

Misconceptions of American Democracy

Gabrielle Correia

College Park High School

Abstract

Democracy is thought of to be the basic structure behind the United States. However, if democracy is the bones, then capitalism is the blood. Capitalism affects every aspect of citizen's lives. The United States prides itself on its seemingly perfect combination of a capitalistic economic system and a democratic political system. The two go hand in hand to shape both the economy and the government. However, if capitalism is left unchecked, it will destroy itself. A strong government is required to calm the flames of capitalism. Often, this requires society's participation. The American public needs to speak out against corporations for any changes to be made. When these corporations control the mass media system, how are citizens going to hear about the injustices committed by corporations? Citizens have even less control when these corporations support political figures. Once in office, these figures can aid the passing of laws that promote certain businesses. Finally, the corporations also have a stronghold on universities. As a direct result, tuition rates and thus student loan rates, have increased drastically. Many cannot afford a college education. What is even worse is that due to the increasingly competitive job market, many college graduates cannot find employment. These unfortunate truths support the idea that the elite class of corporations is overpowering the government.

Misconceptions of American Democracy

Introduction

The term “democracy” has become somewhat synonymous with the phrase “the United States of America.” Elementary school children are taught that America has a democracy. The correlation has grown so strong that some may go so far as to state the United States as the definition of democracy. However, it is not until years later that these children realize the accuracy, or inaccuracy, of this statement. The Founding Fathers set up the United States with a bitter taste for autocracy in their mouths. They had been suffering under the English King for hundreds of years. America was where they found refuge. Therefore, when the Founding Fathers started to write the Constitution, they were extremely careful not to let any one person gain too much power. They established an elaborate system of checks and balances to limit power across the three branches of government. They may have disagreed on many of the technicalities, but they agreed upon the idea that the country needed a weak government so it would not exploit citizen’s rights. They agreed upon democracy was historically an unpopular idea and many were skeptical as to whether it would even be possible. John Adams was quoted saying:

It has ever been my hobby-horse to see rising in America an empire of liberty, and a prospect of two or three hundred millions of freemen, without one noble or one king among them. You say it is impossible. If I should agree with you in this, I would still say, let us try the experiment, and preserve our equality as long as we can. A better system of education for the common people might preserve them long from such artificial inequalities as are prejudicial to society, by confounding the natural distinctions of right and wrong, virtue and vice (“Founding Fathers,” n.d.).

This “experiment” has proved successful over the past almost 250 years. To the skeptic’s surprise, the United States has thrived as a democracy. The only way this is possible is due to the aspect of it being flexible. Under different circumstances the government is able to adjust to meet the desires of its people. This has happened with the Emancipation Proclamation, which gave slaves their freedom and the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote. As the country has grown and society’s views have changed, the Constitution has changed to reflect these beliefs (“How the,” n.d.).

Despite this the United States has been plagued with a history of difficulties. To say the least it simply has not been smooth sailing since 1776, under this ideal system of democracy. Discrimination is a huge problem that, although has decreased over the years, is still a prominent issue in the country. Sexism and racism are debatably the largest forms of these issues. There are also conflicts between different socioeconomic classes. Many Americans do not want to admit that there is a class system present in the United States. However the distinctions between lower, middle, and upper class, in some cases, are apparent. Thirdly, the government that is supposed to be protecting its citizens is often lying to them. This causes unrest when these secrets are leaked. Many have grown to distrust the American government. However, it is often not the government that is acting corruptly, but the corporations that are supporting it. One may analyze the four theories of government, democracy, pluralism, hyper pluralism, and elite class theory, to see the true role of corporations in the American government.

Democracy was famously defined by Abraham Lincoln as “Government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Literally the word “democracy” means rule by the people. These are the simplest definitions that are engrained in American citizen’s minds. In modern society, Democracy can be defined as a, “Form of government, where a constitution guarantees basic

personal and political rights, fair and free elections, and independent courts of law individuals vote and therefore participate in the government that rules over them.” For this system to work, every citizen must have equal influence in the government and access to information about present issues. Governmental decisions will be made by majority rule. Representatives and government figures are elected by the people (“Democracy,” n.d.).

Pluralism is a system where various groups govern the country instead of every individual person. “These organizations, which include among others unions, trade and professional associations, environmentalists, civil rights activists, business and financial lobbies, and formal and informal coalitions of like-minded citizens, influence the making and administration of laws and policy.” They believe that direct democracy is both logistically hard and undesirable. It is very difficult to take an unbiased survey, or vote, from every single citizen over 18 years of age. They believe that instead large groups should decide for the citizens. This would make the voting process easier. Pluralists also note that in some cases it is not the general public’s opinion that may be desired. In some cases, a smaller group of experts on the issue would be much more ideal. They worry that direct democracy can lead to loss of freedom because the average citizen does not know how to handle this power. Therefore, they are not deserving of the right to vote, and should leave it up to these large groups (Reynolds, n.d.).

Hyper pluralism is an extreme form of pluralism. This theory is defined as, “A proliferation of groups and pressures, which affects politics and policy.” Instead of the groups that are present in pluralism working to create the best government for its people, pluralism suggests that these groups are causing the demise of the country. This negative view sees the deterioration of democracy and blames groups such as unions, or corporations. Phinney explains, “This emerging theory contends that so many groups now compete and the political

system is so complex, governing of any sort is most difficult.” With so many differing groups fighting for control, the government has become gridlocked, unable to govern its citizens (Phinney, 1996).

Elite class theory is the idea that the leaders or large organizations ultimately hold all the power in the government. Domhoff suggests, “The starting point for present-day elite theorists is that all modern societies are dominated by the leaders (called elites) of large bureaucratically structured organizations, whether those organizations are corporate, nonprofit, or governmental.” This theory abandons the concept of equality. They believe socioeconomic classes not only exist but also define a citizen’s role in the government. The upper class elite has a vast majority of power (Domhoff, 2005).

