating the conditions, and building entire careers around the conditions—

We were learning how things actually work.

That's a different education.

John Hope Bryant has a name for it.

He calls it the Underground MBA.

Negotiation. Marketing. Logistics. Leadership. Built every single day, without credit, without mentorship, and without a lawful door to walk through.

We'd add a few courses of our own.

Reading people. Managing risk. Making it home at night.

No tuition. No classroom. No diploma on the wall.

Just a final exam where the wrong answer can cost you your freedom or your life.

Chicago has been running that school for generations.

And the people who survived it are the ones talking to you right now.

In that school, you learn to recognize who controls a transaction.

You learn the difference between somebody who can make a promise and somebody who can deliver.

You learn that the person making the announcement isn't necessarily the person making the decision.

You learn that the person who creates the value isn't necessarily the person who owns it.

And you learn to pay very close attention to people's incentives.

Their words.

Their actions.

Their relationships.

Their interests.

What they stand to gain.

And what happens when things go wrong.

Because knowing how to make a deal and knowing whether you're getting a fair deal are two entirely different things.

That's Street Intelligence.

Street smarts.

And America has been overlooking a whole lot of it.

Look at what Chicago has produced.

The blues came up from the Mississippi Delta, plugged into an electric guitar on the South Side, and taught the whole world how to play rock and roll. The Rolling Stones named themselves after a Muddy Waters song.

Gospel music found its father right here, when Thomas A. Dorsey carried the blues into the church.

House music was born in a Chicago club called the Warehouse. Now the whole planet dances to it.

And a generation of young artists from these very neighborhoods built a sound the whole world copied, from London to Brooklyn.

Businesses built from almost nothing. Entrepreneurs, organizers, builders, creators, and people capable of bringing enormous amounts of human talent together.

Even in the underground economy, where the consequences of terrible decisions have destroyed countless lives, the ability to organize, recognize opportunities, understand markets, and influence people has been undeniable.

The human capability was there.

The question was what that capability might accomplish if it were connected to lawful opportunity, productive enterprise, and genuine ownership.

And all the while, the institutions were studying us.

They had the economists.

The lawyers.

The financial analysts.

The consultants.

The researchers.

The professionals capable of examining arrangements that ordinary people rarely had the resources to investigate for themselves.

They could study our neighborhoods, interpret our experiences, and explain our circumstances to the rest of America.

But they were missing something.

Something no report could fully reproduce.

The intelligence developed by the people living through the consequences.

And then something happened that changed everything.

Street Intelligence met Super Intelligence and Extraordinary Capability.

We call it SIEC.

Think about what that means.

For generations, institutions had possessed enormous advantages in their ability to gather information, examine financial relationships, analyze legal structures, and understand the machinery governing economic life.

Now the Streets had that capability too. It was the same artificial intelligence the biggest institutions in the world were racing to put to work for themselves.

Only this time, the Underground MBA was asking the questions.

And we brought something to that capability the institutions couldn't manufacture.

Generations of lived experience.

The questions.

The judgment.

The understanding of human behavior.

The ability to recognize when an explanation doesn't match the result.

And the determination to find out why.

We believe God has given us an extraordinary gift in this opportunity. A chance to connect what human beings have learned through life with capabilities that can help us examine, understand, and build on a scale that once seemed beyond our reach.

And because a gift that powerful must serve people and never rule them, we wrote a Charter for it. The human being stays in charge. Every time.

God has been beside us through this journey. Through every funeral, every shuttered storefront, every promise that never arrived.

God never left the block.

And we're responsible for what we do with what we've been given.

So we went to work.

And something remarkable began happening.

For generations, institutions had been studying the Streets of Chicago.

Now the Streets of Chicago were studying the institutions.

Oh, that changed the conversation!

Because once we began examining the machinery instead of simply living with its consequences, the questions became much bigger.

We could study the financial arrangements.

We could examine the laws.

We could follow the money.

We could look at how credit is created, how ownership accumulates, how political campaigns are financed, and how institutions establish the terms under which everyone else operates.

We could compare what institutions were established to accomplish with what their rules and incentives actually rewarded.

And the more we examined those relationships, the more we began recognizing something about the rest of America.

The problems weren't confined to Chicago.

The same kinds of institutional contradictions could appear in communities all over this country.

Different histories.

Different circumstances.

Different political affiliations.

Different people being told whom to blame.

But some remarkably familiar machinery operating underneath the arguments.

And here's where the whole thing starts getting interesting.

An institution can operate within the law, complete its contracts, administer its programs, and report its activities while the original human problem remains unfinished.

A politician can enter public service with honorable intentions and find that remaining politically competitive requires enormous attention to fundraising, party relationships, and protecting the office.

An entire industry can develop around communicating, studying, managing, or debating a problem without being responsible for actually ending it.

And everybody participating can believe they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do.

Much of it is perfectly legal.

Now think about that.

The machinery doesn't require every person operating it to be dishonest.

It doesn't require everybody to share the same political beliefs.

And it doesn't require one enormous secret conspiracy.

It can continue operating because the rules and incentives reward the activities that keep it operating.

And when the people in charge change, those underlying relationships can remain.

Different president.

Different congressional majority.

Different political argument.

Same unresolved questions.

Now we're beginning to understand something that the permanent political fight has made almost impossible to see.

Changing the people operating an institution doesn't necessarily change what the institution is organized to produce.

And if that's true, then Americans have been spending years of their lives fighting over one part of a much larger problem.

So here it is, plain.

America, we've all been played.

The institutions we built to serve us have captured us.

All of us.

Red states and blue states. Big cities and small towns. The people with plenty and the people with nothing.

And the people running those institutions are caught in the same arrangement.

That's a revelation worth examining.

Because suddenly the people we've been encouraged to blame may not be the people responsible for every condition we're living with.

Our neighbors may not be our enemies.

And the public servants operating inside these arrangements may themselves be struggling with incentives that make doing the right thing harder than it ought to be.

Now imagine what happens when Americans begin recognizing that together.

Better yet, come up here with us for a minute.

Step out of the noise.

Not down in the middle of the fight. Up above it, looking down at the whole thing together.

From up here, everything looks different.

The screaming gets quieter.

The emergencies start looking scheduled.

Two teams in two colors, shouting at each other across the field, and some of the same checkbooks paying for both sides.

And the contradictions?

From up here, they're everywhere.

We're going to show you every one of them.

Imagine what happens when the anger stops being directed automatically toward one another and we begin examining the actual terms under which our institutions operate.

Imagine what happens when we take the intelligence, the capability, the resources, and the extraordinary human accomplishments of this country and begin asking a different question.

What are these institutions supposed to accomplish for the human beings they were created to serve?

Because that's the question that brought us here.

And here's what America may find most surprising.

We didn't stop when we recognized the problem.

We started developing an answer.

Where we come from, once you finally understand the game, you stop complaining about the deal.

You bring your own.

So we brought our own.

An answer grounded in the constitutional authority of the People.

An answer with a North Star at its center. Seven points on one star.

An answer that doesn't ask a single American to change parties, change votes, or give up an argument.

We unite to stay independent.

And as only the Streets can, we're going to restore order between the People and the institutions established to serve them.

This isn't another complaint from Chicago.

America has heard enough about Chicago.

This is the Streets of Chicago announcing that the People are taking back control.

Not with anger.

Not with violence.

Not with another political party.

With the truth.

With God standing beside us.

And with a deal.

The Chicago Deal.

We're going to show you what we discovered.

We're going to show you the contradictions.

And we're going to show you what we've been building.

But first, after everything America has heard about Chicago, there's something we'd like you to understand about the people bringing this forward.

The neighborhoods you've been hearing about for generations?

We're still here.

Mayors came and went.

Programs came and went.

The cameras came and went.

By the grace of God, we're still here.

And we've been doing a whole lot more than waiting for somebody to fix us.

We've been paying attention.

We've been learning.

And we've been building.

This isn't the end of anything.

This is the beginning.

Now, in the words of our late brother Mack Mecca—

We just want to talk to you.

END OF MOVEMENT ONE

MOVEMENT TWO

We Were Already Here

Now that we've been properly introduced, there's something we'd like you to know about Chicago.

We're going to take you back a little ways.

Not because we want to live in the past. We've spent enough time living with its consequences.

But because there's a part of our story that helps explain why we're the ones bringing The Chicago Deal to America.

And it begins long before anybody ever heard of Super Intelligence.

Some of our ancestors helped build a nation that denied them freedom. Others came to this city seeking the freedom and opportunity America promised.

They came up from Mississippi and Alabama on the Illinois Central Railroad with everything they owned packed into a suitcase, because a Chicago newspaper called the Defender told them there was a better life up North.

They came over from Sicily and Naples, from Poland, from Ireland. They came from Mexico and Puerto Rico.

They worked the stockyards, the steel mills, the rail yards, and the factories.

Black and white. Italian and Irish. Polish and Mexican and Puerto Rican.

Shoulder to shoulder on the killing floors of the Union Stock Yards all day long.

Then sent home every night to separate neighborhoods and told to be afraid of one another.

Think about that contradiction.

The same people who could build a city together were taught they couldn't live on the same block.

From Bronzeville to Bridgeport, from Taylor Street to Pilsen, from Humboldt Park to the Back of the Yards, every one of them learned the same lesson.

Being promised something and being able to reach it are two very different things.

Let's go to the 1960s.

America was changing. The Civil Rights Movement was challenging the nation to live up to its founding promises. People were demanding the freedom, dignity, and opportunity that our country had declared belonged to them.

Malcolm X had spoken before crowds in Chicago. He challenged America to confront questions about freedom, human dignity, power, and who had the authority to determine another person's future.

In 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King moved into an apartment in North Lawndale.

Think about that.

Dr. King had helped change the laws of this country. The Civil Rights Act had been passed. The Voting Rights Act had been passed.

And now he was living in a Chicago neighborhood to expose conditions that should have been unacceptable anywhere in the United States.

But here's something important.

The people of Chicago were already fighting for their freedom before Dr. King arrived.

There were local organizers, families, churches, tenants, and community leaders who had been working for years to correct the conditions surrounding their lives.

We were already here.

Dr. King came to stand with them.

That summer, he stood before a crowd at Soldier Field. Then he marched to City Hall and taped a list of the people's demands right on the door.

