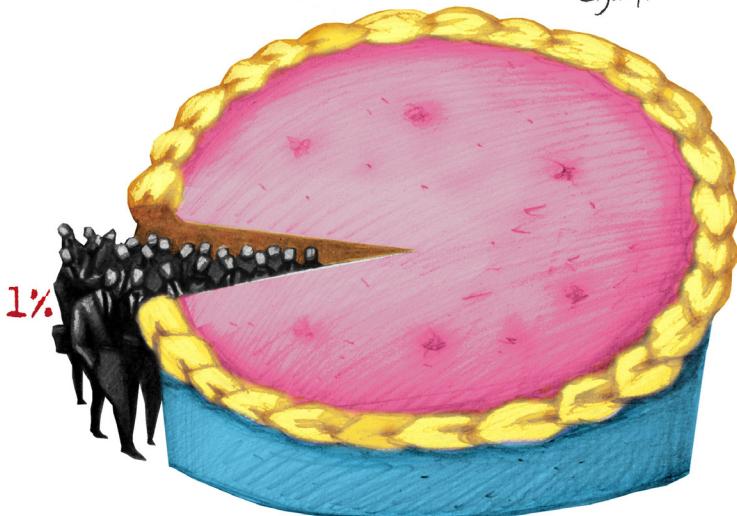
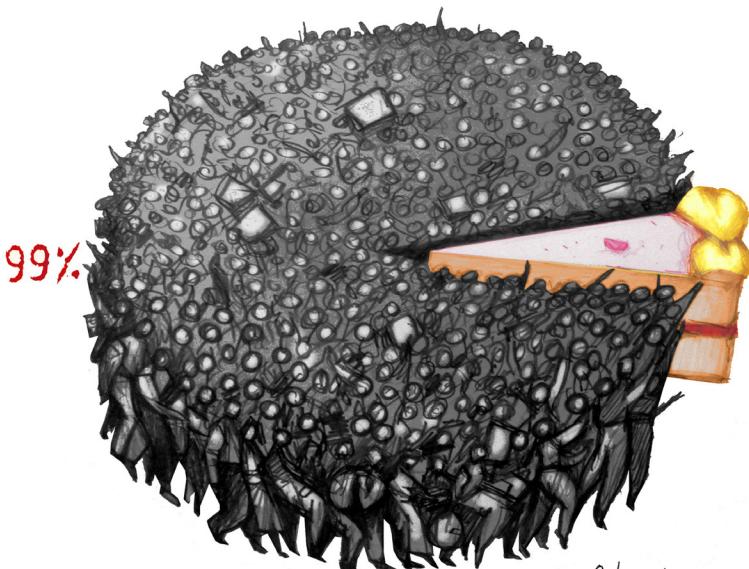


# Strategies the Ultra-Rich Use to Transfer Wealth to the Top

*Gwen Brown*



*Cover artwork by Carlos David Fuentes • Cartoon Movement*

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*For information:  
Gbbrown@udel.edu*

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# **Strategies the Ultra-Rich Use to Transfer Wealth to the Top**

*Gwen Brown*



# About Me and This Pamphlet

I am an older white woman who has spent parts of my life living in each socioeconomic class in the United States.

As a child growing up in rural poverty, I experienced material hardship, with little indoor heat, an outhouse, and an inside pump with cold water only. Fortunately, we were given eggs from my uncle's farm and canned goods and used clothes from the people in a nearby church. The kindness of others helped my family get through hard times, and it helped me keep a strong faith in the goodness of people.

At the same time, I was surrounded by adults who lacked a sense of their worth, and when things got hard, they often acted out their upset on each other and the children around them. Through those early years, I witnessed children in my family and neighborhood being mistreated and humiliated in many scary, violent, and heartbreaking ways. Over and over again, I asked myself two questions: "Why is this happening?" and "Can't someone please fix this?"

As a teenager, my family became working class when my father found a steady job as a mechanic and my mother began working in the school cafeteria. Years later, I went to college and became a Head Start teacher for preschoolers who live in poverty, a job which moved me into the middle class. Eventually, my husband and I went to graduate school. He became a lawyer, I became a professor of child development, and, once loans were paid off, we eventually became pretty wealthy.