On the surface, it may seem that the United States benefits from a democratic structure. However, when one analyzes the government more closely, they become aware of the corporations intermixed in the government. Corporations support elections so that they can weasel their way into having an influence in the government despite the good intentions of the system of democracy. The government controls what information reaches citizens through the corporate-controlled mass media. Lastly, many corporations support universities in order to influence the minds of today’s youth. The United States may officially be a democracy, but under greater analysis it resembles an elite class system.

Capitalism vs. Democracy

Capitalism and democracy are believed to be the ideal match. They supposedly create a perfect society free from a class system, where everyone has a voice in the government. This fostered so much pride in Americans that they were willing to fight to spread these ideologies. However, as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis suggests, “We can have democracy in this

country or we can have great concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both” (Boyer, 2006). Over the years, our country has proved that this assumption needs to be reconsidered.

Under democracy, everyone has an equal say in the government. This system relies on a community-based society. This contrasts with the desires for wealth and gain in capitalism. Capitalism feeds off of the idea that individuals should be able to do whatever it takes to make the most capital possible. This may include lowering employees’ wages, or producing inferior products that will require repairs. These fundamental differences cause the two to not combine together well. Democracy cannot thrive under capitalism because this free market system leads to harsh inequalities, corporations becoming too powerful and those with the most money becoming more powerful.

It is amazing to see the transformation that the human race has undergone in the last 5,000-10,000 years. In the days of hunter-gatherers, cooperation was one of the most cherished values. People relied on each other to fill certain positions, so it took many individuals to run a successful community. Without cooperation one simply could not survive. To be banished and have to support oneself was not only a punishment, but in extreme cases it meant death. This value of cooperation is still present in human kind. However, at an early age, children are corrupted with capitalistic ideas. They are taught the difference between what is theirs and someone else’s. These capitalistic beliefs teach them that more is better, and not sharing means more for them. They grow up to be individualistic and self-interested. Aware of this change in culture, Boyer states, “Capitalism has become the new religion” (Boyer, 2006). Many religions vilify wealth and greed. They teach that a sense of enlightenment will come from giving up

unnecessary items to the poor. This general concept of charity leads to a community where people are willing to help each other. Then capitalism came.

Americans were perverted with the concept of self-gain and as a result, an individualistic culture emerged. Tabb, an author for the *Monthly Review*, noted “Class and power are terms that make Americans a little uneasy and that concepts such as ‘ruling class’ and ‘power elite’ immediately put people on guard” (Tabb, 2006). This stems from the ideal America. Americans want to believe that they live in the “land of opportunity” where anyone can be successful if they simply put in an effort. This idea originates from capitalism. Throughout literature there are countless rags-to-riches stories. As the name suggests, these stories consist of a main character that had very little. Then with hard work, and a little luck, they became very successful. Even in the news, Americans seem to gravitate towards these stories. One often hears of innovators and thinkers who saw a problem and designed a product. For example, Steve Jobs fits this formula. He grew up in a middle class family but later became very successful when his Apple computers grew in popularity. Many Americans may say that he is an inspiration, but why is that our culture focuses on these people and not simply the wealthiest ones? Our culture tells us to value this coming up through the ranks. If one simply is born into a wealthy, powerful family, they are not doing anything to deserve attention.

Boyer summarizes a common analogy used by anthropologists by suggesting, “If a fish were a scientist the last thing it would discover would be water; they only see through it...[people] seldom know how their thoughts are being shaped by the ideas and beliefs imbedded like lenses in the culture that surrounds them” (Boyer, 2006). It is very difficult to see a concrete, black and white image of one’s culture. These are complex ideologies and theories

that are more like a mist surrounding society, than an actual tangible item. However, these ideologies mold and shape society.

“Power of the people” is an elementary-school definition of democracy. Students are taught that in this political system, citizens have a say in how the government is run. One reason this system is so popular is that it gives power to the average person. The Founding Fathers of the United States particularly liked this concept because it meant that there would not be a long dynasty of kings. Civilizations with such systems have failed throughout history because they gave all of the power to one single person, or to a family. Once a large enough group of people is oppressed, there will be revolts and the possibility for a revolution. The Founding Fathers were fortunate enough to have hindsight into these issues and developed a system, which they believed would allow citizens to participate in the deciding matters of their government. However, the addition of capitalism shifts the power from the people to the dollar.

In modern-day America, those with money have become the most powerful or influential people in the government. Capitalism promotes the growth of private income. This creates a hugely unequal society, as a majority of citizens remain stagnant around the poverty line, while the few lucky ones continue to grow and become richer. Suddenly, those with more money can pay for campaigns and lobby for laws that they would wish to see in the government. Additionally, they can buy the media airtime to publicize this campaign. In their essay on the theories of American politics, Gilens and Page state, “The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence” (Gilens & Page, 2014). As unfortunate as it may be, money has come to equal power. Overtime the government has come

to resemble more of a plutocracy than a capitalistic democracy. The lower class citizens and even the average middle class citizens are left with little to no influence over the government. Tabb reported, “What is happening is that as income becomes more and more unequal, so too does political influence grow for the elite of the super rich who are increasingly able to recast the state to accommodate their narrow interests” (Tabb, 2006). There is a very elite percentage of the population that has a large amount of political influence. These are the citizens who are making decisions, however these decisions rarely benefit everyone. Often, “Some portion of the populace, frequently a majority, loses out” (Parenti, 1996). This government has started to resemble a plutocracy instead of the prized democracy.

If money equals power in modern America, then those with the most power are simply the ones with the most money. These “people” are corporations. In the *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* case, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations are legally individual people (Citizens, 2014). This gave them power in society. Parenti explains in *Democracy for the Few*, that throughout America’s history there have been conflicts in which the government usually favored the business interests. “When divisions have arisen within the business class, as between large and small competitors, not surprisingly, government usually has resolved matters to the satisfaction of the more powerful” (Parenti, 1996). The corporations that win court cases and get laws passed in their favor are the ones that write the biggest check to the government. This system has gone on for years creating more and more powerful corporations.

