

Notable Snippets from Critical Reviews of *Abundance*

(Text is bolded here, not in originals, for emphasis.)

3/3/25 - [Do Democrats Need to Learn How to Build?](#), Benjamin Wallace-Wells, *The New Yorker*

“[I]t’s flatly ahistorical to think that liberals are mainly to blame for the halting progress of American climate policy.”

3/4/25 - [An “Abundance Agenda” for Government Is the Anti-DOGE](#), Julian Zelizer, *The New Republic*

Abundance downplays the ways that **some rigid rules serve an important public purpose that often becomes clear in times of crisis.**”

- “For instance, after the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, some experts have warned against California rushing into a rapid rebuilding process that jettisons rules for safer construction, such as a requirement for metal roofs that would contain future fires. Are those rules cumbersome, or are they in fact essential to good government?”

“Nor is there sufficient attention to how **rules and regulations can serve as firewalls to protect us from elected officials who, in the name of efficiency, attempt to abuse power** for their own political or personal purposes.”

- “The arguments in this book could easily provide more fuel for radical conservative efforts to dismantle entire programs without regard for the consequences.”

“Moreover, Klein and Thompson sometimes overlook how **power politics and vested interests would stop some of these policies regardless of how user-friendly government processes became.**”

- “After all, scarcity in health care is nothing new. Americans have suffered from inadequate coverage, high drug prices, and unfair private insurance practices throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. This was happening long before the regulatory expansion of the 1970s took place.”
- “Champions of affordable housing were decrying the way poor and middle-class residents had been pushed out of cities to make way for the preferences of the wealthy—just read Robert Caro’s classic *The Power Broker*—long before many of the most burdensome construction regulations were introduced.”

3/14/25 - [The Abundance Doctrine](#), Mike Konczal, *Democracy Journal*

“[T]he focus on excessive procedures and processes in administrative law... was in fact the historical response by liberals to courts and a conservative ideology that had been hostile to public administration.”

- “Right now we face aggressive new Supreme Court decisions attacking administrative agencies and their ability to function, and more fundamental incoming attacks on the legitimacy of New Deal agencies like the National Labor Relations Board. These would exist even if liberals had had different motivations or struck different compromises within their coalition. And an abundance agenda designed around securing less back-end litigation of state action has to contend with this new assault.”
- “Moreover, much of the conservative project revolves around taking federal responsibilities and programs and privatizing them or devolving them down to state and local governments in ways designed to ultimately undermine them. However, many of the abundance arguments are based around preemption, or moving power and decision-making up to the level that can best solve the problem of coordinating actors. That will be a challenge with so much of the conservative movement in opposition.”

“The efficiency of social insurance sits uneasy in the authors’ framework.”

- “In this light, the call for the expansion of Medicare and public options to save larger costs—with similar or better outcomes—might be the most important abundance intervention.”

3/17/25 - [The Democrats Must Make a Choice](#), Rana Foroohar, *The Financial Times*

“[Abundance] also skates over what I believe to be the key economic dysfunction in the US economy today: power asymmetry.”

- “The private sector, and particularly a handful of big companies, have too much money and power—something embodied by Elon Musk’s unprecedented proximity to Trump and the billionaire-filled seats at the president’s inauguration—while workers have far too little.”

“[T]oo many regulations in California or New York were irrelevant to Trump’s victory.”

- “Rather, it was about the fact that people in hollowed-out post-industrial communities in three swing states voted in historic numbers for him, thinking, incorrectly, that he would protect their jobs.”
- “As long as this electoral structure is in place, and if you believe that unfettered markets fail to provide key public goods, then you have to think genuine economic populism—not the fake MAGA kind—will be the winning formula for the Democrats. But that means rich liberals must think beyond their own interests.”

3/18/25 - [Can Democrats Learn to Dream Big Again?](#), Samuel Moyn, *The New York Times*

“Klein and Thompson omit that the neoliberal era wasn’t just about conservatives downsizing government and liberals putting all their energy into regulatory wins like better food labels and fiscal transparency. If austerity policies cramp innovators, they have hurt others worse.

Dramatizing the innovator's plight, *Abundance* occasionally reads like the brief of a few elite finance and tech bros in two or three coastal cities who are mainly upset by clogged transit and red tape. (Government efficiency, anyone?)

- “Neoliberal policies drove a great divide between the innovative few and the stagnant many, with investment bankers and Silicon Valley types increasingly liberated from the American masses whose best option, apparently, is to get better deals on urban rent so they can cut the hair and cook the food of the people who code and trade.”
- “This is a bad place to end up. Even at the height of American optimism in the 1950s, historians and policymakers knew that the people of plenty had to keep inequality and immobility from bringing the experiment crashing down. Klein and Thompson refer to ‘redistribution’ as a familiar liberal goal that they hope to supplement with their government-fueled growth agenda. But if the ability to innovate itself isn’t spread more widely, then, as Potter observed, ‘many people either lose confidence in themselves or rebel against the society which, as they feel, betrayed them with a false promise.’”

“Klein and Thompson have no answers for how to get the masses back their mojo, and *Abundance* does not seriously confront a big reason for Democratic aversion to dreaming big: neoliberal globalization.”

- “When making stuff migrated elsewhere, most Americans were invited to join the care and service economies and consume their way into national and personal debt. Clearing government obstruction only for a small vanguard could exacerbate this gap between the creative few and the consuming many.”

“[I]f the problem is a divided country, progressives should want to spread the opportunity to usher in utopia.”

- “A publicly controlled venture capital firm, for instance, could bring startup culture to places liberals long ago abandoned to the right.”

3/18/25 - [What's the Matter with Abundance?](#), Malcolm Harris, *The Baffler*

“High-speed rail becomes too costly not because there's not enough steel or labor but because we find ourselves unable to exercise substantive democratic control over our national resources.”

- “Americans can only get a well-planned, transformative high-speed rail network by wresting control of that planning prerogative from the capitalist class.”

“[C]apital is reluctant to enter industries that are easy to enter, for fear competition will drive out the profit.”

- “The abundant solution to a lack of housing is to make it easier for developers to build for increased density: the more units that come onto the market, the less landlords will be able to charge. But the same supply mechanism that pushes down prices discourages capital from the sector... There's no reason to assume a market equilibrium point at

which investors are satisfied with their projected returns and Americans of all income levels enjoy an abundance of high-quality housing.”

