

# CARRYING CIVILIZATION ONWARD

BY JOSIE FAASS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I sit down to write this, the sun is just starting to rise and I can hear birds singing outside my windows. My dog comes into the room and sighs before lying down in her favorite spot on the rug. Life in my home is moving in its familiar rhythm as I have my first sips of coffee. But beyond this small bubble, things look anything but familiar. The America I see through my television and read about online is virtually unrecognizable to me.

In the last week, against a backdrop of pandemic, of uncertainty, loss of economic security and loss of life, the ugliness of American inequality has once again been given a face. George Floyd. Has once again been given a voice. "I can't breathe." Has once again been given an image. A heavy white knee on a vulnerable black neck.

Our national response was immediate, and for those paying attention beforehand, unsurprising. The President took to Twitter to deliver his message - a message that prompted the social media giant to warn readers that the words of the Commander In Chief "glorify violence." There has been violence: Minneapolis, Atlanta, Bakersfield, Kansas City and many more cities and towns have seen looting, fires, and arrests. It appears that organized groups of white supremacists had a hand in at least some of the destruction "accelerationists" from out of town, mingling with local protestors and ensuring that the tinderbox was lit.

Perhaps too fittingly, at the same moment the masses were flooding the streets demanding the right simply to be on this Earth, one exceptional (read: incredibly wealthy) American jubilated as his became the first private company to launch astronauts into space.

While the benefits of the "SpaceX-NASA" partnership (note the order of the names)



is great, let's not lose sight of what is at work. The May 30th launch was a significant step towards Elon Musk's ultimate goal of colonizing (read: privatizing) Mars "to preserve our species." So, in a moment of national darkness, when we desperately longed for proof of American exceptionalism, millions tuned into cheer on what will ultimately and explicitly result in an interplanetary land grab, made possible by the unfathomable privilege our society affords a select few - permitting them entry into the ranks of the ultra-rich.

Were we cheering for this landmark of human accomplishment, this proof of the good we're capable of if we set our minds to it? Or were we cheering with relief at the prospect we might one day walk away from the mess we've created here on Earth, entering an alien utopia created by and for private profit?

As I sit with these dualities I cannot help but think of Henry George. I cannot help but wonder if even he foresaw the true magnitude of the disparities possible in a world where the distance between the haves and have nots are not only unchecked by government but actively accelerated by it.

If he were here today, I believe George would entreat us to do the hard and uncertain work to fix our problems. He would draw our eyes away from the heavens and the flashy distraction of the wealth only a small few will ever know, back to our burning cities and the people in them demanding justice. He would call upon those of us, like myself, who still enjoy the privilege of birds singing through our windows and a hot cup of coffee in our hands, to use the power that comes with that privilege to work for a more equal world. He would encourage that initiative, even if the path to that world is hard to distinguish and following it takes courage we are not sure we possess. (cont. page 10)

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING (CONT.)

There are two basic costs involved in housing development: 1) the construction costs of the structure and 2) the cost of the land upon which the structure is built. Land, of course, has no labor and material costs because it is a gift nature. Its cost is based strictly on “what the market will bear,” i.e. what buyers or renters are willing/able to pay for it based on their incomes. With the current shutdown lowering incomes, land costs would be reduced if land speculation was eliminated.

Doran doesn't take into account the development possibilities of holding land on a rental basis from the community. If developers rented their land from the community, they would only have to finance the structure cost of development and thus could borrow less from banks and ask investors for less funding.

A more thorough analysis suggests :

- Stop taxing buildings so they're cheaper to build, improve and maintain
- Tax land at its full rental rate (6%) so speculators don't demand premiums for it from builders and so developers only have to finance structure costs because they would be then holding their land on a rental basis from the community.
- Give everyone in the city an equal resident credit of several thousand dollars annually so all households can more easily afford housing and other basic needs, similar to the \$1600 per resident Alaska dividend .

Sometimes simpler really is better.

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## CARRYING CIVILIZATION ONWARD (CONT.)

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I recently reread Progress and Poverty and was saddened by the prescience with which George predicted the crushing disparities we now see all around us. But this is not a time to lick our wounds, it is a time to work to right the wrongs, and many, many of George's words offer strength and inspiration.



I'll leave you with just these few to consider: “(T)o effect any great social movement, it is sympathy rather than self-interest, the sense of duty rather than the sense of self-advancement, that must be appealed to. (...) In that spirit, and in no other, is the power to solve social problems and carry civilization onward.”