

The True American Government

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## Abstract

There is a difference between what is ideal and what is real. The visions of equality and democracy have always been the idealistic principles that the American government represents and claims in an international scale. Yet, for these goals to be true, average Americans cannot simply accept what they have been told by the government or society; they must critically analyze the current realities of their government. With careful analysis, one might question whether democracy, a political ideology that emphasizes the goals of the many, can truly coexist with an economic system such as capitalism, which emphasizes personal gain and the goals of the few. Under further investigation, one might also look to the mass media, the supposed informant of the majority. Is this informant unbiased and accurate? Or do the goals of the few detract from the media's designated purpose of helping and enlightening the general public? Furthermore, is the policy-making of the United States in areas as important as education favoring the needs of the majority? Under close inspection, that inquisitive citizen may find himself disappointed, realizing that the governmental power is not evenly distributed amongst all Americans, but heavily concentrated within the few members of the elite class. Although the idea of the American government as a democracy is most ideal, it is a sad reality that the current government coincides with the elite class theory, substituting rule by the many for rule by the few.

## The True American Government

### **Introduction**

The United States has always prided itself for being a democracy, a country of freedom, devoid of any tyranny, enforcing a government ruled by the common man. From the very beginning in the colonial attempt to break from the British monarchical government, the Founding Fathers had emphasized the dominance that the majority held over the government, viewing government as an institution to serve the people, rather than to control them. The Declaration of Independence states:

Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed,--That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive...it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness (“Declaration of Independence”, n.d.).

However, this vision of the American government was established in 1776; it is a matter of question whether these ideals were implemented two centuries after they were first formed. Whether it is the gradual expansion of the United States from thirteen colonies to fifty states, the retreat from isolationist policies and into an international economic and political force, or the expanding influences of corporate power, the modern day United States is far different from when the Founding Fathers settled their goals of a self-governing country.

The rules and advice of our Founding Fathers could have easily been forgotten. George Washington’s warning against splitting the American government into two political parties was completely ignored in the presidential election that immediately followed his term. This

occurrence, Washington feared, would give rise to “an individual [of] some prevailing faction [with a] disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty” (Quidam, 2008).

With two centuries filled with countless events and changes since 1776, it is understandable that the United States government and the citizens’ political perspectives are different than what they once were. Today, although the majorities view the American government as a democracy, there are some who have challenged this claim, attesting that the American government is in the form of another ideology.

In general, there are four basic theories to describe the American government. The first is the traditional democratic theory, in which the country’s governance is strongly influenced by the citizens. This label does not only pertain to the direct democracy of ancient Greece, but extends its definition to the indirect, or Republic, democracy that many believe the American government to be today. In this form of government, citizens voice their opinion and assume that the politicians will accurately represent them.

The second is pluralism, a governmental ideology in which citizens arrange themselves by opinions, forming groups to vie for power and control. In this type of government, opposing groups will compete with one another over the ability to govern. Although pluralism holds the similarity of citizen participation with the democratic theory, it is different in that the power is concentrated in groups instead of individuals.

The next form of government is the one that Washington feared—hyperpluralism. In this form of governing, there are far too many opposing groups for the majority of a country to be satisfied. The opposing groups reach a stalemate and neither side wins, creating rigidity within policy making and governmental administration.

Lastly, some believe in the elite class theory in which the government is divided into socioeconomic classes and the concentration of power is unequally distributed, favoring the upper elite class. Unlike the previous political theories, this one rejects the political freedoms of every individual, specifically neglecting those of the lower classes.

Under close speculation, it appears that the United States government has strayed away from its goals of democracy, implementing the political practices describe by the elite class theory. Enabled by the self and profit-concerned economic system of capitalism, the power of all individuals have diminished, with the upper elite class taking advantage of their economic prowess to extend their dominance into the political arena. It is evident by the unjust and excessive governmental power granted to the wealthy class, the ability for corporations to filter what the average citizen learns through mass media, and the inability to shape policies, such as higher education, to benefit the majority, that the governmental plan that the Founding Fathers had laid out has been abandoned, with the wealthy elite class holding the reigns of the American government.