“The only way to guarantee real housing abundance is deep and concerted public support, by adding the necessary state capacity to build and maintain a home for everyone who needs one.”

- “Something analogous goes for health care and food—not to mention clean air and water, parks, schools, transportation, news reporting, universities, scientific research, museums, and worthwhile artistic production in general. I imagine Klein and Thompson know all of that, but it doesn’t belong in their sales pitch, which can brook no structural conflict between social classes. If developers want to change the rules to let them pay their workers less, it’s only so that they can build more, better, cheaper houses.”

“The authors acknowledge, but decline to unravel, the ways that private demand for profit itself is a fetter on production.”

“It’s one thing to advocate for class compromise, but another to exclude discussion of class conflict altogether... Large increases in material output, we are assured, can save liberalism from the civilizational choice between socialism and barbarism. I disagree; refusing to be forthright about society’s structural antagonisms opens the door to demagogues who peddle false conflicts that still ring truer than the liberals’ false peace.”

“[W]hy can’t decent liberals like Klein and Thompson bring themselves to interrogate America’s trillion-dollar defense budget?”

“Remaking the previous century’s mistakes as fast as possible without thinking is not actually the most optimistic approach to public leadership.”

3/23/25 - [The Meager Agenda of Abundance Liberals](#), Paul Glastris and Nate Weisberg, *Washington Monthly*

“[W]hile devoting so much attention to progressive contradictions, abundance liberals are almost completely silent on the alliance between corporate behemoths and antigovernment politicians that is the biggest threat to the world of plenty they envision, not to mention the republic.”

“The movement to lift zoning restrictions is still new, but enough time has elapsed to begin to see how well it’s working, and the answer is ... a little.”

- “Since Minneapolis pioneered the elimination of single-family zoning in 2019, 72 new duplexes and 37 triplexes (for a whopping total of 255 individual units) have been built. Los Angeles saw only 211 applications for multifamily construction in the year after the law getting rid of single-family zoning went into effect. A comprehensive study from the Urban Institute of land-use reforms across 1,136 cities from 2000 to 2019 found that they increased housing supply by only 0.8 percent within three to nine years of passage.”

“[A] major problem is consolidation in the home construction industry.”

- “Since the 2007 financial crisis, the number of homebuilders has plummeted by 65 percent, according to a Johns Hopkins University study. Two companies, D.R. Horton and Lennar, account for nearly as much new construction as the next eight largest builders combined. The Hopkins study authors estimate that when a local market loses competition in the homebuilding market, housing production drops by 15 percent in value, 16 percent in total square footage, and 11 percent in number of units. Prices go up, too.”

“Even if we eventually succeed in streamlining permitting through NEPA reform and expanded FERC authority, we still won’t be able to deploy renewable energy on the scale abundance liberals believe—rightly—is needed. That’s because of an even bigger bottleneck: corporate power.”

- “America’s electric grid is under the control of regional transmission organizations (RTOs) that are in turn dominated by incumbent electric utilities. These utilities are regulated corporate monopolies that earn guaranteed returns on capital investments and fuel costs. They make money building and operating fossil fuel plants that require continuous fuel purchases. Renewable energy, with its high up-front costs but minimal operating expenses, offers fewer opportunities for ongoing profit under this model. Combined with the quarterly profit pressures of investor-owned utilities, this creates a systematic bias against the long-term infrastructure investments needed for renewable integration.”

“This effective veto power utilities and their RTOs have over the electric grid is an immense obstacle to the transmission and distribution of renewable energy. It’s also one abundance liberals almost never talk about.”

“[T]he federal government could develop a robust medium-speed passenger rail network using existing privately owned tracks... if only Washington required monopoly freight rail companies to make those tracks available.”

“An even bigger problem abundance liberals haven’t grappled with is [healthcare] industry consolidation.”

- “Hospitals have merged into giant systems that now control more than half the beds in the vast majority of metro areas. They have also purchased freestanding physician practices, diagnostic labs, and other parts of the health care delivery system. This has given the hospitals so much market clout that they can dictate prices to the insurance companies—and in many markets the hospital groups have acquired the insurance companies, too, and vice versa.”

“[T]he overwhelming cause of high drug prices is not insufficient numbers of pill factories, but monopolies up and down the supply chain charging monopoly pricing.”

- “Those price hikes lead to higher insurance coverage costs for employers, which are then passed on to employees in the form of lower wages and higher copays and

deductibles. With the commercial health care market this locked up, even a sizable increase in the supply of doctors will have little effect on costs.”

“The heart of the government capacity problem is that for half a century, politicians in both parties... have kept government agencies on a starvation diet even as they’ve asked them to deliver more and more services.”

- “Consider this: The federal government today has roughly the same number of civilian employees as it had during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, even though federal spending has quintupled in inflation-adjusted dollars.”

“Washington has coped with this soaring workload by relying more and more on contractors (many of them behemoths like Deloitte and Booz Allen Hamilton) for administrative tasks once done by civil servants, including managing the work of other contractors.”

- “It has also routed its spending through state governments whose bureaucracies are similarly stripped of talent.”

“[Abundance liberals] see monopolies as drivers of innovation.”

- “In their book, Klein and Thompson write with awe about how Bell Labs, in its mid-20th-century heyday as the development arm of the telephone giant AT&T, came up with the electronic transistor and other technologies that would define the future. [...] [O]nly after the Federal Trade Commission brought an antitrust suit against AT&T for hoarding valuable technology did the company agree to license its patent for the transistor and other technologies to outside companies like Motorola and a start-up called Texas Instruments. It was the government’s suit against AT&T, said Intel founder Gordon Moore, that ‘started the growth of Silicon Valley.’”

“Decluttering bureaucratic procedures won’t be enough to strengthen government capacity. We’ll need to hire far more bureaucrats, offer higher pay to recruit those with the needed skills and experience, and beef up antitrust enforcement agencies.”

“Permitting reform won’t be enough to give us a modern electric grid. We’ll need a new government agency that can construct and manage new renewable power generation and transmission lines when utilities refuse.”