In some cases these corporations have become so powerful that they are effecting the government. The United States government is frequently criticized for getting stuck in a gridlock. Many believe that because of the disagreements between Republicans and Democrats, nothing will ever get done. Politicians spend all of their time arguing and not actually governing.

However, a study by the Program for Public Consultation found that the Republicans and Democrats agreed on most controversial topics. For example, the health care issue has crippled both the government and American citizens in trying to find a good outcome. There is a simple solution, one that has already been instilled by many other industrialized countries. The United States could easily replace the current corporations that run the health care facilities with a universal model available to the public. However, Street states that, “[This model is] irrelevant thanks to the current democracy deficit imposed by the reigning plutonomy wherein the financial institutions...are too powerful for such options even to be considered” (Street, 2014). America remains indecisive on this issue, not because of conflict between Democrats and Republicans, but conflicts between different businesses. There are many options that would end this health care system issue, but they will not even be brought up because they challenge corporations. This gridlock comes from the government favoring businesses instead of its people. In this case the American laissez-faire capitalism system wins out over the health and safety of citizens.

Another problem with corporations gaining so much power is that it is not a single corporation dominating politics. Instead, it is a competitive world where businesses are battling for political power. Reich summarizes, “The result is an arms race for political influence that is drowning out the voices of average citizens” (Reich, 2007). The average citizen cannot compete with a large business. These businesses have huge amounts of capital and connections to media coverage. All they need is a puppet to run for office to voice their opinion. Campaigns become a competition to see which companies will spend the most.

Capitalism is an ideology of competition. Those with the best business tactics survive; the others do not. This splits up the America population into classes, the lower class, the working middle class, and the upper class. A majority of the country’s wealth is concentrated in

the upper class. They use this wealth to gain more wealth, while the lower and middle classes stay stagnant, unable to move up the social hierarchy. Capitalism promotes this inequality but it also promotes unregulated trade. Businesses want less government regulations because these laws decrease their profits. For example, the government tells businesses what they are allowed to pay their employees as a form of minimum wage. Without this regulation, some businesses might exploit their employees and pay them an undersized salary. While these employees would not be able to survive on such a small income, the company would be profiting more than ever. This is an example of a regulation that already exists. However, Parenti suggests that more regulations are needed. “Each year 35,000 were killed on the job, mostly because of unsafe work conditions, while 700,000 suffered injury, illness, blindness, and other work-related disabilities” (Parenti, 1996). Government regulation is the only factor stopping some companies from completely abusing their employees, sometimes to death. A strong government is needed to prevent this. However, when the government is full of lobbyists and puppets that have been instilled by corporations, the necessary anti-business laws are not going to be passed. Edsall notes, “Worsening inequality is an inevitable outcome of free market capitalism” (Edsall, 2014). Capitalism will always encourage inequality. Sometimes this inequality can be healthy, but when our society becomes too unequal, it is hard to have a government that represents its entire people.

Democracy prides itself on the idea that every citizen has an equal say in the decisions of the government. In theory, this would mean that everyone who votes would have a fair, equal chance of having his or her opinion heard. However with a capitalistic economic system to back up democracy, this is simply not the case. It takes an incredible amount of money to run for a candidacy. Frequently, the candidate who spent the most money wins. Although most of this

money comes from donors and not the candidate themselves, the candidate must spend a huge amount of time fundraising instead of campaigning. According to the Campaign Finance Institute, in 2012 it cost 1,596,953 dollars to be elected into the House of Representatives, and over 10,351,556 dollars to be elected into the Senate (“The Cost,” n.d.). In the 2012 presidential election, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party combined spent 2,161,291,756 dollars not including loans that were taken out in their favor. Including these loans the grand total would be just under 2.2 billion dollars (“Presidential”, 2012). These high costs to run for office enforce that the only people that get elected will be those with very wealthy friends. Which party a politician belongs to is no longer as important as which corporations are supporting them.

A politician will vote for whatever their supporters want. Political power has shifted from people to money. In an article titled “Free Speech Requires Campaign Money,” Smith refutes this idea of overspending in the election process. Smith uses interesting statistics to support his case, such as, “The amount spent each year on all political activity in the United States...is less than the amount spent on potato chips” (Smith, 2006). This statistic can be used to show the absurdities of challenging the amount of campaign spending. It compares election spending to something as trivial and everyday as potato chips. However, potato chips are a commodity and should be purchased, a President should not. If one wanted potato chips, the simplest answer would be to drive to the grocery store and buy a bag. By comparing the two, Smith is suggesting that if someone wanted a certain candidate to be president, then they should drive to the closest donation office and write a check. This should not be how one approaches an election process. Rather if one wants a particular candidate they should spread news of this candidate’s ideas and rally for them. Candidates should advertise enough to get their name known to a general public, but they should rely more on televised debates rather than

commercials where they attack their opponent. Smith pointed out, “In 1996, the Home Depot Corporation alone spent more on advertising than federal law allowed Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, and Ross Perot put together to spend on the general election” (Smith, 1996). Home Depot is a large corporation, but it is also a business. Its objective is to sell products. These advertisements are a necessary way of promoting their products. Politicians should not have to advertise their beliefs and opinions. Likewise the best candidates may be the ones without enough money to be heard. Smith summarizes, “The key variable in elections is...whether or not challengers are able to spend enough to overcome the advantage of incumbency and make their names and issues known to voters” (Smith, 2006). This sums up the problem that capitalism has created in the United States. The winner of the election will be the one who has the most money. If a competitor wants to challenge this person, they have to have enough money to get their name publicized and have a very popular stance on a common issue. Perhaps if this were not the way the system worked, we would have leaders as politicians instead of puppets who are controlled by corporations and their financing. This system seriously limits the United State’s potential because it restricts the possible candidates to those with money rather than those who are the best leaders.