Although I didn't get my two most important early childhood questions answered sufficiently at that time, I did learn a lot from living in different socioeconomic classes. I learned that nobody from any class background escapes childhood without losing some of their joy and deep confidence. None of us, as yet, gets to grow up in families, communities, and schools that fully meet our many and varied needs, particularly our need to be respected and listened to, so that we can stay connected and think at our best. Another thing I learned is that the economic

problems we all face are big, and no one person is likely to come along and fix things. We are all needed.

My interest in class issues has persisted throughout my life. In an effort to answer my questions, I got my doctorate from the University of Virginia, writing a dissertation on the development of altruism in children. Looking back, I assume that choosing that topic was an effort to figure out why well-meaning people don't share more of their resources so that all children can thrive and flourish.

After graduation, I began a life of college teaching, first at the University of Maryland and then at the University of Delaware, where I developed a statewide PACT Family Support Network. PACT stands for Parents as Counselors and Teachers. The program was designed to provide information and emotional support to low-income parents so they could do their best with their children. I also created "Tips For Parents," a TV program with one-minute tips shown on public television between the children's shows *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*. While doing this, I began building an international grassroots network of people raised poor who exchange mutual support and listening, using the basic practices of Re-evaluation Counseling.

Through the last thirty years, I have listened to people of all economic groups, in the USA and many other countries, as I led classes and workshops about effective parenting, peer counseling, and eliminating classism and racism. I raised a daughter in the upper middle class and now help her as she raises her upper-middle-class children and teaches psychology at a university. I also still have relationships with and help to support some of my relatives living at the low end of the economic scale.

After these experiences, I finally have more complete answers to my early childhood questions. Among the things I have learned is that we were all born wanting things to go well for everyone, but because we got hurt as young ones, and were not given the help to recover our good heart and mind, we don't always do the right thing. However, with accurate

information and good emotional support, we are better able to behave according to our deep-down goodness and take steps toward creating a better world for everyone.

Therefore, as a lifelong learner and leader around class issues, I wrote the following pamphlet in the hope that I could offer people some information that might help them take steps toward eliminating three great problems that face our world today:

1. The growing income inequality
2. The bitterness, division, and violence between people
3. The threat the climate emergency poses to every species on our planet

I hope this pamphlet will help you move toward more effective leadership related to the strategies many ultra-wealthy people use to undermine our efforts to solve these three problems. I hope, too, that you will give this pamphlet to others so that increasing numbers of us, on this beautiful and vulnerable planet, can act in ways that eventually allow all of us to flourish.



# Strategies the Ultra-Rich Use to Transfer Wealth to the Top

*by Gwen Brown*

At this critical moment in history, we are called upon to save ourselves and our beautiful planet. A key to doing this is understanding how a segment of the owning class controls wealth and stays in power. Even though all of us are impacted daily by the strategies the ultra-wealthy use, most of us have not had the opportunity to think about these tactics and fully understand their impact. To create the just world we all want, with the sustainable future we must have, we need to change that. It is particularly important that those most hurt by these strategies, the poor and working class, have a chance to learn and understand how the rich keep getting richer.

Owning-class strategies have led to the following:

- A few billionaires have most of the wealth.
- A small middle class is striving to “move up.”
- A large working class is constantly worried about having enough money to pay for food, housing, education, and health care.
- Billions of the world’s people are struggling in poverty, hoping to survive and help their children survive, for another week.
- A climate emergency threatens the survival of every species on the planet, including our own.

We need to get smart about how our economy works and teach others about it. We need to summon the courage and develop the skills to communicate clearly about class. Most important, we need to listen to, learn from, and connect with those whose opinions differ from our own.

## **TEN KEY STRATEGIES THE OWNING CLASS USES TO CONTROL WEALTH AND POWER**

The owning class uses the following strategies to control wealth and power:

### **1. Pay workers as little as possible**

Historically, those with access to and control of the wealth have made decisions based solely on the profit motive, not on what would meet the needs of workers or the planet. They pay workers as little as they can get away with, sell the product made by the workers for as high a price as possible, and keep most of the profits for themselves. They use part of this money to live extravagant lifestyles, part of it to invest in things that will make them even more money, and part of it to influence the economic and political policies that further increase their wealth.