“Training more doctors won’t be enough to meaningfully bring down health care costs. We’ll need the federal government to break up provider monopolies and impose a ‘Medicare prices for all’ regime on commercial health care.”

“In an era when tech oligarchs openly work to hollow out the administrative state and monopolists actively suppress innovation, we need our smartest and most influential liberal thinkers to confront power rather than just process.”

- “After all, Progressive Era intellectuals didn’t just advocate modernizing government bureaucracies but also taking on corporate monopolies.”

3/23/25 - [“Abundance” Thinkers Asked Many of the Right Questions in 2021. Are We Going to Like the Answers in 2025 \(and 2050\)?](#), Todd Tucker, *Roosevelt Forward’s Fireside Stacks*

“In their conclusion, Klein and Thompson concede that they are not offering ‘a set of policy solutions.’ Yet most of the problems they identify could be fixed with policy, whether that is expanding the number of fellowships for early career scientists, rezoning to allow shared boardinghouses for unmarried workers, expanding the remit of DARPA to biopharma, or unleashing the Defense Production Act to preempt private or sub-federal interests blocking clean energy.”

- “Indeed, part of the value of the turn to industrial policy in the US is that it allows policymakers to disrupt veto points by moving decision-making from the local to the state level, and the state to the national level.”

“[Klein and Thompson lack] a theory of how the Left could or would build the power that would be necessary to deliver supply-side gains, while easing the economic transition cost that hurts the old while it helps the new.”

“[T]he role of labor is ambiguous in the abundance imagination.”

“[T]he abundance project is centered on a generalized skepticism of coalitions.”

“America is going to get a real-time experiment in what it looks like to take a wrecking ball to guardrails and whatever was left of the New Deal coalition. When we hit the imagined year 2050 that colorfully opens *Abundance’s* introduction, will Klein and Thompson like what they see?”

3/24/25 - [The Abundance Agenda](#), Matt Bruenig, *People’s Policy Project*

“Lots of problems relate back to growth and innovation, but that does not mean they all avail themselves to similar analysis and solutions.”

“I think it would be a huge mistake, on the merits, to sideline whatever focus there is on welfare state expansion and economic egalitarianism in favor of a focus on administrative burdens in construction, both because parceling out the present matters but also because these institutions will determine how the authors’ utopian future will be parceled out.”

“[W]e have now seen what it looks like when the government supports and subsidizes technological innovation and implementation without concerning itself with the inegalitarianism of the system. His name is Elon Musk.”

- “In its desire to promote electric vehicles and rocketry innovations, the U.S. government made him the richest man in the world and then he used his riches to take over a major political communications platform and then the government.”

“The preservation or deepening of economic inequality could easily turn the authors’ utopian vision of 2050 into a dystopian nightmare. Attending to distribution is a must.”

3/26/25 - [An Abundance of Credulity](#), Hannah Story Brown, *The American Prospect*

“The problems the authors identify are real, but they largely ignore who benefits from prolonging them.”

“Their vision is of a government that’s more responsive to the public’s needs, but their proposal is to remove already inadequate levers for accountability in political decision-making.”

- “We should be able to agree that the tools we have to ensure progress and affluence are insufficient, without concluding that the answer is to throw them away.”

“Arguing for fewer checks on government action hits very different amid mass firings, unilateral cancellations of appropriated spending, and dissolutions of entire federal agencies.”

- “The diagnosis of what constrains the state acting authoritatively to meet public needs—more or less the messy multivocality of democracy—is an ill match for an era of accelerating authoritarianism.”

“[I]t is critical to be accurate about the sources of what Klein and Thompson call the ‘chosen scarcities’ that stratify modern American society.”

- “What constrains political action for the public good? Call it industry influence, corporate capture, consolidated power. Call it the societal consequences of the profit motive.”

“[W]hat’s missing from these books is a substantive engagement with the fact that powerful entities profit from the government failing to meet the public’s needs.”

“The fossil fuel industry benefits from our current gridlock.”

- “It benefits from legislative proposals that ‘abundance agenda’ proponents have backed to weaken existing processes for assessing the environmental impact of the construction of energy infrastructure. And it benefits from ‘all of the above’ energy rhetoric that signals political leaders’ refusal to stand up to corporate power and identify which private-sector goals are aligned with the public interest, and which simply aren’t. The stability of the global climate can’t handle the preservation of the fossil fuel industry.”

“We have a serious deficit of home construction, which the authors attribute to nettlesome rules getting in the way of building... [But] we didn’t have only pro-construction zoning rules before 2007 and a flood of burdensome, anti-building rules afterward.”

- “The home construction sector crashed because of the collapse of the housing bubble, driven by the deregulation of housing finance and a securitization machine that broke the market.”
- “This led to a decade of depression in home construction, a mass consolidation of the market, and a loss of technical know-how and material supply chains. The sclerotic nature of the housing market today benefits incumbents, who buy up and sit on available land and build out slowly to keep prices high. Weakening their power is complementary to the necessary step of fixing zoning.”

“Klein and Thompson want ‘more of what matters’: affordable housing, clean energy, useful technology, lifesaving medicine. Yes, please. But we also need less of what doesn’t matter—*predatory* landlords, *polluting* energy, *exploitative* technology, *unaffordable* health care.”

- “Rules imposed over the last half-century that seek to prevent exploitation and safeguard the public have led to dramatically lower air and water pollution, significantly fewer auto and aviation fatalities, reduced mortality from infectious diseases, fewer deaths and injuries at work, fewer deaths from residential fires, fewer bank failures, and a less volatile economy. Some of us believe those are worthwhile trade-offs. But industry tends to lobby against the ‘burdensome costs’ of so increasing general well-being, as rulemaking dockets can attest.”
- “We need better levers to prevent abuses *and* better processes for getting public goods built. But the authors refuse to dignify the question of how to prevent existing abuses from worsening if we take away existing guardrails.”

“When neoliberals attack perverse government outcomes while ignoring the influence of corporate America, they legitimize the center-right doctrinaires advocating for small government and deference to entrenched business interests, undermining their own purported goal of rebuilding trust in government.”

“Modern environmental and labor standards resurface periodically in these books as the bogeymen of expedient building. The profit motive of the private sector is never viewed as so dispensable.”

