
SIXTY GUILDERS
AND A
MEGAPHONE
A Walk Through History, Power, and the Lies We Love to Believe
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Before I ever wrote a word of this book, I sat in the same dark place as everyone else – thinking I was seeing the whole picture.
I didn't know there was a frame around it, much less that the frame had been chosen for me.

It was comfortable in that room.
The light was soft, the story was simple, and the people around me seemed certain.
We all spoke the same language, nodded at the same truths, and shook our heads at the same villains.

But there was a crack in the frame.
And one day, I looked through it.
I saw there was more – more truth, more light, more life than the picture had ever shown me.

Leaving that room wasn't heroic.
It was clumsy, slow, and awkward.
The light outside didn't make things clearer at first – it made them messier.
The tidy story I'd been told gave way to contradictions, missing pieces, and uncomfortable facts I couldn't unsee.

I tried to tell people what I'd found, but most didn't take it the way I hoped.
Some thought I was trying to act better than them.
Others thought I'd lost my way.

The truth was simpler:
I was just someone who used to believe what they still believed.

Two friends have walked with me through that crack in the frame.
We don't share the same politics, the same temperament, or the same vision of a perfect world.
One comes at life from the perspective of art and emotion, the other from discipline and hard analysis.
But for over five years, over countless dinners, we've kept the same pact:
We can disagree – fiercely – without pushing each other back into the dark.

Those dinners have become our laboratory.
We've tested our ideas against history, philosophy, and each other's lived experiences.
We've confronted moments in human history that were well-intentioned at best, calculated atrocities at worst.
And we've tried to see how those moments shaped – and still shape – the world we live in now.

I wrote this book because I believe we're all living with the fallacy of a just world – the idea that life will sort itself out fairly if we just play by the rules.
It's a comforting story, but it's not the whole story.
History is full of moments when the rules were designed to keep certain people out.
And yet, humanity's standard of living has, in many ways, improved over time.

The paradox is worth understanding:
How can the world be both better and still unjust?

How can democracy be necessary even when, as Kenneth Arrow proved, it can never make everyone happy?
And why, in a time when moral character often seems optional, do those with the loudest voices and weakest ethics still thrive?

This isn't an academic book.
It's a walk through history, philosophy, and my own life — written for the person who doesn't care about footnotes but cares deeply about truth.
We'll talk about propaganda and power, about the stories that keep us obedient, and about the moments when people broke free from those stories.
We'll sit at the table with my friends and wrestle with the questions that keep us coming back month after month.

I won't ask you to agree with me.
I'll just ask you to walk with me long enough to see the cracks in the frame for yourself.

The long game — the one that matters — isn't about winning arguments or being right.
It's about building a way of thinking that survives pressure, doubt, and the seductive pull of easy answers.
It's about finding the courage to keep playing even when the scoreboard says you're losing.

This book is my invitation to you:
Step outside the frame.
The light's harsher out here, but once your eyes adjust, you may find you never want to go back.

1

I used to think I saw the whole picture.
Like most people, I built my worldview out of what I was told, what I experienced, and what I wanted to be true.
I didn't realize that what I was looking at wasn't the full story – it was a framed picture, cropped to fit the space I had in my mind.

Then one day, the frame cracked.
It wasn't dramatic.
No blinding light, no overnight conversion.
Just a slow, unsettling realization: there was more beyond the edges.
More truth. More contradiction. More life than the tidy story could hold.

Ever since, I've been trying to help others see what I saw.
Not because I think I'm better, but because I remember sitting in the same dark place – mistaking the shadow for the shape of the thing casting it.

Some of my closest friends came into my life through baseball.
Years ago, I coached their sons on a travel team, and over time, the ballfield camaraderie turned into monthly dinners.

We come from different political leanings, different careers, and very different ways of framing the world — yet somehow, we keep coming back to the same table.

One night, one of them posed a simple question: Do we need government?

We all said yes.

But that answer didn't settle anything.

It only opened a bigger question: Where do we draw the line?

That conversation has lasted five years.

It's taken us through debates about fear and freedom, about whether people are driven more by hope or by survival, and about how much of what we call "reality" is really just a performance we've all agreed to watch.

The story goes that Manhattan was purchased from the Lenape for goods worth 60 guilders — about $24 at the time.

It's repeated as if it were a clean, decisive deal, a clever bargain that changed history.

But the truth is murkier.

The Lenape had a different concept of land ownership; they may not have understood the exchange in European terms at all.

What's remembered as a fair trade might have been a misunderstanding, or a manipulation dressed up as mutual agreement.

That's a pattern that repeats across history — the appearance of consensus masking the imbalance of power. And yet, we celebrate the story as if the neatness of the transaction makes it true.

Economist Kenneth Arrow proved something most people don't want to hear: no voting system can perfectly translate individual preferences into a completely fair collective decision.
That means democracy can't make everyone happy — and it was never designed to.
Its purpose is not to deliver universal satisfaction, but to manage disagreement.

The trouble is, we've grown addicted to the idea that politics should deliver certainty, clarity, and consensus.
So when democracy gives us compromise — or messy, incomplete answers — we feel cheated.

This is where the performers step in.
They don't fix the system; they narrate it in a way that makes us feel like the mess has meaning.
And if they do it well enough, we stop asking whether the meaning is real.

On the baseball field, you can see the difference between the players who quietly master their craft and the ones who master the crowd.
Sometimes they're the same person — but often, the louder player gets more attention than the one who's actually delivering results.

In politics, in business, in culture — it's the same game.
The will to power often belongs not to the most capable, but to the most watchable.

This isn't a new phenomenon.
The penny press of the 1830s sold more papers by telling readers what they already believed, wrapped in fresh headlines.

Cable news did the same with more urgency and better graphics.
Today, algorithms feed us certainty that's tailored to our preferences, as if reality itself could be personalized.

We mistake this personalization for truth.
But in reality, it's just the best-selling product in the political marketplace: the feeling of being right.

I started this book because I realized how much of my own thinking had been shaped by the performance of truth rather than truth itself.
It's humbling to admit.
I used to defend my version of the world like it was the only one.
Now, I see it as one of many – and I'm still finding the edges.

What follows isn't a lecture, and it's not a manifesto.
It's a set of clues.
Some are drawn from history, some from personal experience, some from the quiet moments between friends at a dinner table.

Together, they tell a story about how we build our reality, why we cling to it, and what happens when the frame finally cracks.

2

Once you start letting your eyes adjust, the first thing you notice is that a lot of the stories you've been told aren't just missing details – they've been designed that way. And sometimes, the people telling them don't even realize it.