Remember that picture.

Because nearly sixty years later, the people of Chicago are bringing our terms to the people in power one more time.

Only this time, we're going to ask them to read the words out loud.

Because passing a law and changing the circumstances under which people actually live are two very different accomplishments.

That distinction was already becoming part of our education.

And then came 1968.

On the last evening of his life, Dr. King asked a musician to play one song at the meeting that night. Take My Hand, Precious Lord.

"Play it real pretty," he said.

That song was born in Chicago. Thomas A. Dorsey wrote it on the South Side after burying his wife and his newborn son. He took the heaviest grief a man can carry and turned it into a prayer the whole world would sing.

Moments later, Dr. King was shot.

And when they laid him to rest, Mahalia Jackson, a Chicago woman, sang that Chicago song.

Even in that darkness, a prayer written on the South Side carried the whole country.

The grief and anger that followed shook America. On the West Side of Chicago, fires swept Madison Street and Roosevelt Road and devastated commercial corridors that had been part of neighborhood life for generations.

Stores disappeared. Jobs disappeared. Buildings disappeared. Places where families shopped, worked, gathered, and knew one another were gone.

And the people remained.

Remember that.

The buildings could disappear. The businesses could close. The money could leave. But the people were still here.

And the rebuilding?

Well, that's where our story becomes especially important.

Because nearly six decades later, we're still living with the consequences of an economic foundation that was never fully restored.

Announcements have been made. Money has been appropriated. Programs have been established. Buildings have been constructed. There have been ceremonies, speeches, studies, promises, and some genuine accomplishments.

We've been to so many groundbreaking ceremonies on the West Side, you'd think the ground would be broken by now.

Gold shovels. Ribbon cuttings. Photographers. Somebody important standing in front of a banner.

And then the cameras leave, and the lot is still empty.

The functioning neighborhood economies our families were supposed to inherit never returned on the scale required to make those promises real.

And while all of that was happening, Chicago was producing leaders of another generation.

Fred Hampton.

Think about what Fred Hampton understood.

He was barely twenty years old, and he understood that people who had been taught to see one another as enemies could recognize common interests.

In 1969, the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, and the Young Patriots helped form what became known as the first Rainbow Coalition.

Black people. Puerto Rican people. Poor white people who had come up from Appalachia.

People with different histories, different circumstances, and different grievances, beginning to recognize that the conditions affecting their lives could not all be explained by blaming one another.

The same people who had been told to fear each other on the killing floor were standing together on purpose.

And Fred Hampton wasn't merely talking about those conditions.

The Panthers fed children breakfast before school, provided services, and organized communities around practical responsibilities.

That was a powerful thing to recognize in a city where division had been built into the arrangements governing people's lives.

People who had been encouraged to fear one another were discovering that they could work together without becoming the same.

Fred Hampton didn't live to see twenty-two.

But what he understood outlived him.

Now, that ought to sound familiar.

Because here we are, more than fifty years later, watching another generation of Americans being encouraged to turn against one another.

Different arguments. Different technology. Different political personalities.

But some remarkably familiar incentives.

And there's another part of Chicago's history that belongs in this conversation.

While civil rights leaders, churches, families, and community organizations were fighting to establish legitimate opportunities, another kind of organization was developing on the Streets.

Street organizations.

Some became powerful. Some became violent. Some developed enormous influence over young people who were growing up in neighborhoods where the legitimate economy was failing to provide a reliable pathway forward.

We know that history.

It includes the lives lost to gang violence, the families harmed, the communities caught between competing forms of authority, and the human abilities that became organized around purposes that could inflict terrible harm.

We lived with its consequences.

And there's something about it that America has never adequately understood.

The absence of legitimate opportunity did not mean the absence of human capability.

The intelligence was there.

The organizational ability was there.

The leadership was there.

The capacity to build relationships, understand incentives, manage resources, recognize opportunity, and exercise influence was there.

But what happens to human capability when the surrounding economy fails to provide enough lawful and productive opportunities for that capability to develop?

What happens when a young person can see a pathway into an underground economy more clearly than a pathway into business ownership?

What happens when a neighborhood produces enormous talent, but the institutions controlling capital, property, education, and opportunity fail to connect that talent to a productive future?

Those are questions that deserve answers.

And we're not asking them from a distance.

We've watched what happens when those answers never arrive.

We've buried people.

We've watched mothers hold families together under circumstances that would test anybody.

We've watched fathers struggle to find their place in an economy that had stopped offering them a reliable pathway forward.

We've watched children become adults, and adults become grandparents, while the same neighborhoods continued waiting for the economic foundations they were promised.

And we've watched something else.

We've watched grandmothers fill the pews every Sunday morning. We've watched mothers work two jobs and still make it to choir rehearsal. We've watched church kitchens feed a whole block when nobody else would. We've watched people pray over the same corner they were afraid to walk past.

God was in those rooms long before anybody handed us a microphone.

And that faith carried families through things no program was ever designed to carry.

And here's something else.

Through all of that, Chicago kept creating.

Businesses built from almost nothing.

Artists who developed entire new forms of expression.

People who created opportunities out of circumstances that appeared to offer none.

Families who kept going.

Neighbors who protected one another.

Churches, community builders, entrepreneurs, and ordinary people who never stopped believing that a better life was possible.

And all the while, we were learning.

Learning how people exercise power.

Learning how money moves.

Learning the difference between somebody promising to help and somebody possessing the ability to change the arrangement.

Learning that the people receiving the largest economic benefit aren't necessarily the people doing the most important work.

And learning that the arrival of public money does not guarantee the arrival of public results.

That was our education.

We didn't receive it from a university.

We received it from life.

And we didn't finish learning when the Civil Rights Movement passed into the history books.

Because the speeches eventually ended. The cameras went home. The politicians moved on to the next election.

And we still had to get up the next morning and figure out how to make a living.

That's where some of our most valuable lessons came from.

You see, when the regular economy stops working for a neighborhood, the people don't stop being economic beings.

They still have families to feed. Rent to pay. Children to raise. Things to buy and sell. Places to go. Problems to solve.

And they still have ambitions.

So people find ways to make things happen.

Some open businesses. Some learn a trade. Some sell merchandise out of their homes. Some organize events, produce music, repair automobiles, build customer relationships, or turn whatever talent they possess into something somebody is willing to pay for.

The barbershop that doubles as the neighborhood newsroom. The car wash that doubles as a job program. The kitchen-table catering business that fed every graduation, every funeral, and every family reunion on the block.

And some enter an underground economy, where the lessons can be expensive, the consequences can be permanent, and there isn't much room for mistakes.

We know that world too.

And here's where we want you to pay attention.

There's a whole lot of business intelligence operating in places where America has been taught to see nothing but poverty and crime.

Remember the Underground MBA?

Here's the course catalog.

Think about the person who can recognize an opportunity before anybody else sees it. Who knows what people want, what they're willing to pay, where to find it, how to get it there, and how much money will be left after everybody gets paid.

That's market intelligence.

Think about somebody who can bring twenty people together, organize their responsibilities, settle disagreements, maintain relationships, and accomplish something under enormous pressure.

That's organizational intelligence.

Think about the person who can walk into a room, recognize who's serious, who's bluffing, who's making promises they can't keep, and who's actually controlling the deal.

That's judgment.

And believe us, there are places in Chicago where being wrong about somebody's intentions carries consequences far greater than losing a business contract.

Out here, a bad read doesn't cost you a quarterly bonus.

And what happens when those abilities are connected to legitimate economic opportunity?

A person who understands distribution can build a logistics business.

Someone who knows how to organize people can manage crews, develop enterprises, and lead teams.

A young person who understands an audience can build a marketing company, produce entertainment, or create intellectual property.

And somebody who knows how to hustle can turn that same drive, discipline, adaptability, and understanding of human behavior into something they actually own.

Now consider what that tells us.

For generations, America has been looking into neighborhoods like ours, studying the poverty, studying the violence, studying the unemployment, studying the gangs, studying the families, studying the children.

Studies became reports. Reports became programs. Programs became institutions. Institutions developed budgets, professional positions, administrative responsibilities, and entire networks of economic activity.

People built careers studying circumstances that other people had to survive.

We've been surveyed so many times, we could fill out the questionnaire for you.

If being studied could fix a neighborhood, the West Side would be the most fixed place in America.

And while all that was happening, something was being overlooked.

The intelligence required to survive those circumstances was already here.

The ability to organize. Negotiate. Recognize opportunity. Manage risk. Build relationships. Understand markets. Lead people. Create value.

Think about that.

Those are capabilities that businesses spend fortunes developing.

Corporations establish departments to perform those functions. They hire professionals, purchase technology, build management systems, retain consultants, and compensate executives for their judgment.

And we respect what serious enterprise can accomplish.

But when similar capabilities emerge from the Streets, what does America see?

A hustler.

A gang member.

A kid from a dangerous neighborhood.

Someone who has to be studied, supervised, corrected, or managed.

Same human intelligence. Entirely different economic opportunities.

And the difference has consequences.

Because the person with access to capital can turn an opportunity into an asset.

The person with access to institutional relationships can turn an idea into an enterprise.

The person who owns the intellectual property can continue earning from something they created years ago.

But the person whose work, ingenuity, culture, and experience helped create the value can spend a lifetime watching somebody else own the result.

Ask the musicians.

Now we're getting somewhere.

Because there's something else about this arrangement that deserves a much closer look.

America has spent generations teaching people to fear the young men coming out of neighborhoods like ours.

We've seen the images. We've heard the descriptions. We know the reputations.

And we know the terrible consequences that violence and criminal activity have brought to our families.

But consider another kind of power.

An institution can make financial decisions affecting thousands of families without ever meeting them.

A corporation can close a facility, relocate an operation, acquire property, reorganize an industry, or negotiate an economic advantage that changes the future of an entire community.

The people making those decisions can be intelligent, honorable, hardworking human beings fulfilling the responsibilities assigned to them.

Their decisions can be perfectly lawful.

And the consequences can still be devastating.

That's what makes institutional power so consequential.

An arrangement can produce enormous human consequences while every person participating in it is simply performing the job they were hired to do.

Now think about the difference in how those circumstances are described.

When somebody from the Streets understands how money moves and organizes people around an economic opportunity, America calls it hustling.