Today, by using large amounts of their money to influence politicians, the few at the top control access to jobs, housing, food, education, health care, material goods, and respect. They keep the cost of living painfully high for workers by paying low, selling high, and backing policies that maximize their profits and help them hold onto and increase their own wealth.

### **2. Install fear using violence, threats of violence, and other scare tactics**

Workers have not easily agreed to settle for so little. All manner of violence and human degradation have been used to scare people and get them to submit to the low pay and harsh conditions they were told to accept.

Today violence is not always necessary to control people and get them to submit. People are being kept in fear by threats of job loss, unworkable living and health care conditions, homelessness, school failure, imprisonment, and labeling or institutionalization by the mental health system. Fear of retribution keeps large numbers of people silent.

Guns are glorified. Efforts to limit their purchase and use are defeated. This is because gun company owners, who make billions from sales, play upon people's fears and make them feel as if their safety and freedom depend upon the complete absence of common-sense gun regulation. Huge amounts of money are spent funding the campaigns of politicians who pledge to vote against gun control legislation.

Wars, many if not all of which could be avoided, lead to death, disability, and terror—mostly among poor and working-class people—and provide huge amounts of wealth for the owning class. These wars also require huge amounts of taxpayer money that could otherwise be used for education, housing, food, and health care for people who are struggling to survive.

Once people have been the target of disrespect and violence, they are likely to struggle with feelings of inferiority and anger. Even though they try to control these feelings, when circumstances become overwhelming, they are likely to act out their feelings on those around them. As the saying goes, "The man who experienced violence as a boy, or at work or war, comes home to beat his wife, who hits their child, who hits their younger child, who kicks the dog."

The violence that suddenly erupts in poor families and neighborhoods does not originate there. It results from generations of harsh consequences imposed on people to make them submit, be quiet, and work for little or no pay, often under dangerous conditions. Violence creates terror, a sense of aloneness and hopelessness, and ultimately more violence, the effects of which can be acted out and passed down for generations.

### **3. Flood the media with lies, misinformation, and distortions**

Telling lies, playing upon fears, and blaming are key strategies used to confuse people. Most of all, people are given distorted or untrue information about people from their own and other identity groups. We humans are born good and ready to love and respect all people. However, the pervasive lies, disrespect, and mistreatment we experience lead us to internalize untrue messages, especially about who is "better than" and who is "less than."

When poor and working-class children get mistreated, they internalize the untrue messages they hear about their inferiority. Without a chance to talk or cry about their hurt with a caring listener, they are likely to hold it in and develop negative feelings or “self-talk” that plays in their mind throughout their life. When they face challenging situations, they may say to themselves things like, “You are too stupid to do that” or “You are a nobody; don’t even try for a better life.”

This internalized oppression causes poor and working-class people to lose faith not only in their own intelligence and worth, but also in the worth of other people of their class or race. They see their group through the lens of their own sense of inferiority and are pulled to act out this disrespect or internalized oppression toward them. In this way, the “less than” messages that lead to discouragement, giving up, submission, or ineffective fighting back are experienced over and over again in poor and working-class families and neighborhoods.

When owning-class children get mistreated and left alone with their hurt, they also begin to feel inadequate and deeply unlovable. This hurt leaves them vulnerable to believing the lies they hear about their superiority and entitlement. Without a chance to process their feelings of shame and hurt with a caring listener and regain the inherent sense of worth they were born with, they are likely to develop pulls toward pretense, greed, and dominance.

In service to the idea that they are “better than” and entitled to more, and to satisfy their greed, the ultra-wealthy try to communicate lies and distortions that lead to a disproportionate amount of societal resources being given to them and their children. They fund politicians who will speak these lies and who support policies that benefit the rich, at the expense of the poor. They try to control the media so that the lies that help them accumulate wealth will be heard repeatedly and eventually confuse people about what is happening in our world and who is responsible for it.