One of the first myths that hit me different after stepping out of the dark was the "sale" of Manhattan. The version I heard as a kid was simple:
In 1626, the Dutch bought the whole island of Manhattan from the Native Americans for $24 worth of goods.
End of story.
The teacher told it like it was a clever little joke – a story about street smarts that just happened to be in a history book.
We all laughed.
In the Bronx, we knew a good hustle when we heard one.

If you grew up where I did, this Manhattan sale story made sense without needing any context.
It was the ultimate flip – turning pocket change into a jackpot.
It was the same energy as buying a pair of Jordans for twenty bucks because "you knew a guy," or snagging a

stereo from the back of a truck at a price so low you didn't ask questions.

Back then, I didn't stop to wonder how the Native Americans felt about the deal.
I didn't even think about the fact that $24 back then was worth a lot more than it sounded.
It was just another outline — clever buyer, naive seller — and in the world I knew, that was enough.

Years later, I decided to check the details, and the reality didn't match the story.

Here's the part they didn't teach us:

Year: 1626. Peter Minuit, representing the Dutch, wanted Manhattan as part of expanding the New Netherland colony.

Currency: They offered goods worth 60 Dutch guilders. At the time, a guilder was a standard currency in the Netherlands.

The $24 number: That came from a 19th-century historian's rough guess in U.S. dollars of his own era — not ours. Adjust for inflation from that $24 to today, and you're looking at anywhere from $1,000 to $20,000.

Cultural misunderstanding: The Lenape people probably didn't think they were selling the land forever. In their worldview, land wasn't "owned" in the European sense — it was used, shared, and moved through. To them, this could have been a kind of lease or coexistence agreement.

The bigger twist: Even if the Dutch thought they "owned" Manhattan after that, they didn't hold onto it for

long. The English took it in 1664, without paying the Lenape a cent.

So, the $24-for-Manhattan story?

It's not just oversimplified — it's a sales pitch disguised as history.

But here's the thing: even once you know the real story, the myth still has power.

Why?

Because it's built on something America still celebrates — the idea that the smartest person in the room is the one who walks away with the most for the least.

This is the will to power, dressed up as a feel-good anecdote.

It tells you that if you can pull off a sixty-guilder special, you deserve the spoils.

And the applause.

Fairness isn't even in the equation.

That mindset didn't stop in 1626.

It's still alive in boardrooms, in politics, in real estate — anywhere people clap louder for the closer than the conscience.

I've played that game too.

When I worked in jewelry, the stories I told customers were polished like the stones I sold — technically true, but carefully lit so the flaws didn't show.

When you're in sales, you learn quickly that what people buy isn't the product — it's the story.

The $24-for-Manhattan myth works the same way.

It's not about what happened; it's about how it feels to believe you've outsmarted someone.

And if you've ever been broke, the temptation to chase that feeling can be hard to resist.

Fast forward to modern times, and you see echoes of the Manhattan deal in every "master negotiator" headline. Donald Trump built his brand on the idea that he could get more for less – whether it was a building, a contract, or a TV deal.

It didn't matter if the details held up under scrutiny; what mattered was the perception of winning.

And just like the Manhattan myth, people didn't need the whole story to clap.

They just needed the outline: smart guy, big win, other guy loses.

Here's where the light starts to feel uncomfortable.

If you've built your self-worth on the sixty-guilder score, changing the metric feels like erasing yourself.

But I've learned – the hard way – that the applause from those wins is temporary.

What sticks is whether you can live with the trade you made.

The Manhattan story isn't just about land.

It's about what a culture decides to reward.

And right now, America still rewards the myth.

So here's the clue this story left me with:

When someone tells you what they got for a bargain, ask what they gave – and who really paid the price.

From the Bronx to Manhattan, from guilders to gold towers, the hustle hasn't changed much.

The only question is whether we still want to keep cheering for the same game.

3

Provini was quiet that Monday night – the kind of quiet that makes you talk softer without realizing it.
We were outside, my Summer Spritz sweating gently in the glass, the air light enough to make you forget it was still the city. Two of my closest friends sat across from me – men I've known since before any of us had gray hair. One leans left, the other leans right. Both are sharp enough to know when I'm about to say something they'll have to chew on.

That night, I told them this:
"Thomas Sowell and Al Sharpton are more alike than anyone wants to admit."

They paused, mid-fork.
Not because they thought I was wrong – at least, not yet – but because the idea didn't fit the usual outline.
Sowell, the conservative economist who can slice an argument down to a statistical decimal.
Sharpton, the activist preacher who can turn a microphone into a moral lightning rod.
Different keys, different genres.

But the rhythm? Same.
They know their audience.

They feed their audience.
They don't stretch them — they soothe them.

And in that moment, I realized this wasn't just about Sowell and Sharpton. It was about a long tradition of leaders — political, religious, corporate — who learn to play to the crowd's favorite notes instead of introducing a new melody.

You can track this style back centuries.
Take the late 1700s.
The American Revolution wasn't fueled only by muskets and tea; it ran on pamphlets, speeches, and sermons designed to stir an already-ready audience. Thomas Paine's Common Sense didn't try to convert loyalists — it doubled down on patriots, giving them the righteous clarity they craved.
The goal wasn't to complicate the picture; it was to sharpen it until it cut.

The same pattern showed up in the 1860s. Abolitionists and Confederate leaders used different moral frameworks, but both relied on messages that painted the other side as unredeemable. Reconstruction speeches in the South reframed federal oversight as tyranny, and those in the North framed resistance as pure evil. In both cases, the crowd heard what it wanted to hear.

This is where Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem comes in — and I promise, you don't need a degree to get it.
Arrow proved that in any voting system where people have different preferences, you can't convert all those preferences into a perfect, fair outcome that satisfies

everyone.
Not just "it's hard."
Not just "we need better leaders."
Mathematically impossible.

So, if you can't make everyone happy, what do you do?
You play to the people you can keep happy.
And once you know that's the game, you stop trying to reach across the aisle and start playing the same song your base already likes.

That's why Sowell and Sharpton — and plenty of others — stay in their lanes.
It's not just easier; it's structurally rewarded.

As I explained this to my friends, I saw the look in their eyes — not anger, but the quiet resistance of someone whose brain is trying to rearrange furniture.
I know that feeling.
I've lived in it.
In the Bronx, I thought I was immune to being played because I could spot a hustle. But the truth is, I still craved the comfort of voices that told me I was right.
It didn't matter if they were coaches, preachers, or politicians — if their rhythm matched mine, I listened.

Breaking out of that loop wasn't about changing my politics.
It was about learning to tolerate the discomfort of being challenged.

