



After the Mueller gaslighting, we know the adults won't save us. But the kids might

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With William Barr's non-release of the Mueller report, the truth now smacks us in the face: The grown-ups aren't going to save us. Barr's predictable sabotage (read the backstory here) was merely icing on the cake, and no one should be surprised that President "Where's My Roy Cohn" would suddenly go all Joe McCarthy on us in the immediate aftermath, with eagerly promised assistance from his lackey Lindsey Graham. As Greg Sargent says, it's the same old gaslighting.

But it was *never* realistic to expect Robert Mueller himself to bring down Trump, even if he'd turned in a much more damning report, simply because of the nature of the current GOP — both at its base and in the Senate. However much Trump might deserve impeachment, there's never been anything more than an underpants gnome theory of how it could possibly happen. Simply put, 2019 is not 1974, and the systemic forces that have polarized and paralyzed America over the intervening years have completely changed the nature of what's politically possible, and what's not.

The "grown-ups" trope is simply a way to ignore that chilling fact, a way to pretend that systemic problems can be solved by a handful of benevolent authority figures. Even more, it's a way to avoid even *thinking* about the systemic nature of the problems.

What *can* save us is the exact opposite of the grown-ups — children, as demonstrated a week earlier, on March 15, by the worldwide School Climate Strike, with total participation of more than 1.6 million strikers in more than 3,000 locations in 142 countries and on every continent — including Antarctica. They're demanding transformational action in line with last year's UN special report on global warming, which gives us just 12 years to avoid the most dangerous consequences. The strike began just seven months earlier, last Aug. 20, as a solitary action by then-15-year old Greta Thunberg, leafleting outside the Swedish Parliament.

Thunberg had been inspired by the Parkland students. "Someone I knew said, 'What if children did that for the climate?,' she told Democracy Now! in December. "I tried to bring people with me, but no one was really interested, so I had to do it alone."

"Since then a movement of climate strikers has swept the globe," Thunberg and a group of her allies wrote in the Guardian that day. "This movement had to happen, we didn't have a choice."

The explosive growth it's experienced — from one person to 1.6 million-plus in just seven months, crossing all kinds of boundaries — is precisely what's needed to match the awesome scale of the threat we face, as noted in a statement of support signed by more than 12,000

scientists, which said their concerns “are justified and supported by the best available science.” It's youth-led, bottom-up, participatory and international. And it confronts the systemic nature of the problem head-on. Addressing world leaders at the UN climate summit in Katowice, Poland, in December, Thunberg was very clear about the futility of anything less:

Some people say that I should study to become a climate scientist so that I can ‘solve’ the climate crisis. But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions

Today we use 100 million barrels of oil every single day. There are no politics to change that. There are no rules to keep that oil in the ground. So we can no longer save the world by playing by the rules, because the rules have to be changed.

So we have not come here to beg the world leaders to care for our future. They have ignored us in the past, and they will ignore us again. We have come here to let them know that change is coming, whether they like it or not. The people will rise to the challenge. And since our leaders are behaving like children, we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago.

The School Climate Strike is just part of the global youth climate movement, reflected in local and national organizations around the world, like the Sunrise Movement that's taken such a prominent role in advancing the Green New Deal. The climate strike represents a political solution model that's the *exact* opposite of the “grown-ups will save us” reliance on the Mueller probe. And the problem it's taking on is far bigger than Donald Trump, and ultimately far more important.

The Nation recently published an article by historian Alfred McCoy, "The End of Our World Order Is Imminent," arguing that global warming has the potential to disrupt the world on a scale not seen since the bubonic plague, which precipitated a succession of “world orders,” first under Spanish, then British and then American leadership.

“An ever-escalating tempo of climate change over the coming decades is likely to produce massive damage to the infrastructure that sustains human life,” McCoy writes. “Seven hundred years later, humanity could be facing another catastrophe on the scale of the Black Death.” Mass migrations driven by drought and other climate stress factors are a key risk factor:

If climate change does, in fact, spark mass migrations, then China's untrammelled nationalism, with its implicit hostility to the rights of refugees, might prove more acceptable to a future era than Washington's dream of international cooperation that has already begun to sink from sight in the era of Donald Trump's “great wall.”

On the other hand, China itself is hardly immune from the ravages of climate change, and might not prove capable of reshaping more than a fraction of the world around it. The result could be a much more anarchic descent into general global chaos. That's the scale of the problem that the Climate Strike is taking on — not the end of the world, per se, but the end of the world as we know it, and as we've come to routinely imagine the future will be. Ironically, it's a radical movement with a conservative purpose: preserving our children's hopes and dreams.

Of course mass movements alone don't make for enduring political solutions. But they do make transformative change *possible*. As Martin Luther King noted in his “Letter From Birmingham

Jail,” such activism is indispensable. “We have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure,” he wrote. “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

The South African anti-apartheid movement shared a similar understanding, and a veteran of that struggle — Kumi Naidoo, the secretary general of Amnesty International and former executive director of Greenpeace — spoke out forcefully in support of the Climate Strike.

“In 1980, at the age of 15, I led a student protest that got me expelled,” Naidoo wrote. “Even though adults told us that we could not make a difference, once our eyes were opened to this injustice, there was no alternative. ... Those who lived under apartheid know exactly what it means to live with an inherent threat to your existence. But rather than give in to the fear that it was too big to take on, we had no choice but to trust in the power of our individual actions. There are many lessons here for the climate change movement.”