When a corporation does it, America calls it business.

When a crew protects its corner, they call it a turf war.

When a corporation protects its territory, they call it market share.

When the block keeps its business to itself, they call it a code of silence.

When a corporation does it, they call it a confidentiality agreement.

When a neighborhood organization exercises influence, people ask who gave it authority.

When established financial interests exercise influence, the arrangements get written into contracts, professional responsibilities, and the ordinary rules of commerce.

And when the people living with the consequences demand answers, they're often directed back into institutions whose rules were established without them.

We're not arguing that those activities are all the same.

We're asking America to look beyond the labels and examine the actual arrangements.

Who creates the value?

Who controls the transaction?

Who assumes the consequences?

And who owns what remains?

Those questions have been part of our education for generations.

We learned them in businesses.

We learned them in neighborhoods.

We learned them in the underground economy.

And we learned them by watching institutions operate around us.

We knew that a person could make a fortune from circumstances that left somebody else with nothing.

We knew that controlling the terms could be more valuable than performing the work.

And we knew that the person who appeared to possess the most authority wasn't necessarily the person who understood what was actually happening.

We knew the difference between an announcement and a result.

Between a program and an opportunity.

Between a promise of ownership and an actual ownership interest.

Between somebody bringing money into our neighborhood and somebody building an economic foundation that would remain after the money was spent.

That's Street Intelligence.

It doesn't require somebody else's permission to exist.

It doesn't disappear because the person possessing it has never been invited into a boardroom.

And it outlasted every study ever written about it.

We were already here.

We're still here.

And now the Streets of Chicago are walking into the room with our work already done.

END OF MOVEMENT TWO

MOVEMENT THREE

We Didn't Know You Either

And here's where our story took an unexpected turn.

The more we examined the arrangements governing our lives, the more we began recognizing something about the rest of America.

Something we hadn't fully appreciated before.

We knew what you'd been told about Chicago.

Believe us. We've lived with it our entire lives.

But there's something we ought to admit.

We didn't know you, either.

We knew your political labels. We knew which parts of the country voted Republican and which voted Democrat. We knew what the television commentators said about you.

We knew who we were supposed to blame.

And we knew who we were supposed to be angry with.

But we didn't know you.

Shoot, half the time we didn't even know downstate.

Downstate was told Chicago was the problem. Chicago was told downstate was the problem. Same state. Same taxes. Same politicians in Springfield. And both of us were told the other one was the reason nothing works.

And while we were being told who was responsible for the conditions in our lives, you were being told who was responsible for the conditions in yours.

Different histories. Different experiences. Different circumstances.

And a whole lot of people telling us what to think about one another.

A mother on the West Side of Chicago and a mother in a factory town in Ohio are standing at the same pharmacy counter, staring at the same price, doing the same math in their heads.

A father in Little Village and a father in rural Kentucky are reading the same layoff notice.

And that same night, both of their phones light up with the same text message.

Urgent. Final notice. Chip in before midnight.

And each one of them is being told the other one is the reason.

Somewhere along the way, we'd become so accustomed to seeing each other through political arguments that we rarely stopped to question who was putting those arguments in front of us.

Or why.

Now, don't misunderstand us.

We know America has real differences. We know what history has done to people. We know there are disagreements that matter, and we're not asking anybody to pretend otherwise.

And don't misunderstand us about something else.

We love this country.

We helped build it.

Our grandparents built its cars, packed its meat, forged its steel, laid its rails, and fought in its wars. Our music became the sound of America everywhere America went.

Look at what this country can do.

We can send machines across the solar system. We can move billions of dollars around the earth in seconds. We can build systems capable of examining more information than any human being could absorb in a lifetime.

Yet we still have American families drinking water delivered through lead service lines.

That's not a lack of capability.

That's a contradiction.

And that's exactly why it matters.

But we began recognizing something that changed how we looked at our differences.

We weren't necessarily one another's problem.

And we certainly weren't the people who established most of the institutional arrangements governing our lives.

Yet somehow, we were the ones expected to spend our lives fighting over them.

Think about that.

We were being encouraged to blame one another for arrangements neither of us had much practical control over.

And here's something else we figured out.

The whole world is watching.

For generations, people who had never set foot in Chicago watched us on the evening news and decided who we were.

Now people who have never set foot in America are watching America the same way.

The arguments. The shouting. The campaign that never ends. The most powerful country on earth, and the rest of the world is watching our politics like a reality show.

Now America knows how Chicago feels.

And here's the part that changed everything for us.

Why would anybody spend that much time, money, and talent studying the American People if the American People had no power?

They wouldn't.

Nobody studies people who don't matter.

They study what we fear because our fear moves votes. They study what we buy because our purchases move markets. They study what holds our attention because our attention is worth a fortune.

Think about what that means.

Our labor. Our purchases. Our trust. Our attention. Our votes. Our relationships.

Everything they're competing for belongs to us.

We were never powerless.

We were just divided.

And once we recognized that, we started asking a different question.

Before we argue about whose fault everything is, shouldn't we establish what we're all trying to accomplish?

What do we actually want from this life?

Not what a political party tells us to want.

Not what an institution has decided it can afford to deliver.

What do we, as human beings, want?

And when we began putting those purposes into words, something remarkable happened.

We found Seven.

Health.

Stability.

Peace and Safety.

Family.

Opportunity.

Ownership.

Truth and Respect.

There they are.

Seven inseparable human purposes.

Health, so we have the chance to live full lives. Clean water from the tap. Care we can reach before a problem becomes a crisis. No family forced to choose between getting well and keeping its home.

Stability, so the lives we're building don't remain one emergency away from falling apart. One diagnosis, one layoff, or one blown transmission should not be able to take away what a family spent years building. A life you can plan beyond Friday.

Peace and Safety, so we can live without violence or the constant exploitation of fear. There are children in this country who have never had one full day of simply being children. And there are quiet streets where fear is kept running around the clock because frightened people are easier to manage. Peace and Safety means nobody is making a living off your dread.

Family, including the people we're born to, the people we choose, and the people who stand together through life. The grandmother raising her grandbabies. The coach who became a father figure. The friends who became family in the struggle. And if you're standing alone today, these Seven belong to you just as much as anybody else.

Opportunity, so effort has a fair chance to lead somewhere. So when you push, something moves.

Ownership, so the value we create can become something lasting, something we can keep and pass forward. Not renting your whole life from somebody who owns everything you touch.

And Truth and Respect, together, because there's nothing respectful about withholding the truth from people whose lives are affected by it. Every comfortable lie says you can't handle the truth. Every hard truth told with dignity says you can.

Now look at those Seven again.

Which one would you surrender?

Go ahead. Pick one.

Would you give up your health to keep your job?

Your children's safety to keep the rent paid?

Your family to get an opportunity?

The truth, so somebody can keep you comfortable?

You might care more about one today because of what's happening in your life.

But would you give up the other six?

Of course not.

Nobody does.

And here's the thing.

God didn't put any of us on this earth to settle for six.

In the Good Book, Seven has always been the number of completion.

The solution is all Seven.

Seven points on one star.

Our North Star.

And yes, we put it on a flag.

And here's what's remarkable about that.

We didn't have to settle a single political argument to recognize those Seven purposes.

Nobody had to change parties.

Nobody had to abandon their faith.

Nobody had to apologize for where they came from or surrender their independence.

We could still disagree about how to accomplish every one of those things.

But at least now we knew what we were trying to accomplish.

Freedom is the promise. Quality of life is the daily proof.

God gave every one of us our worth before any party ever gave us a label.

And suddenly, the people we'd been encouraged to fight started looking a whole lot more like the people we ought to be standing beside.

The mother at the pharmacy counter in Ohio.

The father with the layoff notice in Kentucky.

The family on the West Side of Chicago.

Same Seven.

Same star.

That's how we unite.

And that's how we stay independent.

We unite to stay independent.

Now, something interesting happens when we stand together.

Remember when we brought you up above the noise?

Come on back up here with us.

And this time, bring the Seven.

For just a moment, step outside the political argument altogether.

Nobody's asking you to change your vote.

Nobody's telling you which party to support.

We're simply going to stand together, with our Seven firmly in view, and take a good look at the arrangement we've all been participating in.

The entire thing.

The campaigns. The parties. The institutions. The money. The arguments.

All of it.

Because from inside that argument, everything seems terribly complicated.

Everybody's fighting. Everybody's blaming. Everybody's promising that if their side wins, things will finally change.

And the rest of us?

We're supposed to get up every morning, live our lives, pay our bills, pay our taxes, and somehow find the time and energy to participate in a political fight that never ends.

But from up here?

It looks like a ballgame.

Two teams. Two colors. Fans screaming at each other in the stands.

And here's the funny part.

The fans paid for the stadium.

The fans paid for the tickets.

The fans paid for the parking, the hot dogs, and the overpriced beer.

The fans even paid the players.

And when the game is over, the fans go home to the same problems they had when they walked in, while the teams start selling tickets for next season.

And somehow, the fans are the ones fighting each other in the parking lot.

Now, we don't know about you.

But from where we're standing, something about this arrangement is starting to look absolutely ridiculous.

END OF MOVEMENT THREE

MOVEMENT FOUR

The Money Has a Motive

Now take a good look.

Look at the 2026 election season.

Once again, apparently, the entire future of the United States depends on which political party wins.

Imagine that.

A country that just celebrated its two hundred and fiftieth birthday. A country with extraordinary human accomplishments, enormous wealth, and institutions powerful enough to influence events around the world.

And every couple of years, we're told that everything we've built could come crashing down if the wrong people win an election.

Come on now.

How many times have we heard that?

How many times have we been told this is the most important election of our lifetimes?

And how many more lifetimes are we supposed to live through before somebody finishes the important business?

Two hundred and fifty years. This country survived a civil war, two world wars, the Great Depression, and the invention of cable news.

But apparently, it can't survive the next election.

Look at what we've built around this arrangement.

Campaign organizations. Political consultants. Fundraising operations. Pollsters. Advertising agencies. Television networks. Digital platforms. Political action committees. Research firms. Data analysts. Professional commentators.

An entire economy dedicated to influencing who gets control of the institutions.

And here's something worth considering.

That economy gets paid whether the election improves your life or not.