History shows that leaders use crises as amplifiers.
After 9/11, President Bush's speeches leaned into certainty and moral clarity to rally support for the Patriot Act and the Iraq War — policies that might not have passed in calmer

times.
In 2008, during the financial collapse, bailouts were framed as the only way to save the economy.
During COVID-19, leaders across the spectrum used the pandemic not just to manage a public health crisis but to deepen partisan identity.

Different keys, same song:
You're in danger.
We have the answer.
Stick with us.

Nietzsche's will to power isn't just about domination; it's about asserting your reality over others.
When a leader plays to their base, they're shaping the crowd's perception of what's real and what's possible.
And here's the kicker — the crowd is complicit.
We want to be played, as long as the tune makes us feel safe.

That night at Provini, as my friends and I picked at our plates, it hit me:
This isn't a left vs. right problem.
It's a human wiring problem.

If you ever want to know who's being played in a room, don't just listen to the words — listen for the rhythm.

If it feels too familiar, too easy, too much like something you've heard a hundred times before… you might just be dancing to the same old song.

4

The thing about that dinner at Provini is this: it wasn't just about politics.
It was about belonging.

On paper, my two friends couldn't be more different. One's an actor who also teaches at a college, progressive enough to believe the world can be remade if we just keep pushing.
The other's a Wharton-trained businessman who sees the world through balance sheets and probabilities, cautious about change because he knows what markets do when emotions run the show.

You'd think they'd cancel each other out.
But that night, they leaned in, listening hard, challenging without dismissing, searching for something solid in the middle.

That's rare.
Most of the time, even the smartest people I know find themselves pulled back toward their tribe – the labels, the shortcuts, the unspoken rules that let you know who's "with" you and who's not.
The labels promise comfort. They let you settle into familiar rhythms.

But comfort isn't clarity.

I first met these two friends not at a restaurant, but on a baseball field.
Their sons were on my travel team, and like most youth baseball parents, they hovered at the edge of the fence, eyes tracking every pitch.

What struck me wasn't how different they were — one quoting plays like Shakespeare, the other analyzing pitch counts like quarterly earnings.
It was how quickly they could drop those roles when the boys needed a pat on the back.
In that moment, they weren't professor or businessman. They were just fathers.

That's when I realized: our tribes aren't fixed. They shift depending on what story we're telling ourselves in the moment.

History shows us how often the opposite happens — where the tribe becomes so important that truth gets shoved aside.

Take Reconstruction after the Civil War.
Poor Southerners, many with little to gain from slavery, still rallied behind elites who convinced them that federal reconstruction was an attack on "their people."
The tribe became the story.
The truth — that they were being manipulated to preserve a system that didn't benefit them — got lost.

Or look at the McCarthy era in the 1950s.
Communism was painted as an existential threat, and anyone who questioned that narrative was branded a traitor.

The comfort of the tribe was more powerful than the discomfort of asking whether the fear matched the facts.

This is where Karl Popper's voice cuts through.
Popper argued that the strength of a society isn't in proving itself right, but in allowing itself to be proven wrong.
But tribal thinking makes that almost impossible.
No one wants to admit the other side has a point, because it feels like betrayal — not just of ideas, but of identity.

So instead of risking the loneliness of standing apart, people cling tighter.
It's safer to nod along with your tribe than to step outside and face the cold air of uncertainty.

I'd love to say I've always been immune to this, but that wouldn't be true.
Growing up in the Bronx, my tribe was survivalists.
You didn't trust cops, you didn't trust politicians, you didn't trust anyone outside your block.
That wasn't just culture — it was safety.

Later, when I moved into different worlds — business school classrooms, jewelry sales floors, baseball dugouts — I found myself shifting tribes without even noticing.
In each space, I adopted the rhythm of the group, because standing apart felt dangerous.
And honestly, sometimes it was.

The 2008 financial crisis is another reminder.
When banks collapsed, both tribes — left and right — found narratives that let their followers feel righteous.
The left said: "Greedy capitalists brought this on us."
The right said: "Government interference distorted the market."

Both stories had elements of truth, but neither tribe wanted the whole messy picture.
Comfort won.

The result? Bailouts that satisfied almost no one but looked, on the surface, like decisive action.

Watching my two friends debate that night, I realized why I value their company so much: they're proof that you can be educated, successful — and still resist the gravitational pull of the tribe.

But here's the catch: it's exhausting.
It means never quite belonging anywhere, because you're always asking questions that complicate the story.
It means risking suspicion from both sides — "too soft" for one tribe, "too cynical" for the other.

In Popper's language, it's living in a world where falsification — the willingness to admit you might be wrong — is the highest form of honesty.
In Bronx language, it's like stepping out of the circle of streetlights and trusting your eyes to adjust to the dark again.

If the comfort of the tribe feels too easy, ask yourself:
What would it cost me to step outside?
What might I see that no one inside the circle is willing to look at?

That night at Provini, surrounded by friends who've walked very different paths, I saw the answer clearly:
The truth doesn't live in the tribe.
It lives in the space between.

5

The thing about a crisis is that it doesn't wait for you to think.
It demands an answer right now.
And in that moment, the appetite for certainty becomes almost physical — a craving that overrides caution, humility, and sometimes common sense.

We've all felt it.
9/11. The financial collapse in 2008. The early days of COVID.
Moments where the world felt unstable, and the only thing scarier than making the wrong choice was making no choice at all. That's when leaders — whether they're presidents, governors, CEOs, or local politicians — can step into the role of savior.
They don't have to offer the best answer.
They just have to offer an answer that feels solid.

Over the past five years of monthly dinners, my friends and I have noticed this: when the ground shakes, people run toward whoever is already holding a microphone. Sometimes that microphone belongs to someone we trust. Sometimes it belongs to someone we wouldn't invite to our table on a normal day.

But in the panic of the moment, familiarity and decisiveness feel like safety.

I saw this happen after 9/11.

New Yorkers, myself included, leaned hard on city and federal leaders we'd criticized just months earlier.

The feeling was: If you can make the fear stop, I'll listen to you — even if I don't agree with you.

This is nothing new.

In the 1790s, fear of French revolutionary influence prompted the U.S. to pass the Alien and Sedition Acts — laws that flew in the face of free speech, the very thing the country had just fought for.

The public accepted it because the story was framed as safety versus chaos.

The same thing happened during World War I with the Espionage Act, and again during the Cold War when McCarthy used the word "Communist" like a trigger that shut down debate.

Crises give leaders cover to act in ways they couldn't get away with during calmer times.

The appetite for certainty turns the public into a cheering section for ideas that, under other circumstances, would have been laughed out of the room.

Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem says no voting system can perfectly convert individual preferences into a collective decision that satisfies everyone.

That's true in normal times — but in a crisis, the illusion of consensus becomes even more seductive.

We convince ourselves that "the country" wants one thing.

