

The Toxic Soil of America

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Abstract

America was created on the principles of democracy, an idea established in ancient Greece and then changed to fit the purposes of America's foundation; however, throughout the years the principles of democracy have changed and reformed with the American government system. Now, a question faces the masses about the reform: Has America's democracy changed enough to alter the whole state of democracy and America itself? Or has the democracy of American been doomed from the state with the collapse of the Greek city-states foreshadowing their demise? To fully answer and grasp this question one must examine the basic principles that currently held or hold up America's democracy. These fundamental principles are active citizen participation, a thriving and large middle class, and a widespread education system. Those three pillars hold up America's democracy and without them the whole system of government comes crumbling down.

The Toxic Soil of America

Ever since the dawn of time, people have been learning from and improving off each other; whether it be back in the caveman era where someone found a better way to hunt and everyone copied them, or now in somewhat recent times, if someone found a good crop to grow, everyone would grow it. Humans have the nature to mimic behaviors and actions that have been proven to come out with good results. However, humans can be extremely rash creatures and fall into habits quite quickly that will end up having detrimental results. Going back to the caveman analogy, let's assume the better way of hunting was to surround all of the animals and have them fall off a cliff. Though this way may seem faster and easier than other hunting techniques before, the result has dire consequences: a huge loss in food supply for weeks because a whole pack of animals is gone. Or even looking at the techniques of farmers, if they grew a crop in one place for too long, the soil would turn infertile and the farmers would be unable to cultivate any more of that crop. If humans just looked back at the events foreshadowing their demise, many of the problems could have been avoided; however, as stated before, humans make rash decisions that do not last in the long run. Humans also assume they are smarter and more fit to improve the systems that did not work before with the mindset of 'if they could not do it, I can still make it work'; however, history happened for a reason. To deny the results that history foreshadows is setting oneself up for failure. If one knows something will not work and it has been proven to not work, why must one try to put together the pieces of something already broken? Why did the United States of America choose a democracy as their system of government, when the Greeks' system of democracy failed over two thousand years ago? A simple look back in history could have shown any human those results: failure.

The roots of the current system of democracy in the United States came from the ancient Greeks. During the time of the ancient Greeks, democracies were formed in areas called City-States. These City-States had small populations that were all based around trade. These conditions of small-scale communities and a booming trade system helped the Greeks flourish, as it did for the colonies in America (Khan Academy, 2019). From these conditions arose a class never seen in society before: the middle class. They were rich enough to not depend on their money source and poor enough where they were not filled with greed. They were the first middle class. These middle class citizens created a direct democracy where everyone who had citizenship could make changes and impact their government system; however, only free educated males with land could obtain citizenship in Greek City-States. The Greek City-States' democracies established three crucial parts of democracy: an active citizen turn out, a strong middle class economy, and a widespread education (to those who were offered and could obtain it). Their democracy thrived for hundreds of years; however, as time went on, the properties that made the democracy strong waned (Heineman, 1995). The population grew making the problems larger and more complex to be solved by more people with differing cultures. The Greeks struggled with integrating new citizens into their society. Their economy, which was based on trade, started to degrade. The Greeks put themselves in unpopular wars, supported old enemies, and abandoned their core values (Scott, 2009). At the end of their democracy, they had a leader who they worshipped like a God. The Greeks destroyed themselves with their system of democracy; thus, foreshadowing America's own demise.

Now, America has the same problems as the Greek City-States did and the key factors that aid democracies are crumbling. The citizens are becoming less politically involved in their

government, the middle class citizens are being pushed more and more into poverty, and the education systems are varying throughout the country. America's core of democracy is falling apart, just as the Greek city-states were thousands of years ago.

The Couch Potato Citizens of America

The ideal standard of an American citizen has shifted over the course of the centuries. To look back a hundred years ago to other countries, Americans were seen as hard-working citizens of their government. Everyone wanted to come to America to achieve the "American Dream" of working their way up the job ladder and obtaining a stable environment for their family and economic prosperity. Americans were given free speech and loads of job opportunities with normal hours and average wages, so they would not need to work multiple jobs. With this extra time, they were able to create clubs and participate in their government. Even though this idea of the "American Dream" may appear perfect to some, there were still times the people needed to protest. Whenever people disagreed with the government's policies or felt the government was fundamentally wrong about an issue, they took to the streets and voiced their concern. These citizens used every ounce of their citizenship to demand changes in the government. Citizens organized clubs like student and labor unions, women and immigrant rights clubs and more, to take a more active part in their government.