Capitalism is an economic system; democracy is a political system. Some suggest that the two have no effect on each other. Therefore, one can mix and match and political system with any economic system. Political systems state how the government will be comprised, while economic systems decide how the economy will work. In theory they do not seem to be related, so they should not have an effect on each other. However, when examined closer one can see that the effects of capitalism will either support or disintegrate democracy.

Capitalism by its very nature supports free trade. Business, when unregulated, will cause some individuals to become wealthy and others will become poor. This system of inequalities has continued to grow over the years. The wealthy few have the ability to support a campaign financially, and thus have all the power in society. They are people with the most power and typically the corporations. This chain of events will continue to foster the inevitable plutocracy.

Corporate-Controlled Mass Media

A free press is one of the primary elements holding a democratic system together. It allows for a distribution of knowledge across a population. Democracy involves the citizens' participation. In order to make appropriate decisions when voting, these citizens must be educated in the current issues and politics. McChesney and Nichols summarize this system in their book *Our Media, not Theirs: the Democratic Struggle Against Corporate Media*.

They [the Founding Fathers] understood that the essential tool of newly enfranchised citizens would be information. Thus, when James Madison and his comrades in the Revolutionary cause framed the Constitution of the new United States, they enshrined protections for a free and freewheeling, diverse and dangerous press that would serve as the foundation upon which American self-government and freedom would over the next two centuries be slowly—often painfully—built (McChesney & Nichols, 2002).

They understood that if citizens were going to take part in the decisions of their government, they would need information. They were aware that a free press could be very dangerous, as it would allow for a mix of opinions. These opinions may be radical and cause changes, but it is these changes that, throughout history, make the United States able to adapt over time.

According to Croteau and Hoynes, this free press is vital for providing citizens with information, a place where many different opinions can be heard, and for serving as a watchdog

to prevent abuses of power (Croteau & Hoynes, 1999). Without a free press, the government has control of the media, and over time, the nation may start to resemble an authoritarian government. The government would have the ability to control its citizens with propaganda. Over time, they would easily be able to manipulate a majority of the voting class to vote in their favor. The “elected” president would simply be chosen by the handful of officials that make the television programs, and the citizens would become pawns completely in the government’s control. There are signs of this government-controlled media, suggesting that this has already begun. While Croteau and Hoynes accurately outlined the results of a free press, this system is not present in the United States. Instead America suffers from a corporate controlled mass media system.

One sign of successful mass media is this media having the authority to prevent abuses of power. Croteau and Hoynes call this media a watchdog. If the political system gets out of line the media will alert the citizens so that they may protest, revolt, or simply vote to change a policy (Croteau & Hoynes, 1999). However, instead of calling American citizens to action, more often than not this media is used to distract people from the big issues. McChesney and Nichols explain that the “Media should be raising red flags on a daily basis. Instead, it is chirping along to the script provided by White House political director Karl Rove.” The government dictates the media and the public accepts this as news. In reality this is not news; it is propaganda. In contrast, propaganda is information used to control a society. McChesney and Nichols continue to express, “No wonder serious international analysts compare U.S. media coverage of the war to that which might be expected in an authoritarian society where free press protections do not exist” (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). The system of propaganda in the United States has become so bad that people have begun to compare it to authoritarian governments. For the

country that was set up to be a sanctuary for political freedom, this should embarrass Americans and make them want to bring about a media reform. Without a watchdog to stop abuses of power, the media is handing politicians the keys to American citizens' minds.

Another requirement of democracy is that the citizens are supplied with information about government procedures and policies. Otherwise the public would have no idea what they are voting for. Many citizens rely on the mass media to supply them with this information; however, the media has become a source of entertainment rather than news. Croteau and Hoynes report, "The media have increasingly abandoned their civic role as conduits of information and debate in favor of their more profitable role as entertainers" (Croteau & Hoynes, 1999). Instead of the more noble objective of informing the public, news channels are owned by corporations, which are in business to make a profit. They let money rule their programs. Therefore, if they can come up with a way to make news more entertaining, then they are likely to get more viewers, resulting in more money. Perhaps this means having celebrities talk about current government decisions rather than the highly educated critical analysts. While these analysts may not be as nice to look at, or as easy to listen to as the celebrities, they offer a more critical approach. However, the celebrities may be able to captivate a larger audience. Therefore they will make the corporation more money. Unfortunately for viewers craving a more substantial news source, this is how channels decide which shows get airtime and how much.

The media has become increasingly worse in the case of presidential elections. Today a true debate between two highly educated politicians competing to become the nations next president has been replaced by canned conversations between two people who are often afraid to sound radical. Instead of discussing their stances on politics, they discuss each other's background and history. Parenti reports, "Media coverage of electoral campaigns focuses mostly

on the contest per se: who will run, who will win, and what campaign ploys are playing well with the public. Relatively little attention is given to policy content” (Parenti, 2008). A majority of the media treats an election like a race. They report on who is in the lead and by how much. Instead the media should be reporting on which policies the candidates are in favor of, and which they are wanting to change. This would give Americans a better sense of how electing one over the other would impact the country. McChesney and Nichols described the 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush as, “Duller-than-dirt agreeathons in which Al Gore and George W. Bush essentially invited viewers to turn off their televisions” (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). The two candidates spent the entire “debate” agreeing with each other. This leaves Americans with less information on whom to vote for and requires them to resort to personal beliefs to make their decision. Unfortunately, it has only gotten worse in the three elections since 2000. Democracy requires an educated public and the presidential debates are one of the most noteworthy forms of education about the presidential candidates. With the current mass media trying to entertain its audiences instead of educating them, one cannot expect to have a healthy democratic system.

The third requirement of mass media according to Croteau and Hoynes is that it provides diverse opinions. In order to make the decisions whether to vote in favor or against a bill, citizens must form an opinion about the topic. Forming an opinion requires knowledge of both sides of an issue. However, the media almost never shows the liberal or progressive sides of the issues. As Parenti noted, “Conservative guests on network opinion shows outnumbered liberal ones usually by three to one” and “The whole left portion of the political spectrum is mostly shut out of the mainstream media.” If liberal guests are not allowed to show their opinion, then their beliefs cannot be spread to the large majority of the public. This means that the public is simply

not educated in these opinions, so they will not be reflected in the policies of the government. Media should consist of diverse opinions that are given equal airtime.