In reality, it's a patchwork of individuals tolerating the same decision for completely different reasons.
The consent is shallow, but it feels deep enough in the moment to justify almost anything.

I'd like to say I've never been pulled in by a strong voice during a crisis, but that would be a lie.

I've sat in front of the TV after some national shock, nodding along as someone laid out a "clear" plan – even when I knew the details didn't add up.

It's not logic that gets you in those moments; it's the relief of having someone sound sure when you're not.

When the financial crisis hit, both of my dinner companions and I were glued to the news.
One day the talk was about letting the banks fail to teach the market a lesson.
The next, it was about trillion-dollar bailouts.
Within weeks, the bailout plan went through – not because the public suddenly became convinced it was the perfect solution, but because the alternative felt too frightening to contemplate.

It's the same pattern we saw in 2020 when COVID hit: even people who mistrusted government suddenly demanded swift action, clear rules, and resources deployed at scale.
Certainty was worth the cost.

Popper would have warned us that certainty is often the enemy of truth, especially in a crisis.
Quick answers lock in before there's time to test them.
By the time the flaws surface, the political cost of admitting them is too high.

So instead of adapting, leaders double down. And instead of demanding better, the public clings harder to the comfort of the initial answer – because walking it back means admitting we trusted too quickly.

The price of certainty isn't just bad policy. It's the way it trains us to value decisiveness over accuracy, clarity over complexity, and charisma over competence.

That's how you end up with leaders who understand that their real job isn't to solve the problem – it's to sound like they can.

And if we're honest, sometimes that's exactly what we want.

6

If you spend enough time watching politicians in a crisis, you start to notice something unsettling:
The ones who rise aren't always the ones with the best solutions – they're the ones who can perform the idea of leadership.

A steady gaze.
A voice that fills the room.
A way of speaking that makes you feel like they're letting you in on a secret, even if it's just a talking point they've rehearsed fifty times.

The actual plan can be flawed.
The numbers can be fuzzy.
But if the performance is good enough, we start to believe that the flaws don't matter.

Over monthly dinners, my friends and I have circled this point so many times we've worn a groove in it:
When the public feels vulnerable, the person who looks confident becomes the person who is competent – at least in the collective imagination.

That's how someone like Donald Trump could build a brand as a master dealmaker even when many of his deals ended in bankruptcies or lawsuits.

It's the same reason Al Sharpton could hold a microphone and command a room even in the face of controversy.

Different audiences, different politics — same underlying skill:
Turn the story into a stage, and make sure you're the one in the spotlight.

History rewards those who can craft a compelling narrative around themselves.

Theodore Roosevelt didn't just lead; he made sure you could see him leading — on horseback, in a Rough Rider uniform, or delivering speeches that painted his presidency in the colors of adventure and grit.

FDR's fireside chats weren't just informational; they were intimate performances that made Americans feel like he was speaking directly to them, even as he delivered policies that would never satisfy every faction.

Nietzsche's idea of the will to power wasn't about brute force — it was about the drive to shape reality itself, to assert your vision so strongly that others accept it as truth.
For some, that manifests in art or invention.
For others, it manifests in politics, where reality is as much about perception as it is about facts.

In that sense, both Trump and Sharpton are masters of the same craft: the ability to project their will until it becomes the reality their audience inhabits.

Growing up in the Bronx, I saw leadership as something you either had or didn't.
If someone could hold a crowd, they must have the answers.

That belief was hard to shake, even after I learned how often the "answers" were smoke and mirrors.

What broke it for me wasn't cynicism — it was coaching. In baseball, you can't fake performance for long.
If a player can't deliver on the field, no speech or swagger will hide it.
But in politics, the scoreboard isn't as clear, and people can argue for decades about whether the game was even fair.

The story of Manhattan being sold for 60 guilders — about $24 in the currency of the time — is one of the most enduring PR moves in history.
The Dutch weren't fools, and neither were the Lenape.
The "sale" was less a simple transaction than a complicated moment of cultural misunderstanding and shifting power dynamics.

But the simplified version — the bargain so outrageous it became legend — stuck because it was a great story.
It celebrated cleverness over fairness, turning what was essentially the start of displacement into a parable of shrewd negotiation.

It's the same thing we do with leaders today: turn the messy, complicated truth into a cleaner, more flattering narrative that fits the performance.

Popper would argue that our tendency to reward the best performance undermines the democratic process.
When scrutiny is replaced by applause, the feedback loop breaks.
Leaders stop adjusting based on what works and start adjusting based on what gets a standing ovation.

This is why the "White Al Sharpton" line resonates — not as an insult, but as a diagnosis.
We live in an era where the will to power is exercised most effectively through the theater of leadership.

The performance isn't a side effect of leadership — for many, it is leadership.

And until we can separate the two, we'll keep electing, following, and defending those who can keep the lights on, the stage set, and the story moving — whether or not the plot makes sense.

7

We like to think we inherit our values from our families, our neighborhoods, maybe our schools.
But a lot of what we believe about winning, fairness, and leadership comes from stories that were baked into us long before we could question them.

Some of those stories are harmless bedtime tales.
Others — like the legend of Manhattan being "bought" for 60 guilders — have shaped how generations of Americans understand power, ownership, and success.

I was a kid the first time I heard about the Manhattan deal.
The way it was told to me, it was a clean, almost cartoonish transaction: Europeans hand over some trinkets, the locals hand over the island, everybody walks away.
It was framed as a bargain so outrageous it was funny — a moment of shrewdness that made you admire the "buyers," even if you didn't fully understand the context.

Nobody mentioned the Lenape had a completely different concept of land ownership.
Nobody talked about how they saw land as something you could use and share, not something you could permanently sell.

Nobody said the Dutch probably knew exactly what they were doing when they framed it as a purchase.

It wasn't history.

It was a sales pitch.

The Manhattan deal isn't an isolated case.

History is full of moments where the winning side rewrote the details to make themselves look clever, righteous, or destined to succeed.

Think about the Boston Tea Party.

In school, we're taught it as a heroic act of defiance against unfair taxation.

The messier truth — that it was also an act of economic self-interest by smugglers who didn't want competition from British tea — doesn't make it into the storybook version.

These myths endure because they're easy to remember and emotionally satisfying.

They tell us the world rewards those who seize the moment, who "win" even if the playing field isn't level.

Nietzsche would argue that myths like these feed our collective will to power.

We don't just admire the cunning in the Manhattan story — we internalize it.

It becomes a quiet permission slip to pursue advantage first and justify it later.

Over time, that shapes the kind of leaders we tolerate and even celebrate.

If our founding stories glorify the outsmarting of others, is it any surprise we gravitate toward leaders who are better at the game than the truth?