A key wealth-producing lie the owning class spreads is that poor people, particularly those of the Global Majority (nonwhite people), are stupid, inferior, and dangerous, and therefore less deserving. Among other things, these lies enable them to get away with policies that interfere with poor people's access to voting and, thus, their access to needed services of every kind.

Another lie the ultra-wealthy push is that when more money is given to those at the top through lower taxes or other policies, a good bit of that money will "trickle down" to those in lower classes. This way of distributing money has been tried over and over through the years and has never led to any class getting richer, other than the owning class.

One of the most dangerous lies currently being told is that the use of fossil fuels is fine ("drill, baby, drill!") and is not creating a climate emergency. Owners make billions from this lie. Many other damaging lies come through our media every day.

Whenever scientific evidence suggests policies that would interfere with wealth being transferred to the top, that evidence is discredited, and scientists and universities that teach about it are heavily criticized and sometimes defunded. Likewise, when teaching correct history threatens to interfere with the policies they want, the owning class attempts to fire teachers and librarians, ban books, change museum exhibits, and in other ways distort or deny history.

#### **4. Pit people against each other and encourage oppressive behavior**

Since the working class far outnumber the rich, the ultra-wealthy try to maintain economic inequality by keeping the working class divided and in conflict. Working-class people have been pitted against each other by lies that have installed classism, sexism, racism, antisemitism, Gay oppression, ageism, Muslim oppression, immigrant oppression, Indigenous oppression, religious oppression, and more. Those at the top

of each oppression hierarchy (for example, men in relation to women, and middle-class people in relation to poor people) are told that they and their group are “better than.” Although the “better than” group is afforded a certain respect while growing up, and given more opportunities and resources, they are often mistreated in other ways, including being given less warmth and connection. This leads them to lose track of their own goodness and sense of connection to others. The hurt they are left with pulls them to act out the lie of their own superiority and exercise power over those they consider “less than” themselves.

When times are hard, to protect themselves, those in control of the wealth blame, dehumanize, and scapegoat one or more of the already-oppressed groups. People whose overall economic interests are the same become confused about who and what group is responsible for their hardships, and they turn against each other. Jews have endured a long and brutal history of being scapegoated and targeted with genocide. Global Majority and Indigenous people have long endured brutality of every kind, including slavery and genocide. Today, these groups are the owning class’s favorite targets of scapegoating and violence.

The myth of the superiority of one group over another has been used to justify all manner of exploitation and brutal class dominance, including stealing people’s homeland, imprisonment, deportation, sexual abuse, murder, slavery, colonialism, and genocide.

Once divided, people pass the misinformation and lies about themselves and others on to their children, who are then likely to pass them on to their children. This age-old “divide and conquer” strategy undermines unity of action throughout the world today. It is deliberately and openly used to support policies that move more money to the owning class.

In order to divide the working class and set them against each other, diversity programs that promote good relationships across oppressions are being eliminated. Those in charge try to pretend that their actions are just patriotism, not racism or some other oppression.

It is important that we all understand that the motive of greed is the real reason for these actions. It is not in the economic interests of the owning class for people to become good allies for one another. The lies embedded in racism, sexism; and Jewish, Muslim, and Gay oppressions are being promoted because they help the owning class transfer money to the top.

*Perpetuating the myth of the superiority of one group over another and pitting groups against one another makes it possible for most of the world's wealth to be controlled by a small minority of the world's people.*

#### **5. Convince the working class that division and upward mobility are the answer**

The middle class is a subset of the working class that has been artificially separated from it. Middle-class people are conditioned to be upwardly mobile and regard their interests as different from the rest of the working class. To please the owning class and move up the economic scale, they must dress, talk, and act like the owning class. They must win competitions, especially in school, so that they can be in the “better than” group. Working-class and poor people are also encouraged to try to be the winners, but most often they are not given the resources and support they need, and they end up feeling like the losers.

In order to be “successful” and have more access to the resources of the society, the middle class must act out the wishes of the owning class. They are trained and paid to be the managers and bosses of the poor and working class and thus become the visible instruments of the oppressive society.