Americans got many of these standard ideals of a perfect citizen from the Greeks, where every citizen in each City-State would assist the community by creating solutions for the problems of the society. By citizens participating in creating the laws and the standards of their society, they help to structure and support their democracy. Citizens express to the government the problems that need to be fixed and what they want their ideal society to look like. Without active citizen participation, the government cannot base their decisions off of the community,

but instead, what is best for themselves and the multi-millionaires and billionaires of society, the top one percent. When societies start to turn to catering to the elites, they turn into monarchies or authoritarian systems. When the Greeks let their citizen involvement decrease, they lost their entire democracy in the end to one leader who they worshiped like a god (Cambridge, 2009). The American citizen engagement is decreasing at a detrimental rate, with a lack of clubs or unions and community turning instead to solidarity. From the year 1960 to 1988, there was an 11 percent decrease in voting stemming from a 35 percent decrease in social involvement and a 54 percent decrease in mobilization. The Americans' contribution to their own government and society is lacking, and without the fundamental pillar of citizen engagement, the entire government's system of democracy, as people know it today, could collapse (Valelly, 2001).

American society has been changing rapidly throughout the past century. The citizens' lifestyles, routines, and overall quality of life is vastly different from the start of the century. A multitude of factors are now decreasing citizen turnout and engagement in the American democracy today; thus, making an unstable environment for the American government. One of these problems is the idea of individualism, the idea of only focusing on private concerns while subsequently degrading public life. Many citizens now live extremely cushioned lifestyles only thinking about personal problems and not problems that affect the whole community. People are abandoning communities, clubs, and the overall idea of a family or a group for solidarity. For example, Valelly declares that since the year 1954, there has been a 65 percent decrease in unionization. Unionization is the organization of workers of an employer which will help act as a bridge between workers and employers for better rights and deals (Business Dictionary, 2019). Since 1954, Valelly affirms, unfair labor practices and limitations have increased, with

no one to defend them. Companies have slowly started taking over and gaining back rights with no one to stop them in their tracks. The American society is slowly turning to favor the top one percent more and more every day. Since citizens are not participating and using their unalienable rights, huge companies, corporations, and their very own American government is starting to take advantage of the people, as the monarchs did back in the day. Since citizens are distracted, they are not noticing the small parts of power being stripped from them and the core values of democracy being demolished (Valelly, 2001). Additionally, the American public is now engulfed in social media which distracts them from pushing community issues to irrelevant and personal crises. Another author concludes that, “The mass media, including interactive social-networking tools, makes you passive, can sap your initiative, leave you content to watch the spectacle of life from your couch or smartphone” (Cohen, 2011). Social media can be utilized as a source of community and coming together to fix problems and educate others; however, this point gets lost across the internet to insufficient problems and personal preferences. The American society is getting distracted by frivolous items like tweets and are missing the bigger picture of nation-wide problems (Sturgeon, 2018). The Americans’ brains are being distracted from the problems of the real world, with personal and made-up problems. Society is masking itself from the reality of the government and mankind and because of this, finding politics annoying or irrelevant to their daily life. Americans start to see both political parties as the same and citizens also find slogans bland and tasteless (Street, 2002). Since most Americans are masked to the problems, they do not find a need or know that they should participate in their government; thus, Americans are decreasing their active citizenship.

Another prominent reason for the lack of active citizenship displayed in the American people is because of distrust in the government. The American government has become less and less personal over the course of time. Leaders who used to visit towns and meet the people to spread their message, now only go to speeches for the press and personally meet very few amounts of supporters (Valelly, 2001). With this absence of face-to-face or personal contact with the people in power, citizens are lacking trust in their government. How can citizens trust and want to participate in their government if they do not feel a certain connection to it? In the year 1992, 43 percent of American citizens distrusted their government versus in 1994 where 70 percent of all American citizens distrusted their government (Felty, King, Susel, 1998). Where is all this distrust stemming from? Well, in modern day politics, numerous wealthy elites use their money to influence political leaders into making decisions for them and not for the people. Only one percent of America's population holds 40 percent of the wealth, with this unequal cash flow, billionaires hold 80 percent of the finances needed for election funds. In fact, how can the citizens of America trust democratic leaders in a capitalist society, when the society itself is based on the earnings of money? Indeed, the candidate who wins is called the 'wealthy primary' also known as the candidate who has raised the most money. Even spokespeople on news channels get paid by these campaigns and supply and withhold certain information from the viewers. For example, Dan Rather, a spokesperson, when asked about the issue of declining citizen participation, asserted he did not know why it was declining, but the problem needs to be fixed (Street, 2002). With these vague replies, the citizens withhold their trust for the government. If so-called professionals in the craft cannot answer the question, how can average people who do not know much on the topic trust a non-qualified expert? They cannot.