I've caught myself retelling certain stories the same way they were told to me – stripped of nuance, loaded with punchlines.
It's not because I want to mislead anyone.
It's because the simplified version gets the reaction I want.

That's the danger of inherited myths: they bypass critical thinking and go straight to emotional resonance. And once you've built your identity around them, challenging them feels like tearing out a piece of yourself.

This isn't just about old history – it's about how those same values show up in modern politics and business. When a CEO announces mass layoffs while collecting a record bonus, we might shake our heads – but deep down, some part of us sees the boldness, the "deal-making," the decisive move, as evidence of strength.

It's the Manhattan deal all over again.
Get the better end of the bargain, and history will remember you as smart – not ruthless.

Popper warned against the danger of untestable narratives – stories so entrenched in a culture that they become immune to evidence.
When a myth becomes part of the national identity, disproving it isn't enough.
You have to replace it with another story that people are willing to live by.

That's the real challenge: once a myth teaches us what winning looks like, every alternative feels like losing.

We inherit our myths the way we inherit family heirlooms – polished, simplified, stripped of their rough edges.

We put them on the mantle, not realizing they're shaping how we see every contest, every negotiation, every leader.

And as long as the Manhattan bargain sits there as a symbol of cleverness, we'll keep rewarding the kind of victories that look good in the storybooks, even when they leave someone else holding the empty bag.

8

We want to believe the world is fair.
It's one of the most persistent stories we tell ourselves: that good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people, and if something terrible happens, there must have been a reason.

This belief doesn't just comfort us.
It organizes our understanding of reality.
It tells us that the future is manageable — that if we live right, we'll be spared the worst.

But history keeps whispering otherwise.
It's filled with moments where injustice didn't just happen — it was justified, even celebrated, as part of a greater good.

At one of our monthly dinners, my actor friend once put down his fork and said,

"You know, the scariest thing about history isn't the evil. It's how normal it feels at the time."

We all stopped for a second.
He didn't mean "normal" as in harmless. He meant "normal" as in accepted — folded into the background noise of everyday life until you barely notice it.

My other friend nodded, adding that even the most well-meaning societies have convinced themselves that

their worst acts were necessary.
The fallacy of a just world doesn't just blind us to injustice — it helps us participate in it.

In the 19th century, the United States embraced the idea of Manifest Destiny — the belief that the nation was destined by God to expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The story made expansion sound noble, inevitable, and even righteous.

But for Indigenous peoples, this "destiny" meant displacement, broken treaties, cultural erasure, and death. The narrative turned conquest into virtue, making atrocities sound like progress.

Even those who opposed the violence often did so quietly, unwilling to challenge the inevitability of the story. The fallacy of a just world reassured settlers that the suffering of others was either deserved or outweighed by the greater good.

Across Europe in the same era, colonial powers justified their empires as "civilizing missions."
The language was drenched in paternalism — bringing education, religion, and infrastructure to "less developed" nations.

In reality, it was resource extraction, cultural domination, and systemic exploitation.
But because the story felt moral, it was easier for citizens at home to ignore the cruelty or write it off as necessary for progress.

The will to power doesn't always arrive with open violence; sometimes it comes with the soft tone of benevolence.

The just world fallacy thrives because it reduces complexity.
If suffering is random, then it could happen to us.
If it's deserved, then we can stay safe by being "good."

This illusion makes life feel manageable.
It also makes it easier to rationalize looking away.
We convince ourselves that victims must have done something to invite their fate — not because it's true, but because it keeps the story neat.

Genocide doesn't happen in a vacuum.
It happens in societies where the majority either supports it or chooses not to see it.
Sometimes the support comes from fear; sometimes from indifference; sometimes from believing the victims somehow deserved their fate.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 killed more than 800,000 people in about 100 days.
International powers knew what was happening but hesitated, unwilling to call it genocide until it was too late.
At home, many Rwandans who didn't kill still turned away — some out of fear, others because they'd been convinced that the killing was part of restoring justice.

In America, we tell the story of the "American Dream" as if it's open to everyone who works hard enough.
That framing leaves little room for acknowledging the structural barriers that have excluded entire groups from full participation — from the genocide and forced assimilation of Native peoples, to slavery and Jim Crow, to redlining and voter suppression.

To admit those realities is to admit the Dream has never been equally accessible.
And that's uncomfortable, because it challenges the comforting belief that success is purely a matter of effort and virtue.

The fallacy of a just world is seductive because it makes moral chaos feel orderly.
But if we're not willing to look directly at the moments when "order" was built on cruelty, we end up repeating them in new forms.

These aren't just historical footnotes — they're warning signs.
The sooner we learn to recognize the false comfort of the just world, the sooner we can break the pattern that allows well-intended indifference to slide into catastrophe.

At our dinner table, we keep talking about these things not because it's pleasant, but because pretending they didn't happen feels far more dangerous.
The more we can bring them into the open, the less likely we are to mistake them for the way the world simply is.

9

The stories we tell about ourselves aren't just reflections of who we are — they're tools.
They can be used to inspire, to unify, or to justify harm.
When the will to power gets involved, those stories become less about truth and more about control.

The American Dream is one of the most powerful stories ever told.
It promises that anyone, regardless of where they start, can rise through hard work and determination.
It's an intoxicating idea — and for some, it's been true.
But for many, it's been an invitation to play a game whose rules were written to keep them from winning.

One night over pasta and wine, my more contrarian friend said,

"You know, the American Dream is the best marketing campaign in history. And like any good campaign, it works because it makes people ignore the fine print."

The "fine print" is that opportunity in America has always been selective.
It's expanded over time, but never without struggle, and never without resistance from those who benefited from keeping the gates narrow.

My actor friend nodded, adding that the Dream is elastic – it stretches to fit the self-image of the nation, but it doesn't stretch far enough to cover the realities that contradict it.

The United States didn't emerge on empty land.
Its foundation rests on the displacement and death of Indigenous peoples, through war, disease, forced removals, and cultural erasure.
These weren't accidents of history – they were deliberate policies, justified by the belief that expansion was both inevitable and moral.

The will to power made sure the narrative framed settlers as pioneers and Indigenous resistance as savagery. By the time the dust settled, the original violence had been recast as the birth of a nation, and the victims as obstacles to progress.

Slavery built much of America's early wealth, and even after its abolition, the structures of exclusion remained – Jim Crow laws, redlining, voter suppression, and discriminatory immigration quotas.
For those on the outside, the Dream was less a ladder and more a wall.

When opportunity did expand – for women, immigrants, or Black Americans – it was often the result of long fights against entrenched power, not the natural generosity of the system.
And each expansion was accompanied by backlash from those who saw equality as a threat to their position.