3/27/25 - [Make America Build Again](#), Noah Kazis, *The Guardian*

“In assembling a brief against creaky and costly aspects of the status quo, it leaves unanswered the question of what should be kept—which costs are worth it.”

- “The authors accuse their opponents of ‘tradeoff denial.’ Yet, in sketching out a future in which innovation is deployed only wisely, technocratically, and for good, they succumb to the same vice.”

“Opposing the political scrum, they instead valorize ‘strong leadership.’ Any countervailing power is suspect.”

- “For various abundance thinkers, this has included legislatures and courts, environmentalists, unions, and neighborhood associations. Notably, their skepticism of non-majoritarian influence extends less frequently to corporate power.”

“As Donald Trump and Elon Musk attack the underpinnings of constitutional democracy, Klein and Thompson sometimes share the latter’s Silicon Valley-inflected fear that we must choose between that democracy and a bountiful future.”

- “To be sure, they are no authoritarians, and there are virtues in a book focused on 2050 rather than 2025. But those of us seeking a ‘liberalism that builds’ cannot turn away from the work of pluralistic democracy.”

3/28/25 - [Getting Abundance Right](#), Sandeep Vaheesan, *Project Syndicate*

“Fundamentally, the abundance agenda dismisses the value of public input.”

- “Giving communities a say in infrastructure development can lead to more informed land-use decisions and serve as a democratic check on powerful corporate interests. Instead of being jettisoned, environmental review and zoning should be improved through tailored measures, such as expanding state administrative capacity and directing greater population density toward places with ample health care, school, and transit capacity.”

“More broadly, the abundance agenda embodies the failure to confront the pathologies of contemporary capitalism.”

- “Simply granting corporations the legal freedom to build by relaxing zoning rules and environmental reviews ignores the fact that today’s corporations place short-term shareholder payouts above long-term objectives and are thus unlikely to invest at the scale and scope necessary to deliver broad-based abundance.”

“The most effective rebuttal to this anti-statist philosophy is the American experience itself.”

- “U.S. economic history includes episodes in which vigorous government action proved crucial for prosperity. A prime example is President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, which delivered shared abundance by expanding public capacity—most notably through large-scale investments in electricity infrastructure. These investments made electricity affordable and widely available, and pushed the private sector to expand access and lower costs.”

“If Americans are truly committed to achieving broadly shared abundance, they shouldn’t fall for warmed-over neoliberal dogma repackaged for the twenty-first century.”

- “Instead, they should look to a time in their own history when a bold, capable federal government stepped in to deliver real prosperity for the many, not just the few.”

“By directly providing essential goods and services, whether energy, housing, or broadband, the government can expand supply and compel the private sector to be more socially responsive, harnessing the power of competition and public accountability.”

- “Instead of doubling down on the failures of the past half-century, we should revisit a model that has already proven to be highly effective at promoting abundance and strengthening democratic institutions.”

3/31/25 - [The Gaping Hole in the Center of the Abundance Agenda](#), Timothy Noah, *The New Republic*

“The government must reverse the past half-century’s trend toward ever-growing wealth and income inequality. Abundance alone won’t cut it.”

- “Boosting wages, increasing worker power, and generally restoring the middle class to meaningful participation in America’s economy are much more necessary. Otherwise we’ll just make Elon Musk’s grandchildren richer.”

“The authors of these books ought to consider unions part of the *solution* to housing affordability. Boost wages, and people can buy houses.”

“[A]nother reason housing got less affordable—in New York and elsewhere—was that *real wages failed to rise for all but the wealthiest.*”

- “In a thriving economy, incomes are supposed to rise alongside housing prices, and for everybody, not just the rich.”

“If Democrats are to win back the working-class majority necessary to regain the White House, they’ll need to talk about how a more activist government can address demand-side problems experienced by the proletariat.”

4/1/25 - [The Last Abundance Agenda](#), David Dayen, *The American Prospect*

“[T]he deregulation of mortgage finance was justified and sold as a means to make housing affordable and give everyone a slice of the American dream.”

- “The way in which that process was supposed to manifest was just as obscure and technical as zoning laws and mandatory parking minimums. It involved allowing Wall Street to dominate how housing got built and mortgages got sold. Unbounded by rules to protect borrowers and the financial system, it eventually imploded.”

“No zoning law or agglomeration of zoning laws has had the impact on housing construction that the collapse of the housing bubble did.”

- “We built fewer homes each year from 2008 to 2014 than in the worst year for home construction in history to that point. A normal level of construction outside of recessions wasn’t reached until 2020, and COVID and rising interest rates put an end to that.”



Hundreds of thousands of construction workers lost jobs; thousands of construction businesses went bankrupt. It was a deeply scarring event.”

“*Abundance* rather cleverly writes around this, at one point describing the shift in California homebuilding ‘since 2007’ without describing the bubble in 2006.”

“Klein and Thompson describe their book as a ‘lens not a list.’ They aren’t comfortable with defining specifically what should be done, but instead want to raise new questions about how to look at politics. They ask, ‘what is scarce that should be abundant?’ In the ’80s and ’90s, bankers and presidents answered that question with the words ‘affordable homeownership.’ That was the lens, and deregulating finance was the list. **A bunch of constricting rules were shackling the ability of people to own a home, and those rules were systematically bulldozed, to the great pain and continued suffering of everyone struggling to afford housing today.**”

“The idea that the securitization machines that ravaged this country won’t be turned back on in the name of abundance doesn’t seem true, especially because, as Thompson conceded, financing is a really important element of building housing.”

“[I]t was sloppy to recycle a two-year-old Klein column about alleged impediments to federal semiconductor manufacturing grants without mentioning that all the money was taken and the plants are operating.”

“[I]t was maddening to use California’s high-speed rail program as a signature example of Democratic dysfunction when it was a *Republican* governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, who made the decisions while in charge of the state’s high-speed rail authority at the key moment in 2008 to decrease state capacity and outsource to consultants.”

“[I]t was deceptive to celebrate Bell Labs as a spur for invention without mentioning that it sat on most of those inventions, until a Justice Department consent decree forced the AT&T monopoly to license them out, an action that created Silicon Valley.”