Now why is the prospect of decreasing active citizen involvement, so detrimental in the United States? Well, as two recent researchers acknowledge:

Active citizenship is a combination of knowledge, attitude, skills and actions that aim to contribute to building and maintaining a democratic society.

Active Citizenship supports democratic cooperation that is based on the acceptance of universal human rights and the rule of law, values diversity and includes the whole community (Nosko and Szeger, 2013).

With citizens involving themselves in their community and country, people can bridge that gap between the government and the citizens (Irvin, Stansbury, 2004). Ideas can be shared, cultures can be mixed, and goals can be accomplished if all of society works together and participates in the government. The ideas of the majority or community can be reflected in the policies of the government (Felty, King, Susel, 1998). People can help to reshape theories and ideals of society (Mueller, 2003). People can change the pathway of their government, impact how their world continues, or be submissive and watch it abruptly fail. The people, by engaging in politics, take the power away from the wealthy and put the strength into the common man. These people are what matter most in the government and they should have control of what goes on in their daily lives. No matter how big or small the pressing issue is, the people should always have a say in the impacts on their community. Active citizenship participation brings people together, encourages communication, cooperation, and tolerance; therefore, it is a fundamental pillar in the democracy of the United States, after all it is “We the People” (Nosko and Szeger, 2013).

With waning numbers, like how less than 50 percent of Americans are voting in quadrennial presidential elections, the American society has lost its fundamental pillar for

democracy: active citizen participation, just as the ancient Greeks once did thousands of years ago (Nosko and Szeger, 2013). Active citizenship is declining from factors like individualism, distrust, and numerous others. Society may start out strong, as it did for the colonists and the ancient Greeks with active citizens; however, when it grows and changes, its fundamental values change as well. The structure of the government reshapes itself over time, weakening and corrupting itself from the inside. Without the fundamental pillar of active citizenship, democracy in America is failing, thus making the soil once given to build a stable structure of democracy on, infertile.

The Mass Extinction of the American Middle Class

The concept of a stable and larger middle class in democracy is a crucial part of what makes the system of democracy itself tick. If one looks back to the roots of democracy in ancient Greece, they will observe the reason their democracy thrived was because of their middle class. This middle class consisted of male citizens who were artisans and traders. These citizens had enough time to work their jobs and also work on their society (Cartwright, 2018). They became what the democracy relied on for fairness and stability of the government. Aristotle, a supporter of a large and thriving middle class for democracy, thought the middle class was the perfect pillar to raise up the government. They were not as greedy and lustful as the wealthy and not full of hatred and resentment like the poor. Their morals were pure and they only wanted what was best for their society and not themselves. These citizens could bring about trust in each other and in the government (Andre, 2017). Aristotle also expressed the middle class also had the fundamental object of time. The middle class citizens were able to have more time to spend with their families, enjoy owning private property, and help limit their government's power, keeping everything in check. Additionally, this class could contribute to

the education and upbringing of their children's moral development, crucial for the success of future generations. The middle class plays a key role in cultivating all aspects of society from education, moral development, and government. Without a majority middle class there is no mind of reason or fairness to lead or center the other distraught classes. Middle class citizens are the role models of society (Haberman, Stevenson, Wright, 2013). Without these role models comes classism, as ancient Greek philosopher Plato calls it, or divides in society which can bring about distrust and corruption, breaking democracy itself (Andre, 2017). With a waning middle class, the ancient Greeks' democracy was in shambles and eventually turned itself into an authoritarian society with the power of the elites. Today, in the modern day democracy in America, the middle class is either falling into poverty or joining the lustful rich. This mass extinction of such a fundamental class in society is detrimental to all aspects of modern day American democracy. The United States of America is lacking a strong and stable middle class which will have deadly results on how it impacts the system of democracy.