This pattern isn't unique to the United States.
Throughout history, groups who have suffered atrocities

have sometimes, once in power, perpetuated harm against others.
The will to power doesn't vanish with liberation; it adapts.

As Naomi Klein notes in Doppelgänger, Israel's occupation policies – while rooted in legitimate security concerns for some – have also involved systemic oppression of Palestinians.
That reality is deeply uncomfortable, especially given Jewish history and the memory of the Holocaust.
It shows that experiencing suffering does not automatically inoculate a society against inflicting it.
If anything, the narrative of past victimhood can be used to justify present control.

The fallacy of a just world allows societies to rationalize exclusion as fairness.
If you succeed, it's because you earned it; if you fail, it's because you didn't try hard enough – or worse, because you didn't deserve it.

This logic has been used to excuse genocide, forced assimilation, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. It's also been used to defend the myth that America's success story is proof of its moral purity, rather than evidence of how skillfully it has managed its own narrative.

At our dinner table, we've learned that just naming these contradictions can feel radical.
Not because the facts are hidden – most are well-documented – but because they live in the blind spot of the national self-image.

The will to power depends on keeping those blind spots intact.
Expose them, and the story starts to lose its grip.

The American Dream doesn't have to be abandoned. But it has to be stripped of its self-congratulation and rebuilt with a truth that includes the whole story. Otherwise, it's not a dream — it's an illusion, one that keeps repeating the same cycles under new names.

The three of us keep coming back to this:
If we can't face the worst parts of our history — both here and abroad — we can't stop them from happening again. And if the Dream means anything worth defending, it has to belong to everyone, without fine print.

10

Consensus has a certain smell to it.
It's warm, reassuring, a little intoxicating – like bread just pulled from the oven.
It makes you think you're safe because everyone's eating the same thing.

But just because something smells good doesn't mean it's nourishing.
And just because everyone's nodding along doesn't mean they're agreeing for the same reasons – or agreeing at all.

And once you break character, the whole play falls apart.

A crisis turns the world into an audience and leaders into actors.
Some play their roles with skill and sincerity, others with cunning and calculation.
But in both cases, the stage rewards confidence over caution, and drama over doubt.

And as long as the applause keeps coming, the show will go on – whether or not the ending is any good.

Years ago, I sat in a meeting with parents from a travel baseball team I was coaching.
We'd just finished discussing a proposal for stricter practice attendance rules.

When I asked for thoughts, the room went silent for a beat, then everyone nodded in vague agreement.

It looked like consensus.

But after the meeting, three different parents pulled me aside to tell me why they actually disagreed — one thought the rules were too harsh, one thought they were too soft, and one just didn't care enough to weigh in.

In that moment, I learned that consensus isn't always about alignment.

Sometimes it's about avoiding the discomfort of standing apart from the group.

The United States has a long history of manufacturing consensus.

During World War I, President Wilson created the Committee on Public Information, which flooded the country with posters, speeches, and news stories designed to generate support for the war.

It worked. Public opinion seemed overwhelmingly in favor of entering the conflict.

But "seemed" is the key word.

It wasn't that Americans had independently come to the same conclusion — they'd been surrounded by a single, unrelenting message.

It was easier to nod along than to push back.

A few years later, during the first Red Scare, newspapers printed breathless stories about communist infiltration.

Employers demanded loyalty oaths.

Neighbors eyed each other with suspicion.

Disagreeing with the fear narrative didn't just make you unpopular — it could get you blacklisted or arrested.

Under those conditions, consensus isn't a sign of shared truth.
It's a sign that people have decided it's safer to appear united than to risk being seen as the outlier.

The will to power doesn't need everyone to truly believe in its story.
It only needs enough people to perform belief — loudly, publicly, and often.
The performance itself creates the appearance of consensus, which then pressures others to join in.

This is why "unity" can be both inspiring and dangerous. It can rally people toward justice, but it can also conceal dissent, making it look like everyone is on board when many are silently resisting.

At our monthly dinners, the three of us have a rule: we don't let silence stand in for agreement.
If one of us makes a point and the others just sit there, we ask,

"Is that a yes, a no, or a maybe?"

It's uncomfortable sometimes.
But it forces us to confront where we actually stand — and to accept that our friendship doesn't depend on always lining up.

That's rare in politics today.
The easier path is to pretend we agree with the majority of our "tribe" so we can stay in good standing, even if privately we're not convinced.

Social media has turned consensus into something you can measure in likes, shares, and retweets.
A post with a million hearts feels like the voice of the

people, but most of that agreement is passive — a quick tap, not a thoughtful endorsement.

And because the algorithms reward outrage and certainty, dissent gets drowned out.
Before long, it looks like everyone agrees, not because they do, but because disagreement has been pushed so far out of sight that it barely registers.

Consensus can be real — it's not always a trick.
But when it forms too fast, feels too neat, or leaves no room for dissent, it's worth asking: is this shared conviction, or just the fear of standing alone?

The cost of breaking with the crowd can be high.
But so is the cost of mistaking silence for agreement.
And the history of manufactured consensus — from wartime propaganda to social media echo chambers — suggests that the lonelier path might be the only one that keeps you honest.

At our dinner table, we've agreed on this much: it's better to have a room full of messy, half-formed disagreements than a chorus of polished, unexamined yeses.
Because the moment everyone is nodding in perfect rhythm, you can be sure the music's being played by someone else.

11

Certainty is a product.
It doesn't come from within – not in the political sense, anyway.
It's packaged, marketed, and sold like anything else.

And like any high-demand product, there's always a premium on the brand that makes you feel the most right.

Years ago, I walked past a street vendor selling knock-off sunglasses.
He called out to me:

"Why buy those name brands? These are the same thing – only difference is the logo."

He was right – mostly. The plastic was the same, the lenses were the same.
The difference was the feeling people got from the brand.

In politics, that brand is certainty.
You're not just buying facts – you're buying the confidence that you're on the winning team, that your view is the smart one, the moral one, the one that matters.

In the 19th century, the penny press made newspapers affordable to working-class Americans.
Publishers quickly learned that neutrality didn't sell nearly as well as outrage.
So papers became openly partisan, each offering its

readers the comfort of certainty that they were right — and their opponents were dangerous.

This wasn't about informing the public.
It was about selling papers.
Certainty was the hook, and fear was the upsell.

In the 1930s, Father Charles Coughlin built a radio audience of millions by mixing religion, politics, and fiery certainty about who was to blame for the nation's problems.
Listeners tuned in not to wrestle with complexity, but to hear their own feelings amplified and validated.

The product wasn't his theology or his politics.
The product was the relief of not having to doubt.

Doubt is heavy.
It slows you down, makes you hesitate, forces you to listen.
Certainty is light — it lets you move fast, speak loudly, and feel secure even in the middle of chaos.