The advertising gets purchased.

The consultants get paid.

The political organizations raise their money.

The networks sell their time.

The fundraising companies process their contributions.

And somebody starts preparing for the next election.

Win or lose, the consultants get paid.

Think we're exaggerating?

AdImpact, the firm that tracks political advertising, projected that the 2026 election cycle would consume eleven point six billion dollars in political ads alone.

That's a record.

That's more than was spent on ads in the last presidential election. And 2026 was a midterm.

Billions and billions of dollars.

And what are we purchasing with all that persuasion?

Well, apparently, we're purchasing a great deal of information about how terrible our fellow Americans are.

Turn on the television.

One political advertisement explains why a candidate is dangerous.

The next explains why the person making that accusation is even more dangerous.

Then comes somebody who promises to restore honesty to government.

Usually followed by an advertisement explaining why that person can't be trusted either.

Grainy black-and-white photo. Ominous music. A narrator who sounds like the world is ending.

Paid for by Citizens for a Better Something.

And at the end, every single one of them approves their own message.

And you already know what's waiting on your phone before midnight.

Now we're laughing, but there's something profoundly disrespectful underneath all of this.

Because while the campaigns are fighting over who should control the institutions, the American People are living the lives those institutions were established to serve.

And remember what we just agreed upon.

The Seven.

Health.

Stability.

Peace and Safety.

Family.

Opportunity.

Ownership.

Truth and Respect.

Those are the outcomes.

So where are they in this eleven-billion-dollar production?

Of course, the campaigns talk about them.

They talk about healthcare.

They talk about jobs.

They talk about prices.

They talk about safety.

They talk about families.

They talk about the economy.

And they have an explanation for practically everything.

If the economy is doing well, the people in power want the credit.

If it's doing poorly, the people outside power want the blame assigned.

And when the parties exchange positions?

Well, pay attention.

Because the arguments have a remarkable tendency to change places with them.

Yesterday's explanation becomes today's excuse.

Yesterday's criticism becomes tomorrow's defense.

The same public debt that was an outrage becomes a necessity.

The same executive authority that was dangerous becomes indispensable.

The same political maneuver that threatened the republic becomes perfectly reasonable once somebody else's party is using it.

Executive orders are tyranny, right up until your side is holding the pen.

The filibuster is a sacred tradition, right up until it's standing in your way.

Deficits will destroy the country, right up until your side is the one spending.

And somehow, everybody manages to explain why their circumstances are different.

Sometimes they are.

But the pattern deserves a much closer look.

Because we're not describing one political party.

We're describing an arrangement that survives both of them.

And look at the economy.

What an extraordinary subject.

We can spend an entire election arguing about whether the economy is good or bad.

One side presents statistics showing prosperity.

The other presents statistics showing hardship.

One celebrates employment.

Another questions the quality of the jobs.

One points to the stock market.

Another points to the price of groceries.

And pretty soon, two Americans can be fighting about whether the economy is working while neither has been asked the question that matters most.

Working for whom?

Who is building ownership?

Who is becoming more independent?

Whose children have a stronger future?

What happened to the Seven?

Those aren't unreasonable questions.

They're the questions public service ought to be organized around.

But we're so busy arguing over which party deserves the credit or the blame that we can lose sight of the actual arrangement producing the results.

Now here's where we want everybody to pay especially close attention.

We're not suggesting elections don't matter.

They matter enormously.

The people elected to public office exercise real constitutional authority. Their decisions have real consequences.

That's precisely why this arrangement deserves examination.

Because somewhere along the way, the competition to acquire and maintain that authority became an enormous enterprise of its own.

And an enterprise develops interests.

It develops income.

It develops obligations.

It develops relationships.

It develops people whose livelihoods depend upon its continued operation.

And eventually, it develops a powerful interest in making certain the enterprise survives.

Now consider the contradiction.

The American People want the Seven.

But the political machinery is organized around winning elections.

Those are not the same assignment.

Winning an election can be necessary to carry out public responsibilities.

But winning an election is not the completion of a public responsibility.

Neither is winning the next one.

Or the next one.

Or the one after that.

And when the machinery begins rewarding political survival more reliably than completed human obligations, what do you suppose the machinery is going to produce?

More political survival.

More campaigns.

More fundraising.

More arguments.

More reasons to fear what happens if the other side wins.

And more Americans being told that the answer is just one election away.

Now step back and look at this again.

We have two major political parties competing for control of institutions funded by the American People.

Both tell us they want better lives for Americans.

Both tell us the other is standing in the way.

Both depend upon enormous financial, organizational, and communications machinery to compete.

And both return to the People, election after election, asking for the authority to make things better.

At what point do we get to ask whether the arrangement itself is the problem?

Because we have a question.

If an institution is established to serve the People, but the people operating it must continually prioritize raising money, protecting their positions, satisfying political organizations, and preparing for the next election—

Who, exactly, is the institution aligned to serve?

Now we're getting somewhere.

Because the money has a motive.

Look at what it takes to get to Congress.

And what it takes to stay there.

Because apparently, representing the American People has become one of the few professions where you can spend a huge part of your working life raising money to keep your job.

Think about that.

We elect people to represent us.

Then we send them to Washington, where they're expected to raise money, maintain political relationships, satisfy their party's expectations, protect their positions, and prepare for the next election.

And somewhere in between all of that, they're supposed to govern the country.

That's quite a job description.

By the end of June, House and Senate candidates in the 2026 election had raised two point eight billion dollars and spent two billion of it.

Billions and billions of dollars.

And the election was still more than four months away.

Now consider what that money is buying.

Advertising.

Research.

Polling.

Professional campaign management.

Communications.

Fundraising.

Opposition research.

And the ability to influence what millions of Americans believe about the people asking to represent them.

An enormous amount of professional talent is devoted to understanding us.

What concerns us.

What frightens us.

What makes us angry.

What makes us click.

What makes us contribute.

What makes us suspicious of one another.

And, most importantly, what might persuade us to support one candidate instead of another.

We've got entire industries studying our emotions while we're still trying to get somebody to study the results.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with research.

We believe in research.

We've spent a great deal of time doing it ourselves.

But here's a question.

What happens when the people financing the research aren't primarily interested in understanding how to improve our lives?

What happens when they're interested in understanding how to influence our behavior?

Because those are two very different assignments.

And money has a remarkable ability to make certain the assignment gets completed.

Look at the modern political campaign.

Somebody studies your frustrations.

Somebody develops a message.

Somebody purchases advertising.

Somebody distributes the message.

Somebody measures your reaction.

And somebody adjusts the next message based on what worked.

Now imagine that the reaction they're trying to produce is anger.

Anger at your neighbor.

Anger at another political party.

Anger at people you've never met.

Anger at people whose circumstances you know practically nothing about.

And every time that anger keeps you watching, clicking, sharing, donating, or coming back for more, somebody has another reason to keep producing it.

Anger has become a product.

And apparently, America has been enrolled in auto-renew.

We never signed up.

And nobody can find the cancel button.

Look around.

Every morning brings another political emergency.

Every afternoon brings somebody explaining why the other side is destroying the country.

Every evening brings another panel of experts explaining what the morning's emergency really meant.

And just when you think they've finally settled the matter—

Tomorrow morning arrives.

A brand-new emergency!

Fresh accusations!

New outrage!

Same advertisers!

Come on now.

We're laughing, but think about what this does to people.

We go to work carrying responsibilities that don't disappear because Congress is having another argument.

We come home to families and relationships that deserve our attention.

We try to enjoy whatever peace we've managed to build.

And somebody turns on a television, opens a phone, or repeats something they heard about politics.

Next thing you know, two people who love each other are arguing at the dinner table over somebody neither of them will ever meet.

And what did either of them gain?

Nothing.

But the people selling the argument?

They've got another audience.

Another impression.

Another opportunity to raise money.

Another reason to come back tomorrow.

The machine can profit from an argument that costs the people having it their peace.

And here's the part that matters most.

We didn't have to be taught one particular ideology for this to happen.

We could be taught anger.

Blame.

Suspicion.

Resentment.

Fear.

We could be conditioned to respond to another American's political identity before we ever considered that person's humanity.

And once that becomes our normal way of understanding the country, the political machinery doesn't have to work nearly as hard.

We start carrying the arguments for it.

We repeat the accusations.

We defend the people we've been told to defend.

We condemn the people we've been told to condemn.

And sometimes we get so good at it that we can explain what the other political party believes before we've even listened to one of its members.

We're doing unpaid work for people who are raising fortunes to keep the argument going.

They don't even have to pay us.

We volunteer.

Now that's an arrangement worth examining.

And believe us, Chicago could have signed up for the anger business a long time ago.

We've had plenty to be angry about.

But vengeance belongs to God.

We came for the truth.

Because while all this is happening, there's another economy operating behind the campaigns.

The economy of influence.

Lobbying.

Political access.

Special-interest organizations.

Professional advocates.

Industry associations.

Law firms.

Consultants.

And people whose entire profession involves persuading government to act in the interest of whoever has retained their services.

Last year, federal lobbying set a record. More than five billion dollars, the first time it ever crossed that line.

Billions and billions of dollars.

Now let's be fair about something.

The right to petition government belongs to everybody.

Businesses have legitimate interests. Workers have legitimate interests. Organizations have legitimate interests.

And Congress has real legislative professionals, including nonpartisan attorneys who help members and committees write laws.

But those facts make the next question even more important.

Whose interests have the resources to remain in the room?

Because a well-financed organization can maintain a professional presence in Washington.

It can commission research.

It can retain lawyers.

It can develop legislative proposals.

It can recommend language.

It can analyze amendments.

It can maintain relationships with congressional offices.

It can return next week.

And the week after that.

And the year after that.

Now consider the ordinary American who's supposed to be represented by the same institution.

We get to vote.

We get to contact our representatives.

We get to express our opinions.

And then we go back to living our lives.

Meanwhile, the professional influence operation is still at work.

We have to make a living. They can make a living influencing the rules under which we make ours.

That's not necessarily illegal.

That's what makes the arrangement so important to understand.

The law can permit an enormously unequal relationship without requiring everybody participating in it to behave dishonestly.

And the money doesn't have to purchase an individual vote to exercise influence.

It can finance access.

It can finance research.

It can finance communications.