The American middle class has not always been weak and stagnant; for about two centuries, the American middle class was vibrant and booming, just what the democracy needed. In the late 1800s and early 1900s the middle class was able to accumulate wealth and rise into higher classes. For example, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, and the Vanderbilts were able to take themselves from middle class to a fortune because of the distributed wealth in America. That is how the middle class survived as strong and vibrant.

[Now] we often hear that ordinary Americans aren't keeping up, that success isn't as easy, or at least not as democratic, as it once was. At the close of the twentieth century, one disturbing vision portrays the United States as a society pulling apart at the seams, divided into separate and unequal camps, an enclave of fat cats gorging themselves on

the fruits of others' labor surrounded by a working class left with ever more meager opportunities(Cox and Alm, 2003).

As Cox explains, “The most-cited evidence of ebbing opportunity is the distribution of income—the slicing up of the American pie”. The American pie that was once full with equal opportunity is now cut in unequal slices that eliminate distribution thus, decreasing the middle class (Cox & Alm, 2003). However, recently since the 1970s, the middle class has been declining. More and more people these days are being pushed into poverty or extreme amounts of wealth; thus, resulting in stagnant amounts of income. The Pew study of the American middle class compared average incomes from 1971 to present day. If one examines the year 1971 they will see the average income was between 20,000-75,000 dollars per year. The middle class zone was between 30,000-90,000, putting the majority of Americans in the position of middle class. Now, examining the 2015 data, it displays how the highest income is at an unbelievable value of 200,000 dollars per year, while the middle class income gap is between 40,000-120,000 dollars per year. In this gap the incomes are not centered to the middle but more leaning towards the ends of the gap. More people are falling towards the lower beginning of 40,000 and the higher end of 120,000 than towards the middle, meaning more and more income will either pull people towards poverty or towards wealth, calibrating the middle class itself, and leaving it basically extinct. The American middle class has shrunk to half its old population size in the past forty years, making it a minority instead of a majority, in the American class system. Now, problems like globalization (competition), inequality of incomes (rise of millionaires), and a multitude of other factors, has caused a decrease in the American middle class (Smith, 2015).

Globalization was created to help the economy and the middle class thrive and expand; now globalization will demolish the very system it was created for. Globalization was made for the very purpose of businesses and organizations being able to extend their influence and market overseas or to start operating overseas because of economic advantages one might gain (Dorfman, 2017). This concept was not heavily picked up until the 1970s when the United States had an economic downturn and it became more profitable to look overseas for money. This accelerated when the government made the costs of internal national communication and transportation rates plummet (Cypher, 2007). This new act of globalization would give American citizens a bigger variety of goods for cheaper prices and the ability to sell their goods to bigger markets; thus, producing higher rates of revenue and income. Looking at this from the outside, it seems extremely beneficial to the American middle class with no disadvantages for them; however, if one truly examines this act it seems more hurtful to the American middle class and a reason it is weak and now declining (Dorfman, 2017).

Before globalization was profitable, American workers (the middle class) had the upper hand. During the 1940s-1970s, workers were able to control companies and their wages, since going overseas was not profitable. Companies could not go overseas to make the product and sell it back because the tariffs would be too high and the products would be too expensive for the consumer base (Cypher, 2007). Also, Americans were (and still are) highly productive workers, so the companies paid more for larger quantities of products. This kept the American middle class prosperous and thriving. Jobs were only able to be given to them for high wages because that was the only way companies could make a profit, so they had to listen to workers and their demands (Dorfman, 2017). Now, the American economy is based off of international workers and the countries' own middle class, which is why the American economy is now