The will to power understands this.
It knows that if it can offer people a story that feels right, it doesn't matter if it's entirely true.
People will buy it again and again, because the real addiction isn't to the facts — it's to the feeling.

At our dinner table, I've seen my friends — both the contrarian and the actor — roll their eyes at their own "side" when it slips into selling certainty instead of solutions.
The actor will point out when progressives flatten a complex problem into a moral slogan.
The contrarian will call out conservatives when they ignore inconvenient facts to keep the narrative clean.

Both know the difference between being informed and being sold to.
But both also admit – it's tempting to buy certainty, especially when you're tired of the fight.

Today, social media platforms have turned the marketplace of certainty into a 24/7 bazaar.
Every scroll offers a new headline, a new meme, a new outrage packaged into a neat frame.
If you agree, you share it; if you disagree, you rage-share it.
Either way, the marketplace wins – because attention is the currency, and certainty is the bait.

And the algorithms?
They're the salesmen who know exactly what you like, showing you more of it until you can't see past the brand you've bought into.

The marketplace of certainty isn't going away.
The question is whether we walk into it as informed buyers or easy marks.

It's not about rejecting conviction altogether – conviction can drive real change.
It's about knowing the difference between conviction earned through thought and conviction handed to you, pre-packaged, with a ribbon that says, "You're already right."

At our table, we've decided that if we're going to buy certainty, it should come with a receipt – proof we've tested it, questioned it, and decided it's worth the cost.
Because if you can't return it when you learn more, you're not buying certainty.
You're buying a trap.

12

Politics is a stage.
It's also a math problem no one can solve.

That's not cynicism — that's Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem.
Arrow proved that no voting system can turn individual preferences into a collective decision that satisfies fairness, consistency, and universality all at once.
In other words: democracy can't make everyone happy.
It can't even guarantee that the majority's preferences will be represented in a way that's entirely fair.

Which leaves politicians in a strange position — they can't actually deliver perfection, so they perform it instead.

When I coached travel baseball, I sometimes had to make unpopular lineup decisions.
I couldn't give every kid the position they wanted and still field the best team.

The parents didn't vote on my choices, but if they had, the results wouldn't have reflected a single "will of the people."
Some parents valued winning above all.
Others valued equal playing time.
Others just wanted their kid happy, even if it cost us the game.

No single lineup could satisfy them all.
So I learned to do what politicians do: make my choice, explain it as clearly as possible, and keep the appearance of fairness even when true fairness was impossible.

In 1824, four candidates split the electoral vote.
Andrew Jackson won the popular vote but didn't have enough electoral votes to win outright.
The House of Representatives chose John Quincy Adams instead, leading Jackson's supporters to cry "corrupt bargain."

Was it corruption or just the system doing what it does when no clear majority exists?
Either way, the result didn't feel fair to a huge portion of the country — and in politics, feelings about fairness matter as much as fairness itself.

Fast forward to 2000, when George W. Bush and Al Gore were separated by razor-thin margins in Florida.
The election came down to "hanging chads" — bits of paper not fully punched out of ballots.
The Supreme Court stepped in, ending the recount.

Even if the system functioned as designed, the perception was that something had been stolen.
And once that perception takes hold, performance becomes even more important than process.

Arrow's theorem creates a permanent gap between what democracy promises and what it can deliver.
The will to power thrives in that gap.
It fills it with narrative, symbolism, and emotional theater so voters feel like the system is working for them — even when it can't fully do so.

This doesn't mean all political performance is malicious. Sometimes, performance is what holds a fractious country together long enough to get anything done.
But it also means the line between representation and illusion is thin.

At dinner, the three of us have circled back to this truth again and again.
My actor friend sees performance as inevitable — even necessary — because humans are emotional beings who need stories to make sense of politics.
My contrarian friend is more skeptical, worried that performance becomes a substitute for real problem-solving.

I tend to fall somewhere in the middle.
I see that without performance, politics feels alien and unresponsive.
But with too much performance, politics becomes pure spectacle, disconnected from the work it's supposed to represent.

In other democracies — say, parliamentary systems — Arrow's theorem shows up in coalition governments that barely hold together.

Multiple parties negotiate endlessly, each claiming to represent "the people."

But "the people" in these systems are often an abstract collage of incompatible desires.

Performance becomes the glue that keeps the illusion of unity intact.

Arrow's theorem doesn't mean democracy is a failure. It means democracy is a balancing act — one that requires

acknowledging the system's limits rather than pretending they don't exist.

If politics is a stage, the danger isn't the performance itself.
It's forgetting that a performance is what you're watching.

At our table, we've agreed on this: the healthiest politics is the one where voters know the show is on, but still keep an eye on what's happening backstage.
Because the moment you forget there's a backstage, you've already bought your ticket to a story that someone else has written for you.

13

Every society offers you a picture frame.
Inside that frame is the story you're told about who you are, what's possible, and where you fit.
It's tidy, complete, and ready to hang on the wall of your mind.

The problem isn't that the frame is always a lie.
The problem is that it's always incomplete.

Growing up in the Bronx, my first frame was simple:
Work hard, keep your head down, and you'll get what you deserve.
It was a comforting story – the kind you want to believe because it makes the world feel predictable.

But over time, cracks appeared.
I saw people who worked harder than anyone I knew still living paycheck to paycheck.
I saw others, born into opportunity, float through life with safety nets so wide they could never fall far.

That's when I learned: frames don't have to be false to be misleading.
They just have to leave out the parts of the picture that make you uncomfortable.

The American Dream has always been a powerful frame.

It tells us that anyone, regardless of background, can succeed through hard work and determination.

For some, it's been true.

But the frame doesn't show the whole picture — the systemic barriers, the uneven starting lines, the moments in history when that dream was deliberately withheld from entire communities.

Redlining. Jim Crow laws. Immigration quotas tilted in favor of some groups and against others.

These realities existed outside the frame, so they were easier to ignore.

The more a frame is repeated, the more it feels like reality itself.

When people grow up inside the same frame, questioning it feels like questioning the ground you walk on.

This is why frames are so hard to resist — they're not just stories you hear.

They're the background scenery of your entire life.

At our dinner table, we try to take the frame off the wall and look at the blank space it was covering.

My actor friend likes to push on the emotional weight of the frame — asking how much of our politics is built on feelings we're not willing to name.

My contrarian friend comes at it from the other direction — questioning the economic and political incentives that keep the frame in place.

We don't always agree, but the act of examining the frame itself keeps us from mistaking it for the whole truth.

Frames aren't fixed forever.

The Civil Rights Movement shifted the frame on race in

America.
The women's suffrage movement shifted the frame on gender.
Even public attitudes toward war — think Vietnam — can move when enough people refuse to keep the old picture hanging.

