

EDITORIAL

“History, looked under the surface, in the streets and on the farms, in GI barracks and trailer camps, in factories and offices, tells a different story. Whenever injustices have been remedied, wars halted, women and blacks and Native Americans given their due, it has been because “unimportant” people spoke up, organized, protested, and brought democracy alive.”
—Howard Zinn

Venezuela today is a nation of millions who once were invisible and today are visible. The before silent now have a voice, and even more than being heard, act to change and build their nation. In Venezuela, history was once written and kept by the elite, and the people were unimportant, ignored and forgotten. But today that has changed. History in Venezuela is actively being created by the traditionally marginalized and excluded, and the difference is that now, the previously silenced are the protagonists, the leaders. Howard Zinn would be proud.

I say this because often, the ongoing, constant, non-stop, severe, exhausting, dangerous struggle against the powerful causes us to blink and ask why. Why do we fight? Why do we struggle?

The answer is simple. Once we become visible, once we are heard, we can never be silenced again. We must combat injustice in all its manifestations and never allow its deadly face to overshadow us. Speak up, organize, and make your democracy, your people, your conscious mind, live.

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Is the U.S. economic model a failure?

During my tour for my new book *Hoodwinked* I've been asked the same question by many bright university students, “Do you think the US economic model is a failure?”

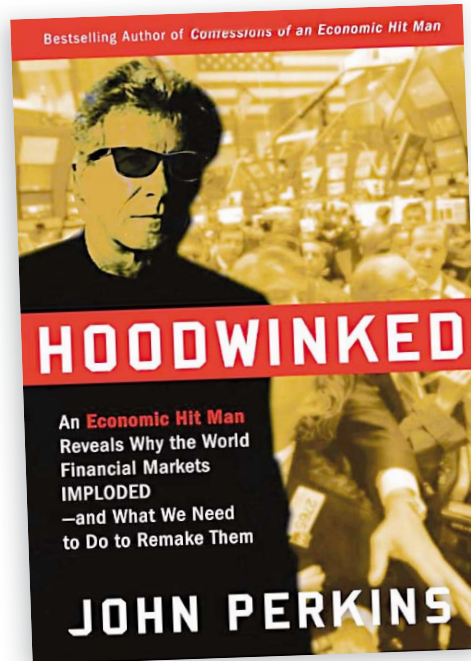
My answer is that I believe our current model is a mutant form of capitalism that is indeed a failure. I refer to it as “predatory capitalism.” It gained international popularity in 1980 when President Ronald Reagan and other world leaders embraced the theories advocated by economist Milton Friedman. The three major tenets of this theory are: 1) the only responsibility of business is to maximize profits, regardless of the social and environmental costs, 2) businesses should not be regulated because rules interfere with making profits, and 3) everything should be run by private businesses.

Every US president since Reagan – Democrat and Republican alike – has embraced this mutant form of capitalism, including President Obama. The resulting system has created a very dangerous, unsustainable world.

The predatory capitalists have pillaged the most valuable resources of countries around the planet and exploited their people in the name of profit. At the same time, the primary benefactor, the US, has followed a course similar to that of the Spanish Empire – we have plundered resources to live excessively materialist lives while neglecting to develop a solid manufacturing base at home.

History tells us that empires do not survive. The US Empire is no exception. Five percent of the world's population lives in the US and we consume more than 25% of the world's resources. The only conclusion a reasonable person can reach is that we have created a failure. This is not a model that can be replicated in Latin America, India, or Africa. And today it is collapsing at home.

With the confirmation that Venezuela possesses the largest oil reserves on Earth, the predatory capitalists are aching to knock the Venezuelan economy and government to its knees.



When President Hugo Chavez deflected the coup launched against him in 2002, he showed the world that David can still beat down Goliath, that the bully in the North can be defeated. His actions gave hope to people and politicians throughout the hemisphere.

Since then a revolution has swept Latin America. Ten countries voted in presidents who have said “no” to exploitation by foreign corporations and governments. It is especially significant that every one of those countries was ruled by dictators with close ties to the CIA for many of the post-World War II years.

One of the new Latin American leaders, President Rafael Correa of Ecuador, has a Ph.D in economics from the University of Illinois. He says that he can see no reason why capitalism should not permit his country to use its petroleum resources to help the poorest of the poor pull themselves out of poverty. He will, he says, work with international oil companies because they have the necessary technology, but only if they share a much larger portion of the revenues with the people of his country. He also publicly proclaimed that Ecuador is not obligated to pay much of its foreign debt since its loans were signed by unelected military dictators, coerced and bribed by the

World Bank, CIA, IMF, and people with my old job (economic hit men).

Today Correa is under attack; his administration is accused of collaborating with international crime syndicates and drug traffickers. While I have no inside information to confirm or deny these accusations, I can say that character assassination is always a risk for those who oppose predatory capitalism.

The fact is that we in the US have acted terribly irresponsibly. We have abused the leadership position we acquired during WWII. We have placed sociopathic CEOs and politicians on false pedestals, glorifying their excessive wealth, multiple mansions, megayachts, and luxurious private jets. For years, we've empowered these people (almost exclusively men) to create a system that is scandalously wasteful, overtly reckless, and – we now know – ultimately self-destructive.

As we've seen in the current economic crisis, the only guarantee is that conditions will get worse unless we insist on change. Today we have an opportunity to wake up and assume responsibility for establishing a world our children will want to inherit. We must recognize that for the first time in history we live on a highly interdependent planet where people everywhere communicate by cell phones and the Internet. The only way our children can inherit a sustainable and just world is if every child on every continent joins them.

So, I tell those students who question the current economic model that we must work hard to transform this predatory form of capitalism into a more compassionate and cooperative version. Profits may be OK, but only if earned while adhering to socially and environmentally responsible guidelines. Private business is a cornerstone of modern economies, but business executives

We recommend
HOODWINKED:
An Economic Hit Man Reveals Why the World Financial Markets Imploded –and What We Need to Do to Remake Them

John Perkins
Random House 2009.

Perkins pulls back the curtain on the real cause of the current global financial meltdown. He shows the deceit of the CEOs who run the corporatocracy and the politicians they manipulate.

But there is a way out. We can create a healthy economy that will encourage businesses to act responsibly, not only in the interests of their shareholders and corporate partners, but in the interests of their employees, their customers, the environment, and society at large. We can create a society that fosters a just, sustainable, and safe world for us and our children. Each one of us makes these choices every day, in ways spelled out in this book.

– like the rest of us – need to conform to rules of conduct. The guidelines and rules should provide a foundation for replacing a failed economic system with one that can perform successfully for all of us who are members of a fragile species living on a tiny spaceship called Earth. ALL OF US.

We in the US will be well advised to follow the example of the new wave of Latin American leaders. We must get back to the real work of creating a sustainable economy.

John Perkins

John Perkins is former chief economist at a major international consulting firm. His *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* spent 70 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. His website is www.johnperkins.org and his Twitter ID is www.twitter.com/economic_hitman.