“[I]t was reductive to blame Democrats for complicating the broadband build-out when it was the product of Republican senators and the telecom industry wanting to bog down the process.”

“The Klein-Thompson view is that Democrats clogged the building channel with unnecessary or just burdensome rules. My view is that powerful forces profit off choke points and want them to remain.”

“If we want to build to productive ends, building power to take down finance and monopoly is the best way to make that happen.”

4/3/25 - [A False Choice for Progressives](#), Hannah Garden-Monheit, *Politico*

“[T]here is growing evidence (and bipartisan concern) that ‘mega’ corporate investors—institutional investors that own over 1,000 single-family homes—are becoming major players in local housing markets, and that this emerging consolidation problem has increased home prices and rents.”

- “Such institutional investors first emerged on the scene following the 2008 financial crisis, when the federal government encouraged the formation of investment vehicles to acquire distressed single-family properties. We should learn from that mistake. An abundance policy that turns a blind eye to the market structure of who owns the supply of housing in our country may produce a housing market dominated by distant and greedy corporate Wall Street landlords—an outcome unlikely to yield more affordable housing for the rest of us.”

“Klein dismisses private investors as currently a mere drop in the bucket, but **housing markets are local, not national, and it is in these local markets where we are starting to see price effects from corporate ownership.”**

- “More importantly, we need to address problems *before* they become full-blown crises. A desire to get ahead of this corporate consolidation problem doesn’t mean we can’t do zoning and permitting reform, too.”

“[T]here is an even larger body of evidence that many landlords are turning to algorithmic price-fixing software to drive up rents... **If a pro-abundance policy succeeds in building millions of new housing units but landlords use common software to ensure those new units aren’t in price competition, working Americans will see no benefit.”**

“[A] strategy for building more [clean energy] supply will not succeed—or at least it will cost significantly more and produce fewer benefits for ordinary people—unless it also accounts for anticompetitive market dynamics.”

- “For example, in 11 states, incumbent utilities have ‘rights of first refusal’ to build and connect new energy transmission lines. This allows incumbents to block new entrants like clean power innovators. It also incentivizes the incumbents to inflate, rather than reduce, their construction costs—costs that they can then turn around and charge to their captive ratepayer customers, generally with little meaningful oversight. One study found that using competitive bidding could lower energy construction costs by 20 to 30 percent, saving ratepayers billions.”

“[W]hile Klein and Thompson seem to assume that deregulation is the way to clear the path for abundance, in this instance a regulation could readily solve the problem: The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has authority to issue rules preempting (i.e., eliminating) incumbent rights of first refusal. **Thinking of policymaking in purely binary fashion as either pro-regulatory or deregulatory is overly simplistic and outdated.”**

4/4/25 - [“Abundance” Is How Dems Lose to Trump](#), David Sirota and Aaron Regunberg, *The Lever*

“The Kafkaesque nature of Biden’s broadband application process was not, in fact, the result of ‘everything bagel liberalism,’ pressure from doctrinaire leftists, or Democratic politicians’ penchant for governing through checklists, which Klein and his co-author, Derek Thompson, frame in *Abundance* as the key obstacles to housing security, decarbonization, and other critical 21st century needs.”

- “Rather, this burdensome procedure was created at the insistence of vote-withholding Republican senators and their cable industry donors—companies seeking to block funding to upstarts that might challenge their regional telecom monopolies or force them to provide affordable prices for broadband.”
- “After they loaded up the funding legislation with a Byzantine process, telecom giants and GOP-led states — not protocol-obsessed lefties or overly rigid bureaucrats — then manufactured a monthslong fight over what constitutes ‘affordable’ rates, delaying quick funding for the build-out.”

“[T]he takeaway from the broadband tale is that the biggest obstacles to efficiency and abundance are often corporate power and its corrupting influence on our politics—factors typically downplayed or unmentioned in the *Abundance* Discourse.”

“We could pass all the federal permitting reforms Klein and Thompson could dream of, but if powerful fossil fuel interests continue to call the political shots, we’ll never achieve the clean energy build-out we desperately need.”

“[U]nlike progressives, *Abundance* Liberals obsessively focus on zoning to the exclusion of most other factors—a sleight of hand that characteristically distracts from systemic corporate-linked drivers of affordable housing scarcity.”

- “[T]he housing crisis reflects a more mundane problem that the *Abundance* Discourse avoids: economic inequality fueled by corporations keeping working-class wages below what’s needed to afford a home in locales full of rich people.”
- “[T]here’s also the recurring problem of monopoly. A 2022 Johns Hopkins study spotlighted how more and more local markets are dominated by fewer and fewer housing construction giants. These home-building behemoths are making higher profits while choosing to build fewer homes than they once did, knowing that there aren’t as many competitors to fill the gap.”
- “At the same time, housing affordability is exacerbated by Wall Street investors buying up existing housing stock, as well as by financial firms algorithmically jacking up rents, allegedly through illegal price fixing.”

“This trend of corporate monopolies—not construction-hating progressives, anti-growth zealots, or imperious bureaucrats—creating scarcity and blocking pro-abundance government policies is pervasive.”

- “Shortages of affordable baby formula, eggs, prescription medicine, ammunition, airline tickets, hamburgers, medical supplies, and hospital services are all connected to oligarchs and corporate donors using campaign cash to make sure that for decades there was a lack of consistent and robust enforcement of antitrust laws.”
- “Those same donors also used their political influence to create a zealous regime of restrictive patents to enforce profit-maximizing scarcity in technology and pharmaceuticals.”

“[T]here was Democrats’ decision to brush off the idea of a single-payer health care system and instead champion the Affordable Care Act—a move that Klein defended and that strengthened the power of health insurers, whose entire business model is rationing health care into a scarcity product, rather than an abundantly available service.”

“Klein and Thompson’s framing provides ammunition to the actual villains blocking abundance.”

“[M]isidentifying the villains is one of the primary political objectives of the Abundance project.”

- “After all, if there’s one thing Trump has proven, it’s that villain stories matter in electoral politics. Oligarchs do not want to be the villains in any kind of story told by Democrats heading into the next set of elections, and they’re concerned about a growing Democratic consensus that the party needs an economic populist rebrand—one that opposes the billionaires and rapacious corporations making the lives of working people harder.”
- “This growing populist coalition understands that in a world where \$79 trillion was taken from the bottom 90 percent of households over the last few decades, the central problem isn’t a lack of ‘abundance.’ The problem is that abundance is being hoarded by the rich.”