But these shifts don't happen automatically.
They happen because enough people decide to live as if the frame isn't the whole story.

The danger of rejecting a frame is that you might just replace it with another one.
Different image, same limits.
Resisting the frame isn't about finding the "perfect" picture — it's about learning to live with more of the wall exposed.

That openness can feel unsettling.
It's lonelier.
But it's also more honest.

The blank space outside the frame isn't empty — it's just unfamiliar.
It's where the uncomfortable truths live, the ones that complicate the neat story you were given.

Resisting the frame doesn't make you superior to those who still live inside it.
It just makes you responsible for what you now see.

At our table, we've learned that the frame is never the enemy.
It's a tool — one you can take down, examine, and even hang back up when it helps.
The key is remembering that what's outside the frame is just as real as what's inside.

14

There's a silence that comes when you stop speaking in the language of the crowd.
It's not the same as solitude — solitude is chosen.
This is the silence of realizing your voice no longer fits the chorus you used to sing with.

The lonelier path isn't about becoming an outsider for the sake of it.
It's about what happens when you see too much to keep pretending the old script works.

I've felt it on the baseball field.
When I benched a popular player for skipping practices, I knew I was breaking an unspoken pact with some parents. They wanted discipline in theory — but not when it meant their kid sat out.

In that moment, I wasn't the coach they cheered for.
I was the obstacle.

The lonelier path in politics works the same way.
The moment you call out flaws in your own "side," you're not seen as principled.
You're seen as a traitor.

History is filled with people who chose the lonelier path. Some were celebrated later — others were forgotten or condemned.

Eugene Debs went to prison for opposing World War I when the national mood demanded unity.
Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, revealing truths about the Vietnam War that many preferred to ignore.
Both were called unpatriotic in their time.

Their stories show that the lonelier path is rarely comfortable, but it sometimes shifts the course of history.

Once you step outside the popular frame, you can't unsee the gaps, the contradictions, the simplifications. And that awareness changes how you move through the world.

The will to power counts on most people avoiding this step.
It rewards conformity with belonging and punishes dissent with isolation.
That's why so many prefer the comfort of the crowd — not because they lack courage, but because they value connection.

At our dinners, we've agreed on one thing: if you walk the lonelier path, you don't have to walk it alone.
We may disagree fiercely, but we don't exile each other for it.

It's a small pact, but it's rare in a world where the line between debate and banishment has grown razor-thin.

During Reconstruction, a few white Southerners spoke out in favor of civil rights for freed Black Americans.

They were labeled scalawags — traitors to their race — and often ostracized or attacked.
In their communities, they became strangers in their own towns.

They didn't win the larger battle, but their presence proved that dissent could exist even in the most hostile environments.

The lonelier path carries weight — the weight of fewer allies, slower victories, and the constant temptation to go back to the familiar script.
But it also frees you from the daily labor of pretending.

And in that space, you can act from conviction rather than choreography.

Walking the lonelier path doesn't mean you give up on belonging.
It means you start looking for it in smaller, truer places — in the people who value the truth more than the performance, and in the rare conversations where disagreement isn't a threat.

The chorus may go on without you.
But sometimes, the quiet you find outside of it is the first honest sound you've heard in years.

15

The long game is never about winning once.
It's about playing in a way that makes it possible to keep playing.

The will to power thrives on short-term victories — quick applause, decisive wins, the appearance of control.
But history tells us that those who think only in the short term often sow the seeds of their own collapse.
Empires burn out. Movements fracture. Leaders rise on waves that eventually pull them under.

The long game is slower, quieter, and far less glamorous.

When I coached baseball, there were moments I knew we could steal a win by bending a rule or leaning into gamesmanship.
The temptation was there.
But I'd think about what that would teach my players.
If we won the game but lost their trust, what had I really built?

The long game in coaching is about more than the scoreboard.
The long game in politics, culture, and life is no different.

The framers of the U.S. Constitution didn't design a perfect system.

They designed one that could adapt — painfully, messily, but adapt nonetheless.

Amendments didn't erase the system's flaws, but they kept the game going.

Without the ability to adjust — to extend the right to vote, to clarify rights, to address gaps — the system would have collapsed long ago.

The long game requires building something flexible enough to survive both success and failure.

The fallacy of a just world tells us that good actions should lead to good outcomes and bad actions to bad ones.

But the long game accepts that reality is messier — good people suffer, bad people prosper, and fairness is not evenly distributed.

Instead of using that truth as an excuse for cynicism, the long game treats it as a design problem:

How do you build systems and habits that work even when the world refuses to play fair?

Over five years of dinners, my two friends and I have circled the same core question:

Where's the line between what government must do and what it should leave alone?

We never land on a final answer.

We don't expect to.

Instead, we keep refining the question — testing it against new events, new perspectives, new contradictions.

That's the long game: staying in the conversation even when there's no finish line.

After the Civil War, Reconstruction was cut short.
The long game was abandoned for short-term political gains, and the country paid for it with a century of segregation, disenfranchisement, and racial violence.

It's a cautionary tale: when you quit the long game because the short game feels easier, you're often signing up for harder battles later.

Arrow's theorem tells us no system can meet every condition of fairness.
The long game takes that limitation seriously.
It doesn't chase a mythical perfect system — it works to create structures that minimize harm, expand opportunity, and allow for course corrections.

It's not about building utopia.
It's about building a system that survives its own mistakes.

The long game asks a simple but unsettling question:
Are we building something that will outlast our own egos?

The will to power says, Win now. Take credit. Claim the spotlight.
The long game says, Win slowly. Share credit. Keep the lights on after you're gone.

At our table, we know the long game doesn't guarantee victory.
But it's the only way to make sure the story doesn't end with us.

And maybe that's the real measure — not whether we saw the perfect outcome, but whether we left behind a game worth playing.

About the Author

Jose Franco is the founder of Stoop Juice, a Brooklyn juice bar he launched in 2012 after losing 70 pounds and reshaping his outlook on life. A graduate of Binghamton University with a business degree earned in 1995, Franco has long been drawn to sociology, philosophy, and the hidden assumptions that shape our world. His writing blends history, humor, and an optimistic strain of nihilism to challenge readers to question comforting myths while still crafting constructive stories for themselves.

Beyond writing, Franco has spent years coaching baseball, mentoring young athletes with an emphasis on discipline, respect, and growth through struggle. Whether on the field, in business, or on the page, his focus remains the same: to explore how self-reflection and resilience matter in a world that is far from just.

Through *Sixty Guilders And A Megaphone*, Franco invites readers to think deeply, laugh occasionally, and embrace their own small but meaningful role.

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