extremely unstable. The middle class is the reason the American economy grows (Madland, 2011). Without a stable, centralized economy in America, it creates a huge backlash for the American middle class. First, international competition has brought down wages, hindering the American middle class citizens and placing them closer to the impoverished or lower class. The low and medium skilled workers hold down these wages. The increase in specific types of labor globally means there is an abundance of that type of work. Whenever there is an abundance of anything, it becomes cheaper; thus, making the wages decrease. Furthermore, the middle class citizens are losing jobs to people with their same skills willing to work for less in other countries. Instead of competing on a national scale for jobs, many find themselves these days competing internationally for jobs and always getting the short end of the stick when it comes to American companies choosing international workers instead of American workers (Dorfman, 2017). Americans are getting taken advantage of by their own people for a profit because in a capitalist society it does not matter how many people get hurt. If someone would not cheat their own family, then why would someone cheat their own country? The government now makes policies helping the big corporations demolishing their own economy and American middle class. The government takes away and lowers tariffs on goods, making it profitable to sell overseas. They also create tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations putting a large sum of the nation's taxes on the middle class, which is barely surviving. The government also enforces laws, so there is no opposition. The American government even went as far to make the NAFTA, the new trade agreement, encouraging companies to move overseas to places like Mexico for better deals. The American government is killing one of its own fundamental pillars, the middle class, just for a bit more of a profit. Globalization is making a

once prosperous and strong middle class, a more waning and weak middle class (Cypher, 2007).

Another factor that is putting the middle class in a place where it could become extinct is the stagnant numbers of income and wealth across American families. The wealth used to be more proportionally spread across American citizens, the poor and the rich not being too far off from the middle class. Now, in recent times, there is more of a gap between the poor, rich, and middle classes which can cause huge problems in democracy and the stability of the middle class. For example, 25% of America's poorest households' net worth fell by 37%, bringing them further from the middle class and closer to poverty. During this time period, the top 10% network grew by 20%, separating them further from the middle class. To be exact, from 1992-2007 the net worth of the top 400 wealthiest Americans tripled from \$937 million to a combination of \$3.85 billion. Now, more wealth is more in centralized areas than spread across the population; thus, pushing the people in the middle class into lower classes. As Fireside explains, "concentrated wealth bites at the hand which feeds it." People with concentrated wealth make conditions worse for the people that give them the money to be in those very positions (Fireside, 2009). Another example of the demolishing middle class due to income inequality is the 2000-2001 recession, where the household income has never fully recovered. There was a 6% drop in household income and a 14.4% rise in inflation. Later on, in 2003-2005, the hourly pay decreased by 1.2%. During that time, work productivity rose by 27.1%. Thus, giving the people less for working harder and crushing the term used so often 'if someone works hard it will pay off'; clearly, this is not the case for the American middle class. The circumstances even got worse in 2006 when the wage sank to 45.4%, lower than the post World War 2 times. In 2006, workers got 65% of their wages. The American capitalists are

making the American middle class weaker every day, growing the gap of inequality of wealth. (Cypher 2007). Every single day the inequality in the economy is worsening because no one is trying to redistribute the wealth. Without the wealth being distributed, the small elites will rise with power, challenging the current system of democracy. The more the middle class falls into either lower or higher classes, the harder it will be to keep a fair and just government. A thriving middle class can give the government morals and objectives that will help most people, that are not tailored to the rich or poor, just for the good of society. The American middle class is not as strong as it once was, it is just a small shadow of its former self. It is depleting every day and soon there will be no one left to guide the government (Fireside, 2009).

Why all this fuss about the importance of a strong and prosperous middle class being a key player in the American system of democracy? Well, the short answer is without a strong middle class, the American system of democracy will cease to be a democracy and turn to the hands of the rich, which is already happening. The majority will lose their power in the government; thus, leaving it in the hands of the rich to decide the fate of the poor. This however is not a democracy at all; it becomes an oligarchy, or rule by the few.

After all, at the heart of democracy is an economic contract between citizens who consent to pay taxes and a government that, in exchange, safeguards the security and welfare of the nation by providing public goods such as education, health care, infrastructure and national security. In essence, any economic challenge that threatens the middle class places this contract – and ultimately, democracy – in peril (Moyo 2018).

The middle class is the source of economy and economic growth for the United States. Without a source of revenue or wealth in the nation, the system of democracy itself would not work.

The American democracy is based off of capitalism, so without the growth of the middle and working class for the economy, democracy crumbles. The middle class helps or assists the democracy in many ways the rich, or poor could never do. They help provide a stable consumer base for companies to distribute and profit off of their products. A 2005 study at Ohio State University came to this same conclusion, across all 50 states a middle class is needed for economic growth and without economic growth, the American Capitalist democracy could never flourish. The system of capitalism itself relies on constant growth.