There once did exist a "Fairness Doctrine," a law requiring that time be given to an opposing viewpoint after a station broadcasted an editorial opinion. But there was no requirement as to the diversity of the opposing viewpoints, so usually the range was between two only slightly different stances. The FCC ruled that broadcast time should not be made available to "communists or the communist viewpoint" but only to "persons other than communists. But even this pale and slanted law was too much for the reactionaries. President Reagan vetoed it in 1987 when Congress attempted to renew it (Parenti, 2008).

This law shows an attempt by the government to protect diversity in the press. It would require that for every minute of an editorial from one point of view, there would have to be a minute from another point of view. If this law were still in effect today, the press would be regulated into telling both sides of an argument. Ironically, more regulation would result in a more fair "free press." However, this law would be almost impossible to enforce. News media would be able to get around it by perhaps showing a traditionalist perspective and countering it with a conservative one. As Parenti suggested, the range of opinions could only differ slightly. Or perhaps the liberal talk show is just as long as the conservative one but it may air in the middle of the night when a small percentage of people are watching. The media must overcome these obstacles in order to equalize the media so liberals and conservatives get the same airtime.

Along with the lack of liberal media, the censorship that journalists face is significantly affecting the media output. Many journalists are not officially censored by their editors. Instead they live in fear of submitting an article that is too scandalous and risk losing their jobs. Parenti

reports, “Journalists can sometimes slip critical information into stories, but if they persist, their reports are spiked, they are reassigned, and soon their careers are at risk.” Sadly, many submit their journalistic integrity to meet these demands in order to feed their families or pay their rent. Fox reporters are under the most censorship; “Daily memos come down from the corporate office at Fox telling reporters and commentators what the story of the day should be and what point of view was expected when reporting.” Not only are they told what to report to their viewers but they are also told how to think. In this case Fox, as a corporation, is dictating the news and how people respond to it. Even though, there are laws supposedly protecting journalists’ rights, their jobs are at stake any time they act upon an idea contrary to the station or corporation they work for. Parenti states, “In 2003 the *San Francisco Chronicle* fired a columnist for participating in a mass demonstration against the U. S. invasion of Iraq—even though California law explicitly states that employers cannot forbid or prevent employees from participating in political activities” (Parenti, 2008). There are countless stories of the injustices that journalists face. Today journalists can either publish the risky stories which may result in them losing their job, or publish the stories that a corporation wants them to. Most choose the latter. As Parenti observes, “The media bosses control the journalists, not the other way around” (Parenti, 2008). The result is a nation full of one sided media that may disagree from topic to topic but almost always has one thing in common: it is in support of corporations.

Corporations have the power to control a large part of the average citizen’s life through the media. In an article, Snyder states, “Today ownership of the news media has been concentrated in the hands of just six incredibly powerful media corporations” which own, “television networks, cable channels, movie studios, newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, music labels and even many of our favorite websites” (Snyder, 2010). Six corporations own

essentially every form of communication. This means that these six businesses have complete control of America's media. The boards of these corporations are made up of extremely wealthy people. Cromwell then asks, "How likely is it, then, that such owners would happily allow their own newspaper, radio, or TV station to criticize systematically the 'free market' capitalism which is the source of his material wealth?" (Cromwell, 2002). Most people would not critique the system that has allowed them to make money and prosper. The quality of information that the nation receives is not important to them. They are wealthy enough to control the system, so therefore they believe that the system should allow them to make more money. Roth, Huff, and Project Censored summarize this concept by declaring, "We are in an era of privatization and inequality" (Roth, Huff, & Project Censored, 2014). This inequality allowed the wealthy to become wealthy and therefore control the mass media.

Corporations have altered the scope of the media. As McChesney and Nichols claim, "The traditional distinctions of left and right are not decisive categories. The more accurate split is between up and down, those who benefit materially from the corrupt status quo, and those who do not." In this sense left versus right or liberal versus conservation no longer hold any importance. It only matters whether a system will support a corporation or not. If it is support of the corporation then one should expect to hear about it on the radio, TV programs, in books or any other medium imaginable. However, if something does not support a corporation then it is likely to not get any airtime, resulting in the general public being completely unintelligible about this concept. McChesney and Nichols explain, "The system works to advance in interests of the wealthy few, rather than the many" (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). In Lehrer's book *The Anti Chomsky Reader*, Lehrer counters this idea proposing that, "Chomsky does nothing to show how being owned by a corporation leads to a desire to advance particular political views.

Corporations, after all, exist primarily to make profits” (Lehrer, 2006). However, there are many ways in which corporations have been known to influence political views such as censoring journalists, solely being concerned with profits, manipulating advertising, and using propaganda to distract viewers.

One of the simplest motives of a corporation is to make money. When these corporations own the news channels, then profits become the focus of these channels, instead of informing the public. McChesney and Richols suggest, “The problem with their media system is that it exists to serve their interests, not ours. Profit trumps civil society every time.” Capitalism puts profits before the common person’s interests. Corporations “could care less about their critics—on the left or one the right. They are worried about making the most money possible.” (McChesney & Richols, 2002). With this system, the news that is shown will be the “news” that generates the most profits. This is whatever program will produce the most money through advertising and will draw the largest audience.