It can help determine which proposals receive serious attention.

It can support candidates who favor particular interests and oppose those who don't.

It can keep the same institutional priorities alive through multiple elections and changing administrations.

And sometimes, after all that effort, the preferred language finds its way into legislation.

Now watch this.

Because look at what happens when Congress actually begins assembling laws.

There are committees.

There are amendments.

There are negotiations.

There are leadership decisions.

There are competing interests.

And there are occasions when enormous packages of legislation are brought together for a single vote.

Omnibus bills.

What an invention.

Congress can take multiple appropriations bills, combine them into one enormous legislative package, and present members with a decision about the whole thing.

Sometimes thousands of pages, released just days or even hours before the vote.

Nobody reads that fast.

Not even the people voting on it.

Some of that packaging is necessary to reach compromises and keep government operating.

But it also creates a remarkable accountability problem.

Because what happens when somebody supports one provision and opposes another?

What happens when legislation intended to accomplish several different purposes contains provisions that deserve separate debate?

What happens when a member is told that opposing the package means opposing everything worthwhile inside it?

And what happens when the public is asked whether we support the bill?

Which part?

The part near the beginning?

The part in the middle?

Or the provision somebody negotiated into the package while the rest of us were sleeping?

We send Congress to make decisions, and sometimes Congress sends us a package deal on decisions we never agreed should be packaged together.

Where we come from, when somebody slides something into the deal while you're not looking, we have a word for that.

And it isn't "compromise."

Now remember our Seven.

Health.

Stability.

Peace and Safety.

Family.

Opportunity.

Ownership.

Truth and Respect.

The Seven belong together.

They aren't bargaining chips.

Yet look at how often political arguments place human purposes in competition.

We're told we have to choose between economic security and public responsibility.

Between safety and freedom.

Between helping families and protecting taxpayers.

Between business opportunity and the communities affected by business decisions.

Between solving one problem and maintaining the institutions already financed to address another.

And sometimes genuine choices have to be made.

We understand that.

But here's what we don't accept.

The People should not have to sacrifice one of the Seven because the political machinery has learned how to make competing interests more important than completed human obligations.

That's the contradiction.

Congress was established to represent the People.

But much of the financial and political machinery surrounding Congress is organized to advance particular interests.

The political parties want to win.

The campaign organizations want to raise money.

The professional advocates want to advance their clients' objectives.

The advertising businesses want to sell advertising.

The political consultants want successful campaigns.

And the institutions want the conditions necessary to continue operating.

Some of these interests can serve the public.

Some can work against it.

But none becomes the public interest simply because it is well financed.

Money has a motive.

And the existence of that motive doesn't establish that it is aligned with ours.

Now here's a contradiction that ought to make everybody stop and think.

In 2017, the Federal Communications Commission invited public comments concerning internet regulation.

A subsequent investigation by the New York Attorney General found that nearly eighteen million of the more than twenty-two million comments submitted in that proceeding were fake.

Nearly eighteen million.

The false comments came from competing sides of the dispute.

On one side, an industry-funded campaign spent about four point two million dollars to generate more than eight and a half million fake comments, many of them using the names of real Americans who never said a word.

That's about fifty cents per fake American.

On the other side, millions more fake comments were traced mostly to one nineteen-year-old college student with a computer program.

Even two United States senators, one Democrat and one Republican, found out somebody had used their names to say things they never said.

Think about what that means.

The government opened a process for the public to express its opinions.

And somebody figured out how to manufacture millions of members of the public.

Apparently, even the American People can be outsourced.

Now, that's funny until you remember what's underneath it.

Somebody wanted to influence a public decision.

And instead of relying on actual people making their actual views known, fabricated voices entered the public record.

That is not a disagreement about ideology.

That's a contradiction between what a public process was created to accomplish and what the machinery was used to produce.

And it brings us right back to alignment.

Because a machine doesn't have to hate the People to produce results that harm them.

It doesn't have to know us.

It doesn't have to understand our lives.

It doesn't even have to recognize the consequences of its own continued operation.

It responds to the rules, instructions, incentives, and financial relationships governing it.

Reward the acquisition of attention, and the machinery gets better at acquiring attention.

Reward political survival, and it gets better at protecting political positions.

Reward the administration of a problem without requiring its resolution, and an institution can continue operating while the problem remains.

Reward the accumulation of influence, and influence becomes something people organize entire enterprises to acquire.

A machine produces what it is aligned to produce.

Funny thing about that word.

Alignment.

The technology world is spending fortunes trying to align Super Intelligence with human values.

Good. It should.

But who's been working on aligning the machinery of government with the People who pay for it?

And here's the extraordinary part.

We built these machines.

Human beings designed the institutions.

Human beings established the rules.

Human beings created the financial relationships.

Human beings enacted the laws.

And human beings can change them.

We can't change everything.

But the machines we built? Those we can change.

And knowing the difference is exactly what Street Intelligence is for.

But first, we have to stop pretending that replacing the person operating the machine necessarily changes what the machine was built to do.

We've been conducting that experiment for generations.

Different presidents.

Different congressional majorities.

Different political promises.

Different political enemies.

And so much of the underlying arrangement continues.

Meanwhile, we're still being asked to choose sides.

Still being asked to surrender our peace.

Still being asked to blame one another.

Still being asked to trust that the next election will finally produce what the previous elections promised.

And we're the ones paying the bills for the institutions that keep telling us to wait.

Our money.

Our institutions.

Our lives.

So while everybody else was arguing about who should get to drive the machine—

The Streets of Chicago went to work redesigning it.

END OF MOVEMENT FOUR

MOVEMENT FIVE

While They Argued, We Got to Work

Now let us show you what we've been building.

But first, let us tell you what we found when we followed the money.

Because money itself isn't what most Americans were taught to imagine.

The American dollar is no longer redeemable for gold at a fixed rate. We operate in a fiat monetary system. Most of the money in our economy exists as bank deposits, and commercial banks create deposit money when they extend credit.

Think about that.

When a bank makes a loan, it isn't handing out money that was sitting in a vault. In large part, it's creating new money right there on the books.

The money, the credit, the interest, the ownership, the obligations, the financing, the rules governing who receives capital and who must pay for its use—all of it operates through arrangements established and maintained by human institutions.

Now ask yourself who gets the loan.

And who gets told no.

For generations, whole neighborhoods in this city were outlined in red on a map and told no.

Same money. Created out of the same thin air. Just not for us.

And now look at the institution responsible for making the laws governing that economy.

Congress.

The institution entrusted with representing the People has become inseparable from an enormous, permanent competition for political money.

Money helps determine who can compete. Money buys attention. Money finances the messages designed to influence what we believe. Money supports the organizations that study our fears, our frustrations, our loyalties, and our divisions.

And those messages help determine who receives the authority to influence the rules under which money itself operates.

The money influences the message.

The message influences the election.

The election determines who exercises the authority.

And the authority helps determine the rules governing the money.

Round and round we go.

In plain sight.

Under laws enacted through the very institutions entrusted to represent us.

We have institutions administering enormous public expenditures, reporting their activities, completing their contracts, and returning year after year for more money.

And the original human problems can remain unfinished.

The money completes its journey.

The people are still waiting.

We could have pointed fingers, demanded somebody's defeat, and added our voices to the enormous business of keeping Americans angry at one another.

But we'd already seen what that business produces.

So we went to work.

And here's the part of our story nobody saw coming.

For generations, the institutions possessed an advantage that went far beyond money.

They controlled access to much of the professional expertise, analytical capability, technical infrastructure, and information necessary to examine the arrangements governing our lives.

They could hire economists to study our neighborhoods.

Lawyers to structure the agreements.

Financial professionals to organize the capital.

Consultants to explain the opportunities.

Researchers to interpret the consequences.

And communications professionals to tell the public what it all meant.

Meanwhile, the people living through those circumstances possessed something that no amount of institutional research could fully replace.

We knew what actually happened to the people.

We knew things that couldn't be understood simply by examining the numbers.

Because we were living the consequences those numbers were supposed to represent.

Then the institutions started preparing to use extraordinary new intelligence to make themselves even more capable.

And something else happened.

The Streets got access to that same capability too.

Now let's be plain about what that is, because Truth and Respect require it.

Super Intelligence and Extraordinary Capability. SIEC.

It's artificial intelligence. The most powerful research and reasoning technology ever put into ordinary hands.

We used it to read the laws. To follow the money. To study the contracts, the budgets, and the financial structures. To check our numbers. To test our arguments. To help us put our words on the page.

And we'll tell you exactly what it didn't do.

It didn't live on our blocks.

It didn't bury our friends.

It didn't sit in the pews, work the corners, run the crews, or raise the children.

The questions are ours. The judgment is ours. The lived experience is ours. The voice is ours. And the final word is ours.

Street Intelligence met Super Intelligence.

And the Streets stayed in charge.

Think about the reversal.

The same human beings who had been treated as problems to be managed could begin examining the arrangements established to manage them.

The people whose experiences had supplied generations of institutional research could now use powerful research capabilities for themselves.

The people whose neighborhoods had been the subjects of economic development could begin designing economic development arrangements of their own.

And the people who had been waiting for somebody else to explain why the promises never became results could start writing the terms for those results themselves.

And we weren't doing it to win another argument.

We were doing it because we finally had the opportunity to put everything we'd learned to work on something worthy of the intelligence that produced it.

And because a capability this powerful can lift people up or push them out, we did something nobody asked us to do.

We wrote the rules for it first.

The Human SIEC Charter.

Super Intelligence and Extraordinary Capability in Service of Human Freedom and Quality of Life.

Here's what it says, in plain Chicago.

A human being stays in charge. Always. A named person with the real power to stop it, change it, and reverse it.

Capability to act does not create authority to rule.

When a machine lets one worker do the work of ten, we follow the money. The gain doesn't get to disappear into somebody else's pocket while the other nine get a pink slip.

And remember where the intelligence came from.

Super Intelligence didn't invent language. It didn't invent medicine, mathematics, or law. It didn't invent gospel, or house music, or the blues.

It learned from us.

From everything human beings have written, built, discovered, and sung.

So the human beings it learned from don't get erased from the value it creates.

Technology is the instrument.

Human beings determine the assignment.

And then we did the thing the institutions never expected from the Streets of Chicago.