The working class has been artificially separated from those at the bottom of the economic scale. Working-class people are encouraged to align themselves with the middle and owning class and support economic policies that transfer wealth to the owning class. They are told that poor people are the reason for their economic problems and that if they aren’t careful, they, too, could drop into the poverty class. They are not given correct information about poor people, including the fact that most poor

people are working poor. They, like others, are manipulated to act in oppressive ways toward anyone with fewer resources. Again, the goal is “divide and conquer.”

## **6. Undermine efforts to build strong unions**

To keep workers’ salaries as low as possible and avoid paying for safety measures that protect workers or the environment, owners pass anti-union laws. They criticize, target, and try to bribe union leaders and undermine workers’ faith in organizing and union building. Such efforts are yet another “divide and conquer” strategy.

## **7. Turn people against the government and leaders who advocate for fairness**

People are told that “big government” is their problem. Working-class people are told that they do not have enough money to live well because they have to pay taxes for programs that help those “lazy poor people.” Working-class people are not told that the taxes they pay benefit themselves or that their taxes would not have to be so high if the billionaires and big corporations paid their fair share or if tax loopholes and programs that benefit the owning class were eliminated.

For decades, working-class people were sent to fight wars against “communism.” As a result of the hateful and scary messages they were told to make them fight, they are susceptible to political messages that label leaders “communist” or “socialist” when these leaders advocate for programs that help the poor and working classes. They are told that smaller government, which cuts costs for essential health care, education, and food for those at the bottom of the economic scale, is the only way to be “free” and is the real answer to their economic woes.

## **8. Shortchange children and sell distractions and instant happiness**

Disrespectful policies toward children and parents *save* billions for the owning class, while distracting substances and activities *make* billions for them.

The ultra-wealthy, who can afford the best for their own children, back policies that ensure that most working-class and poor children are given inferior childcare, education, health care, housing, food, and safety. They keep their taxes low by ignoring the needs of parents. Among other things, they block funding for programs that help parents get access to the information and support they need to successfully raise the next generation of children.

As a result of these wealth-saving policies many children experience life-long damage to their confidence, their sense of joy, and their ability to set up good lives for themselves. With no way to share and process their feelings with caring adults, they all too often become adults who fear their feelings, push them down, and search for ways to feel better fast.

The ultra-wealthy take advantage of this urgency to feel better fast and make billions from advertising and selling things that promise instant happiness—the quick comfort of food, alcohol, drugs, and other addictive substances; and the distraction of purchases, sporting events, pornography, gambling, video games, social media, electronic devices, and other activities.

#### **9. Perpetuate a poverty class and blame individuals within it**

An important feature of class oppression, as it exists in most societies today, is blaming poor people. They are blamed for their situation and for the behaviors they and their children develop as a result of the oppressive experiences they live through (or, in many cases, do not live through).

Everyone needs to be clear on this important fact: *Poverty does not exist because of any shortcomings of the individual human beings who live in poverty.* Poverty does not exist because people are lazy, stupid, or in any other way inferior to others. Nor does poverty exist due to a shortage of material resources. Poverty, and the human struggles it creates, result from oppressive economic and social policies and practices, the effects of which accumulate in people's minds over generations. These policies and practices are financed and put into place primarily by the

small percentage of people at the top of the economic scale. This results in the following:

- Poor children's confidence in their intelligence and leadership ability is undermined in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.
- A high cost of living and difficult living conditions force low-income adults to keep so busy surviving that they have little time to think about and organize for societal change.
- The few programs that are put into place to help poor people are constantly under attack.
- Poor people are blamed for taxes assessed on working- and middle-class people, even though little of this tax money ends up in programs for poor people.

Poverty serves the economic interests of those at the top. It scares working- and middle-class people and causes them to (1) work harder to try to please those at the top, (2) turn against poor people, their natural allies, and (3) settle for low wages rather than take risks, like organizing and protesting, that could cause them to be targeted and their family to fall into poverty.