Advertising is a growing industry that is quickly getting out of hand. In 2001, “Businesses spent over \$230 billion in the United States on advertising.” (McChesney & Richols, 2002). In 2010, individual companies such as General Motors and Ford spent \$4.2 billion and \$3.9 billion on advertising (Laya, 2011). A large portion of the money goes to media corporations to pay for TV commercials, magazine, Internet, or radio ads. Since these corporations are receiving so much money from advertisers, and they are in business to make a profit, they will do practically anything to appease advertisers. Parenti explains, “Corporate sponsors might cancel advertising accounts not only when they feel that the reporting reflects poorly on their product, but also when they perceive a ‘liberal’ drift in the news and commentary” (Parenti, 2008). They simply want to keep the advertisers happy so they will

continue to support the corporation. This may result in a loss of integrity for the type of news reported. Cromwell reports that in 1992, “90 percent [of news reporters] said that advertisers tried to interfere with newspaper content, and 70 percent tried to stop news stories altogether. Forty percent admitted that advertisers had in fact influenced a story” (Cromwell, 2002). This means that the businesses that are trying to get you to buy their product during commercial breaks are actually influencing the stories told during the news programs. At this point, the advertisers and the corporations work together to broadcast propaganda into all forms of mass media.

Mass media is used to bombard citizens with propaganda, sometimes distracting people from other greater issues. McChesney and Richols eloquently point out, “The media are as inescapable and ubiquitous a presence in our lives as the environment.” The average American is constantly facing the media. It can affect all aspects of their lives. McChesney and Richols reported, “The massively monopolized, and increasingly irresponsible media is no longer just unreliable. Their media are fostering our crises” (McChesney & Richols, 2002). American society has become stuck in a vicious cycle. Corporations are controlling the media, and plaguing the system with propaganda. In order to bring about a reform, citizens must petition and vote against these practices. Unfortunately, the only way to spread news of these reforms is through the media, which is controlled by corporations. Corporations are creating the crisis. Parenti explains in his book, how the media avoids certain subjects. It rarely talks about the impact of national debt, income distribution, public sector spending, or how “free trade” globalism is actually monopoly corporate globalism (Parenti, 2008). These subjects are touchy for corporations because they do not show them in the best light. However, if the public is to make informed decisions involving these topics, then they need to be knowledgeable in them.

With the media censored, there is no hope of an educated public, and without a media reform, for a functioning democracy.

As technology improves, news media has become more and more accessible.

Unfortunately, this media is being filtered by corporations to reflect the values they deem important. What was intended to be news from a free press became a source of propaganda. Oftentimes this news tells people how to think. Roth, Hoth and Project Censored observe that, “Critical thinking skills have not kept up with the speed of the digital revolution” (Roth, Huff & Project Censored, 2014). It seems the American public has lost its ability to read articles and analyze them. They simply believe what they hear. The American people need to be more skeptical. If they would ask where data came from or what expert knowledge an article pertains, they would not be able to be fooled as quickly. Perhaps then corporations would not be able to capitalize on the public’s gullibility. They certainly would have a harder time spreading propaganda if the society were more skeptical. As McChesney and Nichols suggest, “Corporate control and hyper commercialism are having what may be their most devastating effects in the realm of journalism, and as journalism is the oxygen of democracy, it is here that we must devote considerable attention” (McChesney & Nichols, 2002). Corporations have worked their way into having a strong hold on the mass media system. This allows them to regulate the information that is available to citizens. When citizens vote they use their knowledge from the media to make decisions. Therefore the corporations can control the outcome of this democracy, resulting in the absence of a free market system.

The Deceit of Higher Education

President Barack Obama shocked the nation with his recent proposal for a free college education. He suggested granting a community college education to all those that keep up a

certain grade point average. According to Queally, “The plan will save the average full time student \$3,800 in tuition fees, making a community college education available and affordable to roughly 9 million students each year” (Queally, 2015). This system would make it much easier for a number of students to continue on through college. When one analyzes the current structure of Congress, they will see that a majority of it is Republican. Based on this, the likelihood of Obama’s vision passing is very small. However it would not be the first time the United States offered free education.

The G.I. Bill or formally the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 was created following World War II. “It established hospitals, made low-interest mortgages available and granted stipends covering tuition and expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools.” This allowed the veterans that had just risked their lives for the country, to receive a much deserved education. Many young men had to drop what they were doing at home in order to go to the war. This meant they were missing these crucial years of education. However, this bill allowed them to go to a college and charge the American taxpayer with the bill. Legislation extended this bill to cover the veterans of the Korean War as well. In total, “From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to \$4 billion from the bill’s unemployment compensation program” (“G.I. Bill,” n.d.). America thrived because such a large portion of its public had a college education. If the government wants to see this level of growth and success, then they need to instate a program to educate the people.

One of the national heroes in today’s society is Bill Gates. At one point he was the richest man in the world. His Father, Bill Gates Sr., served in the Army in World War II and thus benefitted from the G.I. Bill. According to Collins, “When he returned, [from the war] the G.I. Bill enabled him to attend college and law school for free. His debt-free education propelled

him to a career as an attorney and allowed him to provide excellent educational opportunities to his three children.” This is just one example of the effects of the bill. Without it, it is possible that Bill Gates would not have the education he has today. He may not have gone on to start Microsoft. Therefore, it is possible that computers would not be popular or even accessible to the middle class American. Collins summarizes, “The Greatest Generation after World War II was created not only by their own grit, but also through major public investments in their prosperity” (Collins, 2014). The issue today is not that the current youths are lazy as some people in older generations claim. It is simply that the government is not investing in this generation’s prosperity. In the end this would be a worth while investment for the government when one considers the increased amount of income taxes they can collect when the average citizen is educated and making a greater income.

Higher education is perceived to be the ticket to success. With a college degree, it is believed that one can get a higher paying job and be overall happier in the end. However, this is proving to be false. With the job market getting increasingly more and more competitive, those with a college degree are not necessarily guaranteed a job. For those that spend their life savings on this degree this is a very scary sight. According to Berger, “In 2008, 81 percent of adults thought college was a worthwhile investment. This year, 57 percent think so” (Berger, 2013). The national support for education is falling as citizens are seeing more and more unemployed college graduates. Appel, Taylor, and Dispatch have a much more cynical view. They state, “The for-profits [universities] take in the money but leave the students with a substandard education, heavy student loan debt, non-transferable credits, worthless degrees, or no degrees at all” (Appel, Taylor, & Dispatch, 2014). While higher education can be good for some, it does not grant all that it is believed it promises.