### **The Coexistence of Capitalism and Democracy**

Although it is not explicitly stated within the Constitution, the average American will attest that the United States is a land of democracy, a country in which average citizens have the opportunity for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, although not typically a conscious thought, most Americans know to some extent that the United States economically functions under capitalism, a major institution that the U.S. spent over \$5.5 trillion to protect from a communist epidemic during the Cold War (Schwartz, 2008). While it is true that the average American might try to defend both claims, it is still a question whether they can concretely define both

ideologies, whether they can prove that both institutions currently run our country and, most importantly, that if democracy and capitalism can truly coexist.

The word “democracy” was created from the Greek words *demos*, meaning “the people”, and *kratia* meaning “power” or “authority” (“What is a Democracy,” n.d.). As the first government to use democracy, the Greeks visualized it as a system in which all citizens had an influence in governmental issues. In modern day society, especially with a country as populous as the United States, it is difficult to have a direct democracy, but the government by the majority should still be the ultimate aim in a true democracy, regardless of whatever form. On the flipside, the Oxford dictionary, widely considered as the official dictionary of the English language, refers to capitalism as “an economic and *political* system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by state” (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

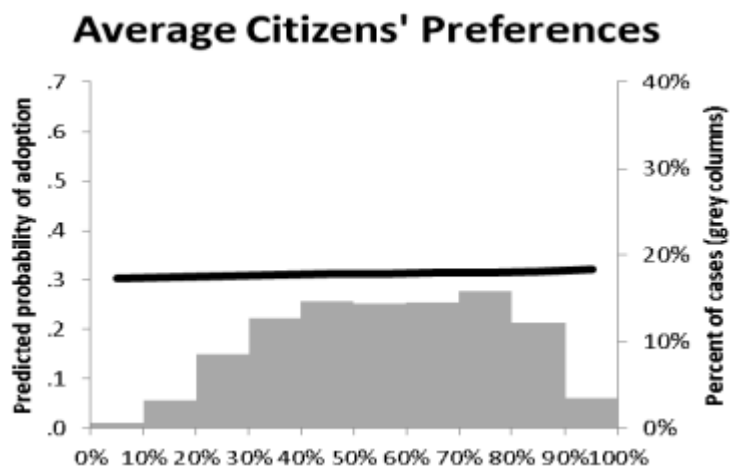
One might find it interesting that one of the universal dictionaries of the English language refers to capitalism as a “political system”. This rightly highlights the political pull that capitalism has in government affairs. It is certain that the United States functions under capitalism with various corporations becoming their own entities separate from the state, but is it possible that this country can operate politically under both democracy, an institution that supports the political power of the majority, and capitalism, an institution that promotes competition and self-interest? The answer is simply this: it cannot. With capitalism inevitably creating hierarchies with the upper one percent using their power to influence governmental policies, the majority of the population struggling to make their input as effective as those with money and power, and with everyone, including government officials as influential as the president of the United States, living under an ideology that promotes profit and self-interest, it is

extremely difficult to have a fully-functioning democracy and its promises of liberty, justice, and equality present in the United States.

The U.S. had a whopping 9.3 million millionaires in 2013 (Fox, 2014). While nine million may seem like a large number, this population reflects only one percent whereas over 14.4 percent of the American people lived in poverty that same year (“2013 Highlights,” n.d.). Now in 2014, the average CEO is making over 774 times the income of minimum-wage workers (Biron, 2014). This significantly large economic gap was enabled by capitalism, a system that allows and even encourages individuals to make profit and serve private interests.

One might argue that an economic gap does not necessarily take away the voices of average citizens; they are still able to propose bills, vote for state laws and government officials, protest, etc. But the important question remains if the citizens’ voices are actually heard amongst the voices of the one percent, individuals of which are closely and financially tied to those who make the law. There have been numerous times when the government ruled in favor for large corporations, whether the case was tolerating low building or working standards and maintaining a considerably low minimum wage in the twentieth century, to the more recent bail-outs for struggling companies and the lack of punishment for corporations in the twenty-first century.

With profit, money, and personal investments as the main priorities in our increasingly stratified society, there’s little concern left for the majority, as is the goal in a true democracy. Political scientists from Princeton



(Gilens & Page, 2012 )

and Northeastern Universities said:

““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.