“In 2024, Kamala Harris rejected a populist message and was lauded by Washington media for specifically running on an Abundance Agenda.”

- “Voters who’ve seen this kind of Democratic bait and switch before ended up trusting Trump more on economic issues — and handed him the presidency. Only months later, Abundance now aims to suppress Democrats’ renewed populist zeitgeist, despite how necessary it is for the fight against Trump and Musk.”

5/7/25 - [An Abundance of Concrete](#), Ben Goldfarb, *The Defector*

“This is a vision of America’s future that has hardly a word to say about forests, oceans, fresh water, ecosystems, or wild animals—about anything that isn’t made by and for humans.”

“A liberalism that builds sounds dandy in Seattle, but here in the rural West, I still want a liberalism that protects, sues, and zones.”

“[T]he Abundists and their allies only seem to think about land as a place to stick more humans. [...] Another term for ‘surplus of open land’ is ‘where the animals still live.’”

“[B]y bemoaning America’s cumbersome regulatory apparatus, the Abundists play into the hands of people who want to unleash hell.”

- **“The Trump administration has, to name just a few of its horrific ideas, announced its intent to sell public lands to developers, ginned up a farcical energy emergency to justify more drilling, and proposed to reinterpret the Endangered Species Act so that it doesn’t actually protect habitat.”**
- **“These are all transparent favors to corporate cronies, of course, but the administration has framed these measures as necessary for housing supply and energy security, Klein’s and Thompson’s favorite priorities.”**

“Depending on who’s deploying it, the word ‘abundance’ can mean more solar panels and high-speed rail—or more offshore oil rigs and mega-highways.”

5/9/25 - [Why the “Abundance Agenda” Could Sink the Democratic Party](#), Aaron Regunberg, *The Nation*

“[C]orporate-aligned interests are using abundance to head off the Democratic Party’s long-delayed and desperately needed return to economic populism.”

“[O]ne of the leading advocates of abundance say[s] in plain English that he (1) self-consciously sees their project as battling with the left for the future of the Democratic Party, (2) understands that we’re in a moment of intense anger at the establishment status quo, and (3) believes that the abundance agenda can ‘channel the anger that people have at the establishment, but toward our own ends,’ i.e., redirect the public’s rage away from the parasitism of economic elites and toward the regulatory regimes of state and local Democrats.”

“Our fear is that this billionaire-backed project is being explicitly used to undermine the kind of populist rebrand necessary to shed Democrats’ reputation as feckless cowards who can’t be trusted to fight for working people—to swap out a villainization of corporate elites that evokes FDR with a demonization of bureaucracy, regulation, and red tape that lends credibility to Elon Musk.”

“Abundance, and the permission structure it offers Democrats who’d rather not alienate their BigTech/Big Oil/Big Money donors, could be the margin that pushes a populist renaissance for our party out of reach.”

5/9/25 - [What Abundance Lacks](#), Isabella Weber, *Foreign Policy*

“[W]hat is the relationship between this vision and democracy? Imagine you are a member of the two-thirds of U.S. workers who work in the local service economy [...] You are constantly confronted with people who are living in abundance, who have fridges stacked with fresh produce, who drive silent e-vehicles, who overlook green lawns. From where you sit, **the problem is not that there is not enough material wealth around but that you are shut out;** that after working long hours, juggling care work and several jobs, you are still living in scarcity while others are dwelling in abundance.”

“To build a new political order, Democrats must win back the large numbers of working people who stayed home in the last election and win over the losers of Trump’s shock therapy. Will they be mobilized around a happy go lucky vision of green abundance where all distributional and power conflicts have disappeared? I doubt it.”

“Kamala Harris tried to run on an ‘opportunity economy’—a similarly vague and harmonious concept that brushes over the absurd levels of inequality that shape the present-day United States. It did not go well.”

“People are angry after having faced scarcity amid plenty for too long. Rebuilding democratic power requires addressing the enormous economic power imbalances that have accumulated over decades. But the vision outlined in *Abundance* mostly neglects questions of power and redistribution.”

“If... all regulations are seen as blockage or anti-abundance, that risks playing into the hands of DOGE-style deregulation.”

“Klein and Thompson seem to be envisioning a surgical kind of deregulation. Yet there is a question of **how much regulation, let alone state capacity to enforce it, will be left after Musk and his successors under Trump will have swung their chainsaws around for four years.”**

“If one tried to translate the Chinese experience into the American institutional context, one arrives at something closer to the ‘multi-solving, whole of government approach to planning and coordination’ recommended for solar development in a recent study from the Roosevelt Institute and the Climate and Community Institute.”

- **“It argues that what is needed is ‘multi-scalar land-use and site planning’; ‘coordinating between federal, state, Tribal, and local governments’; and the creation of ‘public and nonprofit solar deployment companies.’”**

“Rather than trying to overrule vested interests through deregulation and enable implementation through top-down government action or uncoordinated private companies, the authors of the study insist that ‘embedding community, worker, and environmental benefits’ can help to build trust and advance building projects.”

- “Whatever the precise merits of this embedding approach may be for the pace of build-out, it is better suited to win back support for a green agenda after years of climate change denial spearheaded by the White House compared to an Abundance agenda, which the authors themselves describe as being ‘painful.’”

“[T]heir utopia remains too far removed from the real struggles of ordinary people and their policy prescriptions too limited to live up to the challenges we currently face.”

5/22/25 - [The Real Path to Abundance](#), Sandeep Vaheesan, *Boston Review*

“Much of the writing throughout the book... constantly verges on platitude or tautology, concealing consequential political, economic, and moral judgments behind a veneer of common sense.”

- “And it does so in language that repeatedly echoes the entrepreneurial mantras of the world’s most powerful corporations. We have to move faster, Klein and Thompson say. Stop worrying so much about breaking things, they imply.”

“Klein and Thompson entirely ignore the intellectual property regime that protects pharmaceutical companies’ extraordinary wealth and power at the expense of citizens’ health by granting decades of patent monopoly frequently in exchange for nominal benefits to patients. Is a nation that leaves all this intact with the hope of plentiful daily medication really ‘the future we want’?”