The most prominent of these promises is the belief that a degree will allow a graduate to get a job. With the current state of competition both in universities and the job market, this statement cannot be justified. There are cases of graduates working minimum wage jobs trying to pay off their college debts. Queally touches on this argument, stating, “Though told by society that the key to a bright and prosperous future is largely dependent on getting a degree, the new generation is becoming increasingly skeptical of this claim” (Queally, 2014). Students are questioning whether it is worth it to attend higher education at all. Appel et al. suggest that it is not worth it, at least not from a for-profit university. They point out, “For-profit graduates fare little better on the job market than job seekers with high school degrees; their diplomas, that is, are a net loss, offering essentially the same grim job prospects as if they had never gone to college, plus a lifetime debt sentence” (Appel et al., 2014). While they have a very extreme view, in some cases this is justifiable. With the cost to attend college so great, depending on the degree, it may not be worth it. There have always been cases where the dropouts become extremely successful, like Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs, while the graduates end up working a low level job, like McDonalds. This stories always shock and disturb the public. The average citizen does not want to hear that their thousand-dollar investment in education is worthless. This has resulted in many people becoming blind to this outcome. They simply are ignoring the failures of others so they can believe that they themselves will be successful. However, these stories of dropout successes have gone from few and far between to almost a regular occurrence. It seems one has an equally likely chance of being successful with and without a college education. “As the number of people attending college increases, the value of its education decreases. Some Millennials say ‘a four-year college degree isn’t as valuable as it used to be,’ but continue with their higher education in order to have a real chance in the job market,”

Queally reveals (Queally, 2014). For the most part, the American society is not ignorant of these changes. They know that college is very expensive and does not guarantee any ticket to success. However, they continue to attend four-year universities. The idea that a diploma equals success is so engrained in the American society's minds that they cannot break this trend. In reality, college is simply an extremely risky investment.

The most common critique of the higher education system is how expensive it has become. Washburn states, "Since 1980, college tuition and fees at public universities have increased at three times the rate of inflation, rising over 50 percent in real terms over the past decade alone" (Washburn, 2005). College tuition continues to rise. Currently, there is a growing demand for it, so universities can continue to increase their prices. It has reached a level where few can actually afford an education. At some point it will reach a point where no one can afford it. Seybold recognizes, "For those in the poorest fifth, costs at State U have skyrocketed from 42 percent of family income to 114 percent" (Seybold, 2014). College has simply become too expensive for the lower class. Many lower class and middle class families are deprived of a decent education because they cannot pay for it. As a result, student loan debt has quadrupled in the ten years between 2003 and 2013 to an average of \$30,000 per student. Appel et al. continue to humorously acknowledge, "Add up the lifetime debt service that former students will pay on \$1 trillion, over and above the principal they borrow, and you could run a very good public university system for what we are paying capital markets to fund an ever-worsening one" (Appel et al., 2014). The amount of money that students will end up paying is enough to finance an entire university. This university may even be better funded than the one that these students graduated from with frightening amount of debt. Queally states, "Americans need more knowledge and skills to meet the demands of a growing global economy without having to take

on decades of debt before they even embark on their career” (Queally, 2015). This is suggesting that knowledge is required to be successful in the world. However, many Americans are plagued with debt in the process of receiving this knowledge. Instead of building their wealth from the day they graduate, they have to start with simply trying to get above zero. They will work for years before they can pay off this debt. Queally further reasons, “We have created a ‘lost generation’ of debt-saddled, young people lost not only to themselves but unable to help build a more vibrant country (Queally, 2014). The youth are more worried about their finances than any global or national problems. Money will continue to rule the government system because this is the only thing these students can focus on. As they vote, they will vote in favor for anything that will cut them a small break. This may be fewer income taxes or less government policies. However, if there were government policies to help these students not take on so much debt, then they wouldn’t be in this position. By not assisting students with the debt crisis, the government is creating a cycle of continued financial distress.

Possibly the largest strain on the integrity of universities is corporations. Many corporations are closely related to the nation’s top universities. They fund many of the nation’s projects, but also play a large role in influencing the universities decisions. Washburn relates, “Industrial forces began pushing America’s universities to forge closer ties with private industry.” This resulted in the actual objective of the university, “To nurture intellectual creativity and talent” to be pushed to the side (Washburn, 2005). Hildreth addresses the concerns of having a large corporation as the business partner of a university.

For example, there are the students who on average study just one hour a day. There is the college president who demands sacrifices but covets a huge salary. There are the colleges that build awesome scaling walls and swimming pools all in the interest of

wooing big money from wealthy families or out-of-state students who bring the promise of federal loan dollars. And, sadly, there is the continuing accumulation of student loan debt coupled with low graduation rates and scores of alumni who are either unemployed or underemployed (Hildreth, 2014).

These terrible outcomes are all the effect of corporate control. They are crippling the nation's higher education system. Many colleges today have submitted to the capitalistic model of doing whatever will make them the most money. If there is a demand for it, they will build it. "To attract big money, colleges initiated their own borrowing spree and building boom. Along came new multi-story libraries, elaborate gymnasiums, and recreation centers, five-star dining facilities, and spa-like student attractions" (Hildreth, 2014). In order to make more money, colleges build facilities that will attract students, and their parents' checkbooks. They build anything from computer labs, to rock walls, so that during their campus tour they can say that they are the best. Perhaps this money would be better spent on lab equipment or teacher's salaries, for these would improve the education that the student is receiving. Appel et al. state that the "University of Phoenix has spent as much as \$600 million a year on advertising...At some schools the money put into the actual education of a single student has been as low as \$700 per year" (Appel et al., 2014). This huge imbalance shows the true priorities of the university. The quality of the students' education is not important. However, the number of students the school is able to pull in is highly important, for it determines how much income the school will bring in. As Seybold concludes, "Corporate influence over the university has fundamentally changed the trajectory of the institution" (Seybold, 2014). Colleges have forever been changed by their desire to make money. This has already begun to have costly effects on its students.