Nor was the South African experience unique. “Throughout history, our societies have owed a debt to young people who have recognized that sometimes you need to break the rules to create space for change,” he noted. “Just like South Africa’s youth leaders did decades ago, I believe young people striking for climate action today are building exactly the kind of mass movement needed to pressure leaders into acting.”

America, the purported world leader, is clearly the world laggard on this issue. It’s not just Donald Trump’s conspiracist denialism and Mitch McConnell’s cynical gamesmanship that’s the problem, but the Democrats’ “crackpot realism” as well. “I’ve been here 30 years,” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., told the Sunrise Movement students in rejecting their plea to support a Green New Deal. “I know what I’m doing.” But the results speak for themselves: Thirty-one years after James Hansen’s remarkably accurate warning to Congress, *there are none*.

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Barack Obama rolls into office with Mitt Romney’s health care policy, with John McCain’s climate policy, with Bill Clinton’s tax policy, and George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy. He’s all

these things not because the technocrats in his administration think they're the best possible policies, but because [White House adviser] David Axelrod and company say they poll well.

And [Chief of Staff] Rahm Emanuel and company say we've got to build bridges to the Republicans.... And did George H.W. Bush, did Mitt Romney, did John McCain say a single good word about anything Barack Obama ever did over the course of eight solid years?

No, they fucking did not. ... Today, there's literally nobody on the right between those frantically accommodating Donald Trump, on the one hand, and us on the other. Except for our brave friends in exile from the Cato Institute now trying to build something in the ruins at the [centrist] Niskanen Center.

That would be Jerry Taylor, insisting that the Green New Deal is doomed and foolish. Perhaps he's right. But if he is, we're all doomed anyway. Because there are no centrist Republicans to hold up their side, as DeLong points out, and there's also no "centrist" way to address the climate crisis. There *might* have been, 30 years ago, if the centrists had been willing to act. They weren't and it's much too late for that now.

Here's the grand irony: As McCoy makes clear, left unchecked, climate change will destroy the existing world order, and with it any chance of preserving the open society that the Niskanen Center claims to cherish. The only practical way to preserve that society is precisely the kind of radical action that Taylor argues against.

He's not alone, of course. The elite media is full of kindred souls, particularly at MSNBC, which is full to the gills with Bush-era Republicans in various modes of reinvention, bemoaning the lack of "adults in the room." They dominate the discourse at the purported "Fox News of the Left," which barely even noticed that the Student Climate Strike even happened.

It's one thing to have this politician or that argue for this policy or that in the name of "the children." It's quite another thing to have the children themselves speak up on their own behalf. The center of moral authority starts to shift, and with that everything else shifts as well.

It's not that these students can change *everything* about our system — that's clearly unrealistic. But they can change enough. When it comes to the American political system, for instance, climate strikers can demand major reforms. Getting rid of the filibuster, perhaps, so Democrats can pass a Green New Deal in 2021.

There's strong institutional resistance to that within both parties, of course. That's where the Student Climate Strike movement could prove invaluable. "Who are you going to choose?" they could ask Dianne Feinstein, Chuck Schumer and the rest, "Yourselves and your clubmates, your comfortable way of not doing anything? Or us, America's future and our very lives?"

We could also expand the size of the Supreme Court to 11 justices, to offset the theft of Merrick Garland's seat and ensure against a politicized invalidation of the Green New Deal, à la the 2013 gutting of the Voting Rights Act. Again, Democrats have a very strong procedural conservatism that cripples their willingness to act decisively. Will they really cling tight to that conservatism, at the potential cost of unfathomable climate catastrophe? How will they explain that to children and teenagers by the thousands?

For far too long, our politicians have treated climate change as an abstraction. Republicans may continue to do so, but that's changing rapidly for Democrats, thanks to the children and youth of

the Sunrise Movement and the School Climate Strike, as the center of moral authority shifts to them, here in America and around the world.

“I started my activism quite young – at 11,” Brianna Fruean, 20, wrote in the Guardian. “As a young girl in Samoa, a small island in the south Pacific, hearing the implications it had for my island scared me and jumpstarted my passion to do something about it. ... Right now, along with a lot of other vulnerable communities around the world, we’re having cyclones, floods and droughts. And it’s going to be that – and worse – for future generations.”

“My country lives with the shame of having 14 of the 15 most polluted cities in the world,” Arya Dhar Gupta of India wrote. “How can I not host the strike in Gurugram, labelled the city with the worst air quality in the world in a recent report? My parents don’t allow me to play outside on most days, for my safety. While I am asthmatic, two years ago, I had a near-death experience from an asthma attack. I don’t want to live in a mask for the rest of my life.”

“My friends and I heard for the first time about Greta Thunberg and her climate strike in the autumn of 2018,” wrote Anastasia Martynenko, 20, of Kiev. “Then we had the idea to hold a similar action in Ukraine. I and like-minded people are happy to be the driving force of change among young people, because when our children ask us, ‘What have you done for our future?’, we will have an answer.”

Multiply these voices by a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million. They were not part of the equation a year ago. The equation that had our planet headed toward unimaginable chaos. But they are part of the equation now — and they are changing it in unforeseeable ways. The global nature of climate change and the students' response is a powerful counter to the right-wing nationalist wave represented by Trump, Putin and the others. allies represent.

The adults will not save us, because they never have. Not on the eve of World War I, or the dark prelude to World War II, not before the Vietnam War, or the invasion of Iraq.

“If our leaders and indeed other adults are still clueless as to what they can do,” Kumi Naidoo concluded, “my one piece of advice is: act like the kids.”

“What we do now, future generations can’t undo in the future,” Greta Thunberg told Democracy Now!“We are deciding right now how we want our future to look like.”