- “Klein and Thompson might support patent reform too, but they never train their attention on *that* problem. Instead, with laser-like focus, *Abundance* again and again blames a real and urgent issue—poverty, homelessness, dirty energy, disease—on a simple and familiar villain: well-meaning but short-sighted liberals who are more concerned with tying things up than getting things done.”

“The authors’ concrete agenda, so far as it is discernible in this mostly rhetorical book, is much more likely to perpetuate the ugliest aspects of the United States today than to deliver utopia for everyone.”

“A much more promising path to abundance than the one this book offers is to embrace a twenty-first-century New Deal. That is the tried-and-true model for a ‘liberalism that builds’ in the United States, and *Abundance* rightly invokes it as a foil to the present.”

- “Yet Klein and Thompson strangely shy away from calling for a new (or Green) New Deal. And they display little understanding of how the old one actually worked, both in terms of politics and in terms of policy.”

“[Klein and Thompson] clearly think government has a central role to play in delivering abundance. Still, the role they see for it is mostly limited to fiscal support for the private sector, and their main target is what they consider excessive government bureaucracy.”

- “Throughout the book, the authors direct their ire at local zoning rules that bar the construction of multifamily housing, condition development on minimum parking requirements, or otherwise outlaw dense residential construction. And they repeatedly criticize environmental review processes that they claim delay, inhibit, or render construction of clean energy and transmission infrastructure prohibitively expensive. Remove these hurdles, *Abundance* contends, and private actors will deliver abundance—at least when goaded by sufficiently high levels of public subsidy.”

“Where this [book] doesn’t give a mistaken impression through sins of omission, it simply gets things wrong. It often blames government for bad outcomes where it should be blaming the whole structure of the market—including other government policies (among them *too little* regulation of the private sector) and, especially, the nature of private investment (even when spurred by government subsidy).”

“Klein and Thompson note that states like Texas today are building more housing than liberal strongholds like California, which they view as the epitome of blue state misgovernance. But the Golden State built plenty of housing in the mid-aughts. In fact, **at times in 2004 and 2005, California even permitted more new housing units than Texas did. Since zoning restrictions didn’t suddenly get tighter in the second half of the 2000s, this building boom scrambles the thesis that public land-use controls are the root cause of today’s housing crisis.**”

- “The authors fail to note the many determinants of housing starts, ignoring recent national dampers on homebuilding (including high interest rates and shortages of building materials and construction workers) as well as local factors such as much higher land prices and wages and the relative scarcity of undeveloped land in blue center cities in blue states.”

“But even if zoning and other onerous regulations aren’t the primary reason for stagnant homebuilding, couldn’t upzoning help? However intuitive the idea may seem, the evidence is mixed—nowhere near as strong as Klein and Thompson insinuate.”

- “Such reforms have already been pursued in many localities. A leading meta-study published in 2023 found, on average, a 0.8 percent expansion of the local housing stock three to nine years after such changes, with significant variation. **Zoning reforms produced a modest increase in housing stock in some places but not much elsewhere.**”

“Zoning is certainly too restrictive in many low-density suburbs throughout the country, but it is hardly the principal reason that housing is very expensive in high-density San Francisco and comparatively cheap in less dense Houston.”

- “The findings of Louie, Mondragon, and Wieland present another reason: San Francisco is simply a ‘superstar city’ (in Klein and Thompson’s own words), while Houston is not.

The simple story of California bad, Texas good does not stand up to scrutiny, at least on housing. Once a broader lens is brought to bear and rent is measured in relation to income, Texas looks much less like a success story.”

“As for energy, *Abundance* rightly stresses the need for more investment in zero-carbon power generation and transmission lines. But here the story of public barriers to abundance is even weaker. [...] **The real problems have to do with the authority to site transmission lines (which mostly remains at the state and local level, rather than with the federal government) and the bad incentives that shape the behavior of private transmission owners.”**

- **“Private management of the grid thwarts construction of lines that threaten the profits of investor-owned utilities and prevents timely connection of new generation facilities.”**

“This is the blind spot running through all of *Abundance*’s anecdotes: the limits of the private sector. The primary conceit is that in many areas, the private sector is ready to invest—and to invest big—if politicians would only lift public barriers standing in their way. There is little evidence that is true.”

- **“In reality, corporate executives and managers make investment decisions based on expected profits. Even when zoning restrictions are favorable, developers evaluate a range of investment options before committing to construction. They are looking not only for positive returns but for *higher* returns than alternative options.** Homebuilders, in particular, will not build unless they have reason to think they can achieve sufficiently high profits—those that outperform land banking, speculation, or other forms of investment. **The much-touted housing boom in Austin is a case in point: after a few years of above-average building activity led to modest rent reductions, residential developers reduced construction substantially.** The burst of construction made only a small dent in the dramatic increase in rents since 2010.”

“The same is true when it comes to renewable energy. In his recent book *The Price Is Wrong*, Brett Christophers shows that **insufficient expected profits are a principal barrier to investment in solar and wind projects.** Developers and lenders alike are reluctant to pursue and finance such projects unless they will deliver substantial and stable profits and are more attractive than other investment choices.”

“In addition to neglecting the central role of profit expectations in investment decisions, Klein and Thompson have nothing to say about the short-term orientation of today’s large shareholder-dominated corporations.”

- **“In general, shareholders withdraw far more capital from businesses than they invest, and they often demand massive dividends and stock buybacks and acquisitions in lieu of capital expenditures, let alone higher wages for workers.** Given that CEO compensation is often tied to their company’s stock price, top executives have little incentive to defy shareholder demands for cash.”

“The government could do a lot to change corporate behavior—by banning stock buybacks, for example, or requiring firms to give workers and consumers board representation. Yet except for a passing mention of stronger labor laws in the book’s introduction, Klein and Thompson say nothing about the public regulation of corporations.”

“Abundance thus makes a very weak case for the supposed benefits of relaxing public governance. But it also misrepresents deregulation’s obvious costs and regulation’s clear benefits.”