We didn't come back with another demand to be studied.

We came back with terms.

The People's Freedom and Quality of Life Covenant. The terms of the deal, with the Seven as the standard.

The Human SIEC Charter. The rules that keep the most powerful technology on earth working for people.

Three Covenant Industries.

Skilled Builders. Proven capacity converted into licensed work and worker-owned companies.

Cannabis Equity and Unity. A market that used to put us in handcuffs, converted into lawful ownership and citizenship.

Creator and Culture. The culture they captured, converted into creator-owned business and community wealth.

Four Chicago proof lanes.

Lead Pipe 2050.

The Chicago Unity Memorial.

The Tolton Home Ownership Initiative.

MusicTown 2030.

And a forward application for quantum and frontier technology, so the next economy doesn't get built on our land without us.

All of it running on three sentences.

Benefits follow the person.

Ownership follows the work.

Community wealth follows the value created.

And one rule that binds everybody, including us.

Public advantage carries public obligation.

Now let us show you what that looks like.

Chicago has two problems that everybody keeps discussing separately.

The first problem is in the ground.

Chicago has more than four hundred thousand confirmed and suspected lead service lines. That's the largest known inventory of any city in America. Pipes carrying drinking water into homes where children live.

There is no safe level of lead for a child.

And under the schedule Illinois law allowed, Chicago could have been replacing those pipes into the 2070s.

Think about that.

A baby born in this city today could reach middle age before the city finishes delivering safe water to every home.

The second problem is standing on the corner.

Young men with organizational intelligence, judgment, and hustle, and no lawful door to walk through.

The city doesn't have enough crews to finish the pipes on any decent timetable.

The young men can't find work that will feed a family.

Now put those two problems in the same room.

Street Intelligence looked at that and said: those aren't two problems.

That's a workforce and a job.

That's Lead Pipe 2050.

A completion target of 2050, decades ahead of the old state schedule, and never slower than any deadline the law requires.

A target cost of twenty thousand dollars a line, against a reported city average around thirty-one thousand.

And not one dollar of that saving comes out of a worker's wage, a weaker pipe, or a skipped inspection. It comes from smarter engineering, scale, coordinated streets, and open books.

The men come in at real trade wages.

They get benefits that follow them.

They earn credentials.

They become crew leaders.

And then they become crew owners, with companies that can work across Illinois and in cities all over this country for decades.

The neighborhood organization that once organized young men around the corner converts into a new kind of NGO.

A Non-Gang Organization.

Now watch what one pipe does.

Health, because a child drinks clean water.

Stability, because a man has serious work.

Peace and Safety, because a lawful path replaces a dangerous one.

Family, because a father can provide.

Opportunity, because the credentials are real.

Ownership, because the worker becomes the owner.

Truth and Respect, because the books are open and the men are recognized as the assets they always were.

One pipe.

All Seven.

That's what happens when the people who know where the pathway broke are the ones who rebuild it.

And here's the part that changes the whole conversation.

They call us the bottom.

In 2024, the lower half of American households by income spent about three point two trillion dollars.

Three point two trillion.

That's bigger than the entire economy of almost every country on earth.

The people they call the bottom aren't a charity case.

We're the customer.

We're the workforce.

We're the economy.

And when we organize around the Seven, every enterprise that wants our dollars, our labor, our trust, and our attention has a reason to answer our terms.

And the next economy is already arriving.

On the South Side, on the land where U.S. Steel's South Works once stood, Illinois is building a quantum computing park.

The steel mill that employed our grandfathers is becoming a quantum campus.

So here's the question.

Will our grandchildren work there?

Or will they just pay the electric bill?

Data centers and quantum campuses run on land, power, water, and public support. The same things our communities have been supplying for generations without a share of the upside.

The Covenant welcomes the next economy.

On one condition.

The big users pay the costs they create. The neighborhoods get the training and the contracts before the jobs are filled. And the public support produces a public return.

Public advantage carries public obligation.

And then there's the music.

Last year, Chicago welcomed nearly fifty-seven million visitors who spent more than twenty-one billion dollars.

Now ask how much of that reached the West Side that helped give the world its music.

MusicTown 2030 changes the map. Studios, venues, museums, restaurants, hotels, and the Music Mecca, built on the West Side, so visitor dollars come to the neighborhood because the neighborhood owns part of what the visitors came to see.

Creators own their masters.

Remember when we said, ask the musicians?

This is the answer.

The Chicago Unity Memorial begins where this city has too rarely begun. With the dead, counted and remembered.

Tens of thousands of lives lost to violence across five decades. Behind every number is a name, a family, and a story too often reduced to a police report.

The families who lived the loss don't sit in the audience.

They hold the authority.

Because a city cannot prevent what it refuses to mourn.

And the Tolton Home Ownership Initiative carries the name of Father Augustus Tolton.

Born into slavery in Missouri. Carried across the Mississippi to freedom by his mother. Turned away by every seminary in America because he was Black.

So he was ordained in Rome. And he came home to Chicago.

He started building a church for his people on the South Side. St. Monica's. It never rose past its first floor before he died in 1897, at forty-three years old.

A Black man in this city, building something for his own people, who ran out of time before the structure could be finished.

The Church has declared him Venerable. Chicago is still waiting on him too.

The Tolton Initiative turns renters into owners, built to outlast City Hall. Because ownership that depends on the goodwill of a mayor isn't ownership at all.

We're finishing what he started.

Now, we're going to tell you the truth about all of it.

This is designed. It is ready to be proved. It is not finished, and nobody gets to pretend otherwise. Not us, and not anybody else.

Every claim gets checked.

Every dollar stays in the open.

Failures get reported as fast as successes.

Because a system that only reports its wins isn't a proof system.

It's the old machine with a friendlier logo.

And the same standard we're bringing to Washington applies right here in Chicago.

Including to us.

So that's what we were doing while they argued.

They spent billions studying our fears.

We spent our time studying their machinery.

They built campaigns.

We built a Covenant.

They asked for our votes.

We wrote our terms.

God gave us the gift. The Streets did the homework.

And now we're taking our terms to the door of the institution that writes the rules.

END OF MOVEMENT FIVE

MOVEMENT SIX

The Office Belongs to the People

Now there's one institution sitting at the center of everything we've shown you.

An institution with the constitutional authority to write the laws under which much of this machinery operates.

An institution whose members must compete inside the very political and financial arrangements they have the authority to change.

An institution Americans have been fighting over for generations.

The United States Congress.

And before anybody reaches for another political accusation, we've got something to say.

We're not bringing Congress another enemy.

We're bringing Congress an opportunity.

But first, America deserves to understand the arrangement those representatives are operating inside.

Now, we're not asking Congress to surrender its constitutional responsibilities.

We're asking something much more fundamental.

Who are those responsibilities supposed to serve?

And when the financial and political arrangements surrounding public office have become misaligned with that purpose, why should the People continue accepting the arrangement as though it were beyond correction?

Because we've arrived at a remarkable contradiction.

We have been taught to look at Congress as the institution possessing the power to correct so many of our national problems.

But Congress itself operates inside the political and financial machinery that requires correction.

And that means the very people entrusted with changing the arrangement can be among the people whose professional lives have become dependent upon it.

Think about that.

The people holding the authority to change the rules are operating under rules that reward them for keeping the arrangement alive.

That's like asking the casino to fix the odds while it's still counting the money.

And here's a perfect example, fresh off this year's news.

Members of Congress write the laws that move the stock market.

And members of Congress are still allowed to trade individual stocks. They just have to report the trades, sometimes weeks later.

Almost everybody in Washington says that ought to stop.

So this summer, the House passed a partial ban.

Then an unrelated fight got attached to it. The Senate vote fell short. Both sides blamed each other.

And the rules stayed exactly the same.

Remember the package deal?

There it is.

Now, what are we supposed to do with that?

Condemn every person who ever ran for Congress?

Declare everybody dishonest?

Spend another election screaming about which political party deserves the blame?

We've tried enough of that.

And it has produced an enormous amount of anger.

But anger isn't the destination.

Truth is how we get out of the anger.

And the truth points us toward a very different way of dealing with Congress.

Because the people serving inside this arrangement are human beings too.

Some of them came to Washington for all the right reasons. Some of them have been trying to do the right thing inside a machine that punishes them for it.

And before we ask them to change the machinery, perhaps America ought to give them something the permanent campaign rarely offers.

A chance to stand before the People without another political advertisement speaking for them.

A chance to acknowledge what has happened.

And a chance to show us, through their actions, whom they have come to serve.

Now here's where the whole thing begins to make sense.

We've spent so much time arguing about who should control Congress that we've almost forgotten to ask what Congress is supposed to accomplish.

And we've spent so much time blaming the people who serve there that we've barely examined what the arrangement requires of them.

Think about the position we've put these people in.

We ask them to represent us.

But to get elected, they have to compete for money.

To remain competitive, they have to maintain political support.

To maintain that support, they have to work within their party's political arrangements.

And to remain in office, they have to keep preparing for another election.

Now imagine trying to operate a business that way.

You hire somebody to manage the company.

They arrive on Monday.

By Tuesday, they're raising money to keep their job.

Wednesday, they're meeting with the people financing their campaign.

Thursday, they're explaining why the other manager would destroy the company.

Friday, they're asking you for another contribution.

Saturday, they're at a fundraiser.

Sunday, they're on television explaining what a tough week it's been.

And when you ask how the business is doing, they tell you how much money they've raised.

Congratulations. You've got a political campaign.

But who's running the business?

Now, of course, Congress does real work. Legislation gets written. Budgets are negotiated. Public responsibilities are carried out.

And many people serving there take those responsibilities seriously.

That's exactly why we ought to examine the arrangement.

Because the institution has real constitutional responsibilities, and the people entrusted with them ought to have every opportunity to fulfill those responsibilities without having their professional survival depend upon an endless competition for political money.

Yet look at what we've created.

A person can enter Congress with honorable intentions and discover that maintaining the position requires an enormous amount of attention to things that have very little to do with the Seven.

Fundraising.

Party leadership.

Political relationships.

Committee assignments.

Campaign organizations.

Outside spending.

And the next election.

Now, notice something.

We haven't accused that person of doing anything dishonest.

We haven't accused their party of plotting against America.

We haven't even questioned why they wanted to serve.