Numerous modern economists are blind to the fact that the middle class holds such an important place in economic growth; however, by the promotion of free trade, the middle class and the economy crumbles as a whole. A strong middle class citizen base also contributes to an increase in investments, which drives economic growth. Without a strong consumer base, people are less likely to invest; thus, bringing down the economy. Additionally, a majority middle class can lead to a higher level of trust in society. With higher levels of trust, a society works better together. If the middle class has a high level of trust, it can make huge impacts on the economy with the lowering of transaction costs. Therefore, less time and resources are spent on policies because each person trusts each other to give a fair price (Madland, 2011).

Also, middle class citizens who trust more of their fellow human beings are more likely to trade and innovate, making the economy flourish. Without high levels of trust, a middle class citizen is less likely to participate in the government, which is fundamental for democracy to survive. An active middle class citizen brings more ideas to their government and helps promote policies that can benefit the whole society. A recent 2008 Dredrick Solt Study found

that in advanced countries because of a decreasing middle class, there was a 13% decrease in voting and a 12% decrease in political discussion; thus, demolishing the fundamental attribute of an active citizen in a democracy. Without an active citizen, the government becomes less effective for the citizens living under it because they are not voicing their opinions and rights; thus giving the government the power to make decisions for the masses. With all this power, governments become corrupt and citizens are less likely to hold them accountable. With a corrupt government, middle class citizens are less likely to promote values, morals, and behaviors to their society and their children. The values of education and hard work will be lost if there is nothing to work hard for in an unfair society. Without the fundamental pillar of education in the middle class, the overall intelligence and drive in the nation will be gone. It is proven that middle class schools have higher test grades and graduation rates from high school and college. With a lack of education, there are fewer innovators to create and fewer thinkers to challenge the leaders of the government. The middle class not only holds up the democracy, but all other fundamental pillars of democracy. When America basically pulls out their middle class, their democracy will crumble under their feet. One cannot stress enough the impact that the middle class has on all aspects of democracy: from the economy, to daily life, to morals and values, and even intelligence. The extinction or decline of the American middle class currently is the extinction of the system of democracy itself in America (Madland, 2011).

Overall, the vital middle class is not as strong as it needs to be for a democracy to thrive in America. The middle class is being hit with globalization, competition, a huge wealth gap, and inflation which push the middle class into the lower or higher classes of America. The middle class cannot be strong without a majority, which it currently lacks today. A stagnant middle class decreases trust in society and the government, which leads to the government

being less effective for the people; thus, turning a democracy into an oligarchy. Furthermore, the weak middle class also weakens the other two fundamental pillars of democracy: education and citizen participation. In conclusion, with the weakening middle class the United States is faced with in modern times, it cannot sufficiently hold a democracy for much longer.

The Educated and Mindless American Citizen

Education is a privilege. For centuries under monarchies and the feudal system, the average citizen's knowledge was suppressed. No one knew anything, nor could explain the world they lived in, so they had to listen to the king and do as they were told because the citizens were lacking knowledge. After, the end of feudalism and the start of capitalism, education started becoming more widely available and separate from the church. Citizens were able to learn about their world and conjure up questions about their environment. By the time America had become a nation, education was widespread throughout the rich, white, male population. So the basis of the American democracy and democracy itself derived from widely educated citizens who questioned and changed their government and formed a new nation, all because of education. Without educated individuals, America may not be here or be the same America people see today. Even in ancient Greece in one of the first democracies in Athens, the government only worked if the people were properly educated. They expressed a thorough education was one in the arts and wanted their citizens to explore their knowledge and learning by furthering their education beyond military school. However, when widespread education was decreasing in the citizens' society, their City-State ended up falling to Sparta because of bad decisions made by the uninformed citizens. People started becoming easily corrupted and propagandized or misinformed, leading to their downfall. Without the proper education, democracy fell because of the ignorance of the citizens. America right now could be on the

brink of creating ignorant citizens which could lead to the downfall of democracy, or much worse. The ancient Spartans who took over the Athenians were also educated; however, they were all educated to what the state needed. All male citizens went to military school to become strong warriors because that is what their society needed. The ancient Spartans became by-products of their monarch society. So, if America has an apparent lack of education, not only is democracy ending, but a new monarchy of uninformative education has started (Dickey, 2014).