Poverty is not a natural state for anyone, anywhere. No human being would devise or settle for policies that leave people in poverty had they not been emotionally hurt and defeated as children. We all begin life with caring hearts. Until we are hurt, we want things to go well for everyone. Blaming our human nature is incorrect. All people are inherently good. The problem is our distressed-based behavior caused by the hurts we experienced and did not get a chance to heal from because of growing up in an oppressive society.

#### **10. Convince people that our current economic system cannot be changed**

The current state of the world and our harsh history as humans make it difficult to believe we could create a better world. However, we humans have always tried to change things to reflect our good inherent nature. We have had thousands of years of

successes. Even without having had a chance to heal from their early hurts, large numbers of people have spoken up, organized others, and shifted societies toward more human policies. People of all class backgrounds have heroically struggled and won the many victories and gains we enjoy today.

Historically, societies evolved from tribal societies to slave societies, to serf/lord societies, to capitalism. Capitalism gave rise to a middle class but has left billions of people poor. In an effort to meet the needs of all people, some countries have attempted socialist and communist systems. Some of these experiments have failed, and some have had limited success.

All of these economic systems have had limitations due in part to people's fears, individualism, greed, and hopelessness. All along the way, without a chance to heal, people brought their distress-based behavior into their attempts to set things up well for everyone. As yet, no economic system in any country has met the real needs of its people. People remain fearful, discouraged, and divided. Unity of purpose and action remains an idea whose time has not yet come.

Today, advanced global capitalism dominates our planet. In order to provide greater and greater profits to those at the top of the economic scale, it demands cheaper and cheaper labor, encourages more and more division, and destroys more and more of the world's resources. Regulations that could help, but that interfere with profits, are discouraged or eliminated. Freedoms that protect people who speak up against environmental damage and the growing wealth inequality are threatened or limited.

Not only has today's capitalism left billions of the world's people in poverty, it also threatens humanity as a whole and thousands of other species by, among other things, prioritizing profit from fossil fuels over reducing climate emissions.

Although most of the billionaires strongly defend keeping things the way they are, and do everything they can to make others think that "all is well" in terms of how our overall economy works, it is becoming increasingly clear that any system that

maximizes profits for a few rather than meet the needs of all humanity and our environment is not sustainable.

## MAKING CHANGE

While we have different ideas about how to change our world, we have much that we agree on. Most of us agree that humans should not be hurting other humans. It follows that most of us are opposed to oppression and any other disrespectful and hurtful practices that have become institutionalized. Therefore, we are against the following:

- Anything that prevents people from being able to safely make a living wage
- Anything that prevents children from getting their emotional, educational, material, and physical needs met
- Dividing people and telling some groups that they are better than other groups
- Policies and institutions that prioritize profits for a few over human dignity, a good life for all, and a stable climate
  - Reliance on prisons and mental health facilities to house and treat those who have been mistreated, rather than focusing on getting it right for children from the beginning
  - Using lies and misinformation to confuse and take advantage of people
  - Any economic system that enables and promotes the above

Unfortunately, our progress toward the more caring world we all want is much slower than we would like. We can speed things up by doing the following:

- Listening to children and adults, validating their intelligence, goodness, and worth, and helping them reclaim their ability to set goals and free themselves from their feelings of discouragement, individualism, and powerlessness

- Listening to one another's political views and reaching for relationships with those with whom we strongly disagree
- Learning how to give information about how our economic system works, including which policies benefit which people and which ones damage our fragile planet, and encouraging people to become allies for all the subgroups in the working class
- Building relationships with people from all classes, including the owning class, especially those who are saddled with distress-based greed that makes it hard for them to behave according to their good inherent human nature and that, deep down, leaves them feeling guilty and lonely

We live in an incredibly challenging time. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to building a global economy based on love and respect for all. As much as we might wish that things were easier and that someone else would fix things, it has become clear that we all are needed. We get to summon our courage, set our goals, and take our action steps. While doing this, we can be well rested, well nourished, well exercised, and well listened to, supported, and loved. Let's start now to set up these positive conditions for ourselves so that we can flourish and become the leaders for change we were born to be.