We've simply examined what the machinery rewards.

And that's enough to recognize the problem.

Because when political survival becomes a continuing financial enterprise, the interests financing that enterprise acquire influence over the conditions under which public service takes place.

The money doesn't have to purchase every decision.

It doesn't have to control every politician.

And it doesn't have to organize one enormous conspiracy.

It only has to create dependencies strong enough that the people inside the arrangement must continually account for them.

Think about that.

The politician depends upon the party.

The party depends upon the machinery necessary to win elections.

That machinery depends upon money.

And the people supplying substantial amounts of that money often have interests in the laws, regulations, expenditures, and decisions government makes.

Round and round we go.

Meanwhile, who does Congress belong to?

Us.

The People.

The same people who pay for the government, endure the consequences of its decisions, and are supposed to possess the authority from which representative government derives its legitimacy.

Now here's where we can simplify an enormous problem.

There are two corrections we ought to be able to discuss without turning on one another.

The first is congressional term limits.

The second is the money financing federal elections.

And they belong together.

Consider term limits.

Experience matters. Institutional knowledge matters. Competence matters.

But none of those things should make public office a permanent possession.

We already understand that principle when we apply it to the presidency.

Why should the concentration of power in Congress escape the same serious examination?

A congressional seat belongs to the People. Serving in it is an opportunity and a responsibility, not a piece of property somebody gets to keep.

Some of these seats have been occupied so long, you'd think they came with a deed.

Public service should never become permanent ownership of public authority.

We call for a constitutional amendment.

Two four-year terms in the House of Representatives.

Two terms in the Senate.

Two terms, the same as the President of the United States.

Right now, a member of the House gets two years in office and spends both of them running for the next election.

Four-year terms, elected alongside the President, give them time to do the job they were sent to do.

And now consider the money.

What good would term limits accomplish if every new candidate had to enter the same financial arrangement to become competitive?

We could replace the people and leave the machinery exactly where it was.

New faces.

New advertisements.

New fundraising emails.

Same dependencies.

On the other hand, suppose we corrected campaign financing without addressing the permanent accumulation of political power.

The financial relationships might improve, but the institutional advantages of holding office indefinitely could remain.

That's why the two corrections belong together.

Term limits address the permanence of political power. Campaign-finance reform addresses the financial dependence surrounding it.

Neither alone corrects everything.

Together, they begin changing what the machinery rewards.

The Covenant calls for citizen-funded federal campaigns. Every dollar and every outside expenditure disclosed in real time. And no more members of Congress trading individual stocks while they write the laws that move them.

And that's the point.

We're not trying to tell the American People which political party should win.

We're not trying to tell anybody to abandon their representative.

We're not even asking people to stop disagreeing about the important issues facing the country.

We're asking something much simpler.

Can we agree that the institutions we finance ought to be organized around the purposes for which we established them?

Can we agree that public office belongs to the People?

Can we agree that concentrated money should not enjoy a greater practical claim upon political attention than the citizens whose lives are governed by the decisions?

And can we agree that a country capable of extraordinary accomplishments ought to be capable of correcting the rules governing its own representatives?

Because if we can agree on those principles, we have something much more useful than another argument.

We have a direction.

Now, nobody should mistake what we're saying.

Changing these arrangements requires real constitutional and legislative work.

Congressional term limits require a constitutional amendment. Campaign-finance reform must respect constitutional rights while changing the financial dependencies surrounding elections.

Those responsibilities are real.

And the Constitution already gave the People the road. Article Five. Two-thirds of both houses of Congress can propose an amendment, or two-thirds of the state legislatures can call a convention to propose one. Three-fourths of the states ratify it.

But the People don't have to complete all that work before deciding what we expect our representatives to do.

We can establish the expectation now.

Before the new Congress takes the oath.

Before another campaign begins.

Before another generation grows up being told that everything depends upon which political party wins.

And here's what makes this opportunity so extraordinary.

We don't have to change anybody's vote.

We don't have to settle every disagreement.

We don't have to ask our neighbors to surrender their convictions.

And we don't have to spend another lifetime waiting for the political machinery to volunteer to correct itself.

We can stand together on the Seven.

We can recognize the two corrections that must move forward.

And we can begin holding the people entrusted with public authority accountable for what they choose to do.

Because we've heard enough speeches.

We've heard enough promises.

We've watched enough elections come and go.

This time, we want to see an action.

Something public.

Something unmistakable.

Something every American can recognize, regardless of which political party they support.

An action that doesn't complete the entire correction but establishes where the work begins.

Because there's something the American People deserve after all these years.

A beginning that belongs to us.

This is our republic.

Well, then we ought to act like it.

Because there's something remarkable about the position we've reached.

We have spent generations allowing the people seeking public office to decide what the conversation is going to be about.

They choose the issues. They choose the arguments. They choose the advertisements. They choose the questions they want us to answer.

And then they spend billions and billions of dollars trying to persuade us to give them the job.

Think about that.

We own the office.

But the people applying for it have been conducting most of the interviews.

Imagine a job interview where the applicant asks all the questions, writes his own job description, votes on his own pay, and tells you that if you don't hire him, the whole company is going to burn down.

Then he asks you to chip in for the interview.

Before midnight.

Well, we've got a few questions of our own.

And we've got something even more important.

We've got the terms.

Now, America, this is where we want everybody to recognize what has changed.

The Streets of Chicago didn't spend all this time examining the institutions of our constitutional republic just to arrive with another complaint.

We have a Covenant.

The People's Freedom and Quality of Life Covenant.

And that Covenant carries something much more substantial than a collection of promises.

It establishes the human purposes the institutions of this country were created to serve. It carries the economic arrangements we're proposing, the opportunities we're developing, and the work by which those proposals can become real.

It carries the evidence. It carries the responsibilities. And it establishes how the results will be judged.

All Seven.

We've been doing our homework.

And we're going to keep doing it.

Because this is a living undertaking. As the work advances, the Covenant advances. As we discover something new, we examine it. When something is wrong, we correct it.

And here's what makes the entire arrangement interesting.

We don't have to convince every American to support the same candidate.

We don't even have to agree about which political party has the better ideas.

We can have those arguments.

That's part of living in a free country.

But before the next argument starts, there's something we ought to be able to establish together.

Who is working for whom?

Because somewhere along the way, political allegiance has gotten turned around.

Candidates want our allegiance.

Political parties want our loyalty.

Campaigns want our contributions.

And the moment one election ends, somebody is already trying to persuade us that the next one will determine whether the country survives.

Meanwhile, the office still belongs to us.

Now, every member of Congress already takes an oath.

It's written into federal law. They swear to support and defend the Constitution, to bear true faith and allegiance to it, and to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office.

And the oath ends with four words.

So help me God.

We honor that oath.

We're not here to replace it.

But think about how it's been working.

On day one, they raise their right hand before God and the Constitution.

And by day two, they're back on the phone raising money for the next election.

So the Streets have one more question to put on the record.

Whom do you serve?

So we're going to make a very simple correction.

Let us show you what happens when the Streets restore order.

Where we come from, everybody knows what it looks like when somebody restores order.

Somebody stands up in the middle of the noise.

The room gets quiet.

And everybody gets reminded who answers to whom.

So hear us, America.

With God standing beside us, here's the order.

The People come before the parties.

The public obligation comes before the private advantage.

The Constitution comes before the institution.

And the politicians answer to the People.

Not the other way around.

Order restored.

And now, for the first time in a very long time, the people taking office are going to receive something from us.

This time, we're going to give them something to read.

Our words.

Imagine that.

After all those campaign speeches, all those political advertisements, all those carefully prepared messages designed to tell Americans what they ought to believe—

We're going to ask the politicians to read something the People have written for them.

And we're going to ask them to read it publicly.

In their own voices.

On the record.

Where everybody can hear it.

We call it the Pledge of Allegiance to the People.

The People's Pledge.

END OF MOVEMENT SIX

MOVEMENT SEVEN

The People's Pledge

Here it is.

It begins with a principle that ought to be familiar to everyone serving in our constitutional republic.

Public authority belongs to the People.

It is entrusted to those who serve.

It is not theirs to possess.

And it continues into the responsibilities that give those words meaning: the proper purpose of public office, the permanence of political power, the influence of money over elections, and the Seven human purposes government exists to help protect and advance.

Now, here's where it gets interesting.

We're extending that invitation to every member of Congress sworn in this January.

The same Pledge.

The same opportunity.

A Democrat doesn't get one version.

A Republican doesn't get another.

An Independent doesn't have to find somebody willing to write a third.

The People have already supplied the words.

And each person entrusted with a seat gets to decide whether they're willing to stand publicly behind them.

Nobody has to confess to a crime.

Nobody has to switch parties.

Nobody has to agree with us about every policy in America.

If you're taking your seat for the first time, the door is open.

If you've been serving for thirty years, the door is open to you too.

All you have to do is stand before the People and read.

Out loud.

In your own voice.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE PEOPLE

Having earned the trust of the People and the opportunity to serve, or to continue serving, I pledge my allegiance to the People of the United States of America and to the Constitution of the Republic they established.

Before God, and with respect for every person's freedom of conscience, I acknowledge that public authority belongs to the People.

It is entrusted to me.

It is not mine to possess.

I recognize that the arrangement we have all been operating under is broken.

Money, permanent campaigns, party advantage, and institutions protecting themselves have come between public service and the People it exists to serve.

Good intentions have not been enough.

I acknowledge this truth without condemning anyone who has served inside that arrangement.

And I pledge to help change it.

I pledge to restore the proper order of public service.

The People come before political parties.

Public obligations come before private advantage.

The Constitution comes before institutional interests.

And the freedom and quality of life of the People remain the purpose of every power entrusted to me.

I commit to term limits for every member of Congress, established by constitutional amendment.

Two four-year terms in the House of Representatives.

Two terms in the Senate.

Two terms, the same as the President of the United States.

I commit to citizen-funded federal elections, with every dollar disclosed in real time, so that no corporation, union, lobby, contractor, or special interest finances the campaigns of the people who write its laws.

I will not trade individual stocks while I hold office, and neither will my immediate family.

I accept these terms as the People have published them. Where I hold a condition, I will state it publicly, and it will be recorded beside my name.