So, the underlying question is, is the average American citizen properly educated on current issues and laws? Of course American society does not want to admit or adhere to their ignorance, so studies and data must speak for them on an unbiased playing field. At the University of Pennsylvania in Annenberg, a Public Policy survey asked the students if they could name all three branches of government, shockingly only 25% could do so. The most basic structure of the American democracy and government cannot be named by its own citizens. That is something that should be ingrained into the minds of American youth and is hardly covered and basically brushed over with unimportant details. To further continue their results from the study, 39% of students said the constitution did not give the president the power to declare war. That means about 4 in every 10 people they asked gave the wrong answer. What a scary thought that about half of the American population does not even know how the American government functions. If the American public does not even know the basic facts on how the American government works, there is no way they can possibly be educated on current issues. Americans need an overall basic understanding of the government to help change it. One cannot put together a Lego set without figuring out how the Lego itself works and the design instructions. One must start from the bottom and work their way up, getting more in-depth every time. Additionally, Americans cannot exercise their rights or truly be free

if the citizens do not even know their rights or how to use them. The modern day American citizens do not know the most basic structure of their government, so clearly they are not properly educated on issues of political importance. The modern American citizen does not know anything of substance about their government and the only item at fault is the lack of a widespread education system (Strauss, 2016).

Every day for five days a week, 20 days a month, and 180 days a year, an American student attends school. School is an education system made to prepare the child for the ‘real world’. This education system is supposed to give children knowledge, life lessons, and practical skills to utilize in their adult lives. This education system is supposed to put a stop to citizen ignorance and make sure citizens are informed with common knowledge of their government and the life around them. Giving citizens this sort of knowledge is giving them power or like the ancient phrase, “Knowledge is Power.” With knowledge, American citizens are able to help assist their leaders with decision making for the nation and stop their leaders if they become too corrupt. This knowledge is one of the most important factors that makes up a citizen besides being able to exercise the rights and being economically stable. The American education is stumbling and failing because of the lack of knowledge (Archana, 2019).

Now, what is to blame for this widespread education crisis? Some point to the students and accuse them of ruining their own learning. In the NAEP test, an international education test, America was placed last internationally in 1995. Some speculate this is because students only care about tests for their grades and if it does not directly affect their future, students are not as inclined to try. This overall philosophy is that the American student is lazy; they have the smarts to be properly educated, but they slack off. Students do not care because they think these crises are not going to affect them personally; however, this misconception is not true

(Starr, 2005). The truth is that many public schools are overcrowded, underfunded, segregated, and not backed by government support, so the students are not properly educated. The huge overarching problem of segregation plays into the underfunding, overcrowding, and inequivalent education of the nation. For example, minorities are usually segregated out of schools because of a lack of income and housing; thus, they end up going to a school that receives less funding than usual. Public and widespread education is backed on communities of wealth and if poor and rich communities are not equally educated then half of the American population will always be more intelligent and richer than the other classes. Now, there are larger gaps in academic achievement and less qualified teachers across the board; thus, making it extremely difficult to implement widespread education. From 1965-1990 education was successfully integrated and there were higher test scores for all races. When education was more widespread and integrated, students as a whole were more educated. However, since 1990, the Supreme Court dismantled its enforcement to desegregate states and has not needed to pay for integration programs. Now society is feeling the effects of this decision. People of other races are finding it harder to work with other people of different races to their own. Without integration in the education system, schools cannot properly create the right environment for their students to prosper, learn, and remember the important parts of school and make them a proper citizen. Since 1990, America's education system has been weak and has not recovered (Kozol, 2000, 33-35).

Furthermore, the American government itself is damaging its own citizens' intelligence. Presidents like Bush and Obama created systems supposedly to help the American education system, but it was an actual grab for money. As author Cooke suggests, "The war on education has been carefully planned for years, orchestrated by corporate interests and