The higher education system plays a large role in the American society. The nation will have more opportunities to thrive when its citizens are more knowledgeable. Also, the system of democracy requires that the citizens know what they are voting for. If the general public does not have a good understanding of politics and the government, they cannot be expected to make beneficial decisions. Higher education should do this, while also teaching students how to think critically. This is very important in order for society to not be over ruled by powerful forces like corporations. Queally points out, “Our country’s greatest asset is the energy and creativity of our young people. Why allow that energy to be siphoned off to increase the wealth of a handful of millionaires? Isn’t that a form of cultural suicide?” (Queally, 2014). Queally is arguing that corporate greed is indirectly limiting the creativity of the youth through education. Without this creativity, there could be a period without new inventions or discoveries. Technology may remain stagnant for the first time in history. Theoretically, education is important. However, this idea of learning critical thinking and becoming prepared for a job has begun to be stripped away from students. Students are currently finding themselves without a proper education and an increasing amount of debt.

In order to improve the current higher education system to be more fitting for future generations, the government needs to make policy changes. First, there needs to be a limit to how much money corporations can give to support a school. This would reduce the amount of biased research in universities. Second, Obama’s plan should be installed so that those with a certain grade point average can attend community college for two years free of charge. While this proposition does not exactly provide free education for all, it is a step in the right direction. Those who are determined enough to obtain a diploma and transfer to a four-year university can at least receive the first half of their education for free. This will still result in a system of

inequalities. Those who can afford to go to a trade school or a four-year university will do so, while those who cannot, will go to community college. The community colleges may become overridden with students. However, reforms like this allow a greater number of people to have the opportunity to become educated, which should be the objective of America's higher education system. Bill Gates Sr. suggests a system where "Millionaires and billionaires would pay back the society that made their wealth possible, thanks in part to public investments in education, infrastructure, property rights protections, and so much more" (Collins, 2014). Here Gates is explaining that today's wealthy are influenced by government policies. Therefore, a portion of their capital is the community's wealth. With this in mind, the wealthy should give up a fraction of their affluence to set up a program for public education. This, combined with some governmental support, would be more than enough to education the nation's youth for free.

Conclusion

"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time"

Sir Winston Churchill ("Democracy," n.d.)

Although Churchill was not an American, his quote about democracy can be applied towards the current government system in the United States of America. Countless problems remind citizens, everyday of the shortcomings of the American government. There are corporations that are controlling government figures as their puppets, propaganda is commonly viewed and taken for news, and many college graduates cannot find employment, to name a few. But what is worse is that many citizens are not even aware of these problems. They continue through their life thinking everything is fine. Perhaps, they only stop and think about politics

around election time. These people fall prey to the government and many of the corporations controlling it. They accept the information that is given to them and do not try to investigate further. If the American government were more noble this would be fine, but countless scandals have proved that it is not to be trusted.

Regardless of whether it is to be trusted, the government is necessary for the survival of the United States. Reforms lead to more systems set up to protect citizens and their rights. Corporations are becoming wealthy off of American citizens' capital. Many use this wealth to support candidates in presidential elections or simply different divisions of the government. This gives them more political power than the average citizen. Suddenly, candidates are much more willing to listen to these corporations and make promises to pass laws in their favor. This is a direct result of capitalism filtering through the economic system and crossing over into the government system. As a result, huge corporations have a large influence in the decisions of the government. At this point the government has transformed from a democracy to an elite class theory.

Democracy is supposed to be the power of the people. However, in today's society the power has shifted away from the people and more towards money. Corporations with the most money, therefore have the most power. The government will not pass laws that will hurt businesses, even if it is for the good of the American people. Capitalism is an ideology of competition. This splits up the public into the winners, the upper class, and the losers, the lower class. The middle class is left somewhere in the middle to fend for themselves. Capitalism is a demanding economic system that, if left unchecked, will devour resources. Because of this, it requires a strong government. The current status of democracy in the United States is simply not a strong enough government to protect its citizens from the capitalistic overcoming.

One of the fundamental requirements of a democratic society is a free press. The Founding Fathers were aware of this when they wrote the Bill of Rights. They granted every citizen the right to both say what they want and have access to independent news. However, more recently this right has been quietly stripped from the average citizen. Most citizens rely on mass media for their news. Mass media has been taken over by corporations. Many journalists are not able to publish the most revealing stories because they are either censored or afraid of losing their jobs. Presidential debates have become more about entertainment than news; candidates know the topics in advance and have time to prepare for them. Often the government uses the media as a form of propaganda to distract civilians from greater issues. Lastly, the media does not provide a check against abuses of power. The media has succumbed to corporate control and has become dysfunctional in its role of educating citizens.

Higher education is believed to be the way out of a career in a minimum wage job. It promises a brighter future with more wealth and a happier life. However, it is not able to live up to these expectations. In recent years, the job market has become increasingly competitive. It is difficult for even a college graduate to secure employment. Colleges are continuing to raise tuition rates, making students take on more debt. Many students will be attempting to pay off this large sum for decades after they graduate. High prices have kept many prospective students away. As more and more students give up the dream of higher education, a degree becomes a luxury for the wealthy. Due to a lack of government support, universities had to search for money elsewhere. They turned to corporations. Colleges began using marketing strategies to entice students to come. Now a student's tuition paycheck may fund a new rock wall instead of a Chemistry class. Government reform is needed to steer the higher education back on track.

The key aspect of a traditional democracy is its ability to right itself. When an issue arises, it can be brought to the public, citizens can vote, and changes can be made. This system allows the country to grow and expand along with technology and its people. Sometimes for this change to happen, injustices have to occur; sometimes protests are sufficient. Either way the public has to be educated, through the media or through higher education, about the actions of the government. This is the only hope the country has at rising up against the corporate elite and tipping the balance back in the favor of the average, hardworking, moral citizen.

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