These commitments will not end as campaign promises, endless studies, or discussions without decisions.

I will advance them through the lawful legislative process and work for clear, separate, recorded votes.

I will not use unrelated provisions, deliberate procedural obstruction, or political convenience to defeat them.

From the day I sign this Pledge, my answers are on the public record.

From the day I take office, my votes are there too.

I acknowledge that public office is a period of service, not a permanent entitlement.

That serving the People deserves fair and transparent compensation, but never ownership of the office.

And that the opportunity to serve must remain greater than the opportunity to profit from holding power.

I pledge to direct my service toward the Seven inseparable human purposes of the People's Freedom and Quality of Life Covenant:

Health.

Stability.

Peace and Safety.

Family.

Opportunity.

Ownership.

Truth and Respect.

And I will work so that no person ever has to surrender one of the Seven to obtain another.

I will protect the constitutional rights of those who agree with me and those who do not.

I will respect the independence of the People, their families, their communities, and their lawful enterprises.

I will never ask them to surrender that independence in exchange for the public service to which they are entitled.

I accept responsibility for making my commitments visible, my actions accountable, and my service answerable to the People.

> I make this pledge freely.
>
> Not as allegiance to a political party.
>
> Not as allegiance to a person.
>
> Not as allegiance to an institution.
>
> But as my commitment to the People whose trust I have received.
>
> I pledge my allegiance to the People.
>
> I serve the People.
>
> The People do not serve me.
>
> So help me God.

That's it.

Those are our words.

And we're going to make something else clear.

We aren't judging anybody's ability to deliver a beautiful speech.

We've had plenty of beautiful speeches.

We're interested in what happens after the words are spoken.

A politician can acknowledge that the office belongs to the People.

Wonderful.

Now show us.

What did you do with the authority entrusted to you?

What did you do about the arrangements that keep political power concentrated?

What did you do about the money that finances your political survival?

What did you do to advance the Seven?

And if you disagreed with something we proposed, what did you offer instead?

We can examine that too.

Because we're not asking public servants to surrender their judgment.

We're asking them to exercise it in the open, where the People can examine the result.

And we're offering every one of them the same opportunity to begin.

So here's how the record works.

Every member taking a seat gets asked.

And every answer goes on the record.

The Pledge is read as written. Every word, in order.

Change a word, and you've changed the Pledge, and the record will show exactly what you said.

You don't have to respect it.

Just don't disrespect it.

So every answer lands in one of four places.

Read as written.

Read with conditions, and the conditions get written down right next to the name.

Declined.

Or no response.

Silence doesn't get counted as a yes.

And it doesn't get counted as a no.

It gets counted as silence.

Same standard for every party. Same standard for the members who agree with us. Same standard for our own.

Every member of Congress sworn in this January will have the opportunity to make the Pledge.

And the more Americans who stand behind that expectation, the harder it becomes for anyone holding public office to pretend the question was never asked.

Now here's where you come in.

Because this was never just about the politicians.

Think about how this usually works.

Every election, the campaigns go looking for people with big followings. The artists. The athletes. The personalities. The people with the platforms. And they pay good money for those voices to tell us who to vote for.

Well, the voices are about to work for us.

The Streets of Chicago are handing the microphone to our own.

The artists. The creators. The barbers and the pastors. The block club presidents. The people with a million followers and the people with forty.

And instead of telling the People what the politicians want us to hear—

We're going to tell the politicians what the People want them to read.

That's the inversion.

They flipped the table on us a long time ago.

We're turning it right side up.

So here's what we're asking.

Go to thechicagodeal.us and Co-Sign.

Read the Covenant. Judge the Seven for yourself.

Download the flag. The Seven-point star. Our North Star.

Put it up. On your page. In your stories. On your profile. In your window.

And then tell your members of Congress, in your own words, that you want them to read the People's Pledge.

Tag your representative. Tag your senators. Tag every member who has ever asked you for five dollars before midnight.

You don't have to use our words for that part.

Use yours.

But if you'd like a place to start, start here.

> *I stand with the Seven. I'm asking you to read the People's Pledge out loud, on the record. The office belongs to the People. #TheChicagoDeal*

And Co-Sign means exactly what it sounds like.

If you've read the Covenant and you choose to stand with it, you put your name on it.

Freely.

Not as a party registration. Not as a donation. Not as a surrender to some new institution.

Just a free person saying, out in the open, these are the terms I'm willing to stand behind.

And to the institutions that answer to the People, to Government, to Enterprise, to Civic and Community Organizations, and to the Media—

The Covenant has terms for you too.

Read them.

Bring a specific answer.

Now consider what this means for the rest of America.

The person who voted Democrat can stand beside the person who voted Republican.

The person who voted for neither can stand beside both of them.

They can continue disagreeing about candidates and policies.

But they can agree that the people entrusted with public authority ought to acknowledge whom they serve.

And they can stand behind the Covenant that establishes what that service is supposed to accomplish.

Seven points on one star.

Our North Star.

Now we've got something.

And here's the beautiful part.

We don't have to become Democrats to do it.

We don't have to become Republicans.

We don't have to surrender our beliefs, our differences, our independence, or the freedom to disagree.

We don't even have to agree about who should win an election.

We can disagree about all those things while standing together on one fundamental truth.

The institutions belong to the People. The People do not belong to the institutions.

We unite to stay independent.

Because the question is no longer simply which political party can persuade enough Americans to win an election.

The People have entered the conversation carrying our own terms.

The politicians can answer.

The institutions can respond.

And the work can be examined.

Nobody has to abandon the Constitution. Nobody has to surrender an opinion. And nobody has to wait for a political party to give us permission to establish our expectations.

We're going to continue having elections.

We're going to continue having disagreements.

But the People can begin changing the relationship without waiting for a single congressional seat to change hands.

That's how the Streets restore order.

Without changing a single vote.

Without changing a single person.

And the extraordinary part?

The people bringing this opportunity to America are the same people whose neighborhoods have spent generations being discussed, investigated, managed, and used as political evidence by institutions whose decisions we were rarely permitted to influence.

Well, look who's asking the questions now.

We came from the Streets of Chicago.

We know what happens when the people who live with the consequences don't control the terms.

And we've learned what becomes possible when we begin establishing those terms for ourselves.

So, America, after everything we've shown you about the arrangement, nobody has to wonder what the Streets of Chicago want.

We've put it in writing.

And we've brought it to the People.

And there's one more thing we have to say before we close.

We can't introduce the People's Freedom and Quality of Life Covenant to America without talking about a man.

Mr. Larry Hoover.

America has been told a lot about Mr. Larry Hoover.

Most of it by people who have never met him.

We know him.

Mr. Larry Hoover went to prison in 1973. He was twenty-two years old.

Malcolm X was gone. Dr. King was gone. Fred Hampton was gone. The West Side was still living in the ashes of 1968.

He was convicted of ordering a killing.

We're not forgetting the life that was lost. Not for one second.

And we're not here to retry the case.

We're here to talk about the punishment.

In America, the typical person released from state prison for murder has served about seventeen and a half years.

The other man convicted in that same 1973 killing was paroled after about twenty.

Mr. Larry Hoover is seventy-five years old.

He has been locked up for fifty-three years.

More than two-thirds of his life.

Longer than most Americans have been alive.

The punishment doesn't fit the crime.

It never did.

So ask yourself what else was going on.

Because from inside a prison cell, Mr. Larry Hoover took the two letters the whole country had learned to fear and gave them a new meaning.

G and D.

Growth and Development.

And he started talking about votes.

In 1990, he launched 21st Century VOTE. Voter registration drives. Community clean-ups. Protests at the doors of City Hall.

The government's own recordings caught him saying it plain.

"They got to get 'em out and vote."

The man America was told to fear most was on tape telling young men to go register and vote.

In 1995, the federal government came for him.

Six life sentences.

Six.

Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the most notorious cartel boss on the planet, got one.

El Chapo sits today in the same federal supermax where Mr. Hoover spent more than twenty years. He's been there since 2019, and he has already written the court that he's getting sick and he's going to lose his mind.

His son cut a deal with the United States government. Seventeen members of his family crossed into this country.

Mr. Larry Hoover did more than twenty years in that building.

He said it himself. He believed his politics were the reason he was still locked up.

That's why the Streets of Chicago call Mr. Larry Hoover a political prisoner.

In 2025, Washington commuted every one of those six life sentences.

Time served.

For decades, those federal life sentences meant nothing Illinois did could ever bring him home.

That reason is gone.

Only one person can send Mr. Larry Hoover home with the stroke of a pen.

The Governor of Illinois.

JB Pritzker.

A governor who has already commuted the sentences of people convicted of murder.

The paperwork has been on his desk since May.

A man's freedom shouldn't wait on anybody's politics.

This isn't about a party. It isn't about anybody's next campaign.

We told you we came to restore order.

We told you the war being waged on the American People, neighbor against neighbor, party against party, was the biggest con of our lifetime.

Well, we just ended it.

The People stood up. The Seven are on the flag. The terms are on the table. The politicians have something to read.

That war is over.

And when a war is over, the prisoners come home.

Mr. Larry Hoover comes first.

We're not asking anybody to change their mind about the past.

We're not asking anybody for anything.

We're standing on God, and we're telling you where the Streets of Chicago stand.

We believe in redemption because we've lived it. We believe in mercy because God has shown it to every one of us.

It's time to send Mr. Larry Hoover home.

They called us the bottom.

They were wrong.

The bottom is the foundation.

It's laid lowest, and it carries the most. Everything else stands on it.

And God has always known the value of the stone the builders rejected.

The pathway is broken.

The dream is not.

So after everything, after all the elections, all the promises, all the arguments, and all the years we've spent living with the consequences, there's one question a free people has to keep asking.

Are we still our own?

Here's our answer.

We are.

We remain our own.

And this isn't the end of anything.

This is the beginning.

America, we asked you to turn the noise down.

Thank you for listening.

Our late brother Mack Mecca said it best.

We just wanted to talk to you.

Now you've heard from us.

The jig is up.

Now let's see what we can build together.

All glory to God.

Let's build.

END OF MOVEMENT SEVEN

AUTHORS
The Streets of Chicago

STEWARDS
Bo Deal · Powers B. Miller

HONORED BROTHER
Mack Mecca · David Penn · In Memoriam

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