implemented by Republicans and Democrats alike.” What these recent presidents are doing is not new; for over three decades politicians have been lowering taxes on corporations that fund the American public school systems. Instead of giving schools more money to educate their civilians, politicians are letting companies and corporations keep more of their money for themselves. For example, in Obama’s Race to the Top program, he rewarded states for shutting down public schools and opening up more private or charter schools that could be profited off of by big companies or corporations. These companies are now dipping into education for money to bail out banks, fund war, and find new investments. Companies and the American government do not want their citizens to be educated; they would rather have the system of capitalism running than their own citizens learning. Now, because of Obama’s actions, teachers with credentials are being fired en masse because they are not protected by their own government. Companies are starting to employ teachers by training them themselves for five weeks at the program, Teach for America, and then sending them off to teach the future of America. These charter schools now only need 50% of teachers to actually be certified in teaching. The American government is against their own people, stripping them of their education for a profit (Cooke, 2010). How can the American citizens make the right choices or even be allowed to have a say in governmental matters if they are not educated on the issue first? Citizens can not and they are not. The American government is purposely dumbing down their citizens and stripping them of their education. As another author, Gatto suggests, “The interest of complex management, economic or political, to dumb people down, to demoralize them, to divide them from one another, and to discard them if they do not conform” (Gatto, 2004, 94). The government is creating their own servile force of consumers and citizens, not to exercise their own rights, but to support the elites and their governmental decisions without

question and without thought. Elites only need citizens for manual labor and smaller job opportunities. Now in the seemingly oligarchy system Americans live in, the government and companies are suppressing the common man (Gatto, 2004).

Overall, the average American citizen is not well educated and thus cannot make informed decisions about their government. The modern education system is denying students of leadership, integration, curiosity, and exploration. Without these factors being taught in the environment of the schools, students are incomplete citizens. Schools are now training students to establish fixed reactions to authority, make them think alike, determine proper social roles and training, exposing the unfit, and teaching that an elite group of caregivers will hold control of the population. Education is not used to better society anymore, but to better the elite man. The government is purposefully weeding out rebels of their government with certain tactics of discipline used in school. The government is creating a consumer base of the children to hold up the failing capitalist society. Without a national widespread education system, citizens can not be properly informed of issues. Additionally, students are being turned into soldiers instead of philosophers (Gatto, 2004, 92-95), as before seen in ancient Greece. The corruption and inequality in the education system led to the fall of the democracy of Athens and the rise of the monarchy of Sparta. In ancient Greece, citizens were trained not to think, but to obey; not to challenge, but to observe, like the modern day educational system. Without proper widespread education for the citizens of America, the government system itself will crumble and turn into a monarchy, just like in ancient Greece (Dickey, 2014).

Conclusion

"If history can provide a map of where we have been, a mirror to where we are right now and perhaps even a guide to what we should do next, the story of this period is perfectly suited to do that in our times" (Dr. Scott, 2009)

The American system of democracy is crumbling because the soil that was laid down by the ancient Greeks was already toxic and Americans tried building a government system out of something that already fell apart. The Greeks had the same problems that modern day America is facing today. The Greeks had economic downturn, corrupt politicians, immigration issues, unpopular and unnecessary wars, changing values, and lack of overall trust. Their three major pillars of active citizen participation, a thriving middle class, and education, all fell apart, and so did their democracy. History proved that a democracy would not last in small Greek City-States, like Athens; why did Americans think democracy would work for them? If something is proven not to work once, people should learn from the past and not repeat the same underlying mistakes. History happened, so the same events do not need to happen again (Cambridge, 2009).

Based on the data examined throughout this paper on the pillars of American democracy: an active participation, a middle class, and educational systems; America does not have the strong pillars it once did to support its system of democracy. First, citizens are becoming less active in their government and are not fully exercising their rights and freedom. American citizens are becoming 'couch-potatoes' and are giving the elites more power to run the democracy. Without active citizen participation, the American democracy does not have a full majority public opinion in the government; thus, making the American democracy an oligarchy (Valelly, 2001). Additionally, the American middle class that supports the economy

and the government is shrinking. The middle class helps create a balance between the rich and the poor. The middle class gives the government a common ground to listen to and less bias or selfish opinion. With the middle class decreasing because of factors like inflation and globalization, it creates huge wealth gaps and an unstable economy. Since the American democracy is based off its economy, without a strong middle class, the nation cannot be a democracy (Madland, 2011). Lastly, without the fundamental pillar of widespread education, the citizens of modern America cannot fully understand their government or work together as a nation. Since education is not widespread in America, there are many discrepancies and problems between groups and ethics that would not happen if schools were integrated and funded privately and not profited from (Cooke, 2010). Overall, America does not have fertile soil to sustain a modern day democracy and thus is currently crumbling down. Without the pillars of active citizen participation, a favorable economy, and widespread education, America is and always was doomed.

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