- **“Klein and Thompson acknowledge that federal environmental laws have been enormously successful in cleaning up the air, water, and land of the United States. (An EPA study found that the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 produced public health and welfare benefits, including preventing hundreds of thousands deaths annually, that exceeded the costs of compliance by a factor of 30 to 1.) But they suggest zoning and environmental review have outlived their justification.”**

“The authors compare court-centric governance in the United States unfavorably with administrative governance in other nations. [...] They are correct that administrative decision-making is generally superior to judicial supremacy, both on public accountability and expertise grounds. But the practical effect of abandoning administrative zoning and environmental review in the United States would be to cede even greater power to judges.”

“While zoning rules are unduly restrictive in many affluent suburbs, they are often far too weak elsewhere. Many poor people, especially poor people of color, live in proximity to polluting facilities like oil refineries and power plants and bear disproportionate harms of polluted air and water, including higher incidences of asthma, cancer, and premature death.”

- **“The Mississippi River corridor in Louisiana illustrates this problem: lined with oil refineries and petrochemical plants, it is dubbed Cancer Alley for the facilities’ adverse effects on residents’ health. Stronger zoning rules that separated such activities from residential areas would yield significant public health benefits.”**
- **“Klein and Thompson say nothing at all about such issues—they simply write these impacts out of the story. In a notable passage, they credit Congress for exempting some new chip fabrication plants from NEPA review. What they don’t say is that these facilities are highly polluting, contaminating air and groundwater. They were once concentrated in Santa Clara County, helping to make it the county with the most Superfund sites in the nation. There are obvious benefits to studying social and environmental impacts in advance and designing and siting industrial facilities with an eye toward minimizing them. Any serious public policy discussion must contend with tradeoffs—but Klein and Thompson see nothing but costs.”**

“[Abundance] also misrepresents the political obstacles to abundant housing and abundant clean energy. For the most part, that is because the book has little concrete political

vision at all. Klein and Thompson repeatedly say that ‘we’ are all in this together, depicting Americans as a monolith. It’s clear enough why they write this way: they hope to recruit people to the cause. But good missionary rhetoric makes for bad analysis.”

“It’s not insignificant that Klein and Thompson’s attacks echo the Trumpist agenda they disclaim.”

- “The affluent undoubtedly have more time and resources to spend advocating for their interests than the poor. **But instead of calling for steeper progressive taxation and anti-monopoly policies that would rein in the power of the affluent, Klein and Thompson focus single-mindedly on red tape.**”
- **“Instead of calling for expanded state capacity to expedite environmental reviews** (as they do for some government projects, like California’s High-Speed Rail Authority), **they suggest we should ditch environmental review entirely.**”
- **“And instead of making the case for strengthening and broadening democratic participation in land use policy, they imply we should simply jettison it altogether.”**

“This vision is undemocratic in both form and function. Diminishing public power over land use decisions means greater private control, which in turn means more deference to the whims of the market and more discretion for corporate executives and financiers—in short, more oligarchy.”

- “That is exactly what Trump and Elon Musk are hoping to achieve by taking the chainsaw to federal agencies, and that is why, as Republican pollster Patrick Ruffini puts it, they are ‘hitting the professional-managerial class—and hitting them hard.’”
- “These points of overlap with Trump’s agenda also matter politically. Whatever one thinks of the merits of their policy proposals, **Klein and Thompson present no evidence that Democrats—including the liberal professionals they condemn—will be energized by their anti-bureaucracy platform in the face of Trump’s destructive attacks on government.** Perhaps the authors believe that steep partisan polarization, along with growing disgust at Trump, give Democrats a rare agenda-setting opportunity to declare war on the liberal PMC—an integral part of its base—without suffering at the ballot box. But if so, they do not argue the point.”

“The book echoes today’s oligarchy in another way, too: its embrace of Silicon Valley’s vision for America.”

- **“Klein and Thompson gush about AI’s potential and want the United States to play a leading role in directing its development.** Similarly, their transportation future says more about self-driving electric vehicles than about mass public transit. **This is not the utopianism of Edward Bellamy or the Knights of Labor, but the familiar futurism of tech oligarchs.**”

“... Klein and Thompson cast doubt on a broad range of public demands, from prevailing wage laws to green design standards, child care requirements for chips factories, and mandates for special air filtration systems for apartments located near highways. The authors do not go so far as to insist that any one of these conditions should generally be given

up. But because the book fails to give reasons for ever attaching any of these conditions to an actual project, readers are left with the impression that we might as well dispense with all of them.”

- “Never mind that prevailing wage requirements have been a foundation of federal contracting policy for nearly a century and worked harmoniously with the developmentalism of the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s. Or that building energy-inefficient structures in an age of accelerating climate change is penny wise and pound foolish for society. Or that clean indoor air should not be a luxury in a society as wealthy as the United States in 2025. The final example is revealing: the paeans to a bountiful future in Abundance conceal an unacknowledged validation of scarcity.”

“... Klein and Thompson fail to convey the risks of overcorrecting in the opposite direction: a plain-bagel liberalism that simply hands money over with very few or even no conditions at all. We don’t have to look very far to get a sense of how such an agenda would play out.”

- **“Since the early 2010s, Musk’s various ventures have been lavished with federal and state support, including low-cost credit, loan guarantees, and a variety of government contracts. Tesla and SpaceX would hardly exist if the government had not opened its coffers to them, with few if any conditions. These handouts have made Musk the wealthiest man on the planet, deepening oligarchy while providing only modest public benefits.”**

“While widely shared abundance is a worthy aim, it will require a radically different program than further delegating public decision-making to private hands. But Americans do not have to build a program from scratch. They have a useful historical precedent: the New Deal.”

“[R]emarkably, apart from citing fewer public controls on land use at the time, the book says nothing about why the New Deal was so successful, nor about the populist politics—including Franklin Roosevelt’s contempt for ‘economic royalists’—that undergirded it.”

“*Abundance*’s poverty of vision does not counsel hopelessness. We have a proven model for achieving broadly shared abundance. The New Deal delivered it through a combination of public investment and stronger public control of private corporations. The state spurred the private sector to adopt a longer-term social orientation in lieu of the extractive governance that had prevailed before the Depression.”

“[The U.S. needs] a serious revival of New Deal politics, not a doubling down on the ethos of neoliberalism—however appealingly rebranded.”