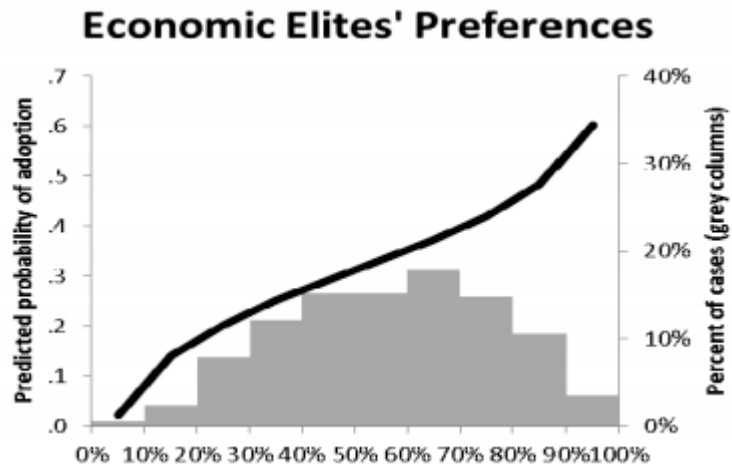
government policy... While

mass-based interest groups and

average citizens have little or no

independent influences ”” (Street,

2014).



(Gilens & Page, 2012)

In fact, after studying 1,779 policy cases, they discovered that a policy that lacked support from the one percent was approved only 18 percent of the time whereas the policies that had backing from the economic elite class were implemented 45 percent of the time (Gilens & Page, 2012).

Their data (shown above) depicts their research of the probability of a policy’s implementation based on whether the policy had preference from the average citizen or the economic elite. As one can see, the probability is unproportionately skewed favoring the economic elites, again only one percent of the American population. Just from this one research project alone, it is apparent that a government rule by the average citizen is rarely occurring.

Some argue that the blame for this inequality rests in problems within government bureaucracy and that capitalism itself is simply a separate, economic entity that plays no role in the effectiveness of the government. For example, a writer from the Huffington Post wrote an article ensuring that capitalism is not a political model and in fact, the economic independence



provided by capitalism “fosters freedom” (J. Friedman, 2012). What the author neglects to mention, however, is who the freedom is intended for—the common citizen or a member of the one percent?

Freedom itself can be interpreted in various ways, whether in social structure, economics, and politics. Within the first two categories, although many Americans have the misconception that social mobility is accessible for the average person, studies show that in America, a citizen whose parents were economically in the bottom quintile has a 7.9% chance of making it into the top quintile, less than half the probability of that in our Western European counterparts (H. Friedman, 2012). Americans should have the freedom and the ability to advance their socioeconomic positions, but under current circumstances, social mobility is becoming increasingly difficult. Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors pointed out the most basic solution to the United State’s social stratification, saying:

Children of wealthy parents already have much more access to opportunities to succeed than children of poor families, and this is likely to be increasingly the case in the future unless we take steps to ensure that all children have access to quality education, health care, a safe environment and other opportunities that are necessary to have a fair shot at economic success. (Vandivier, 2013)

However, the chairman’s ideas to have an equal economic opportunity are hindered by capitalism’s emphasis on profit and competition. Those securely at the top one percent would want to stay in the one percent and with the inability for social mobility they are more than capable of defending their economic status. Thus, the proclaimed freedoms of capitalism in the economic and social context are reserved mainly for the economic elite, allowing them to

continue making an exponential amount of money while the income gap between them and the average citizen continues to grow.

Again, there remains the question of whether social and economic inequality inevitably equates to political inequality. In the political sense, many will testify that Americans of various socioeconomic positions possess freedom in various forms, whether by voting for the governmental officials they want, protesting against government policies they disagree with, or openly voicing their political opinions in the media or in daily life. However, it is a question whether all these freedoms really have an impact on the government, as is intended in a democracy. From the data provided by Gilens and Page, one can see that although average citizens have the freedom to speak their minds, oftentimes even when collectively in agreement, they have little effect in government policy-making. The majority was also proven ineffective in the 2000 presidential election, where Bush beat Gore through the Electoral College, even though Gore had 500,000 more votes from the American population (“Presidential Election of 2000,” n.d.) Bush’s victory was obtained when his campaign sued Florida to stop the individual voting counts, which were steadily showing a victory in Gore’s favor. Bush, a member of the economic elite, and his lawyers were able to present a solid case and the Supreme Court ruling called for the official termination of the Florida voting count. This decision was split 5-4 and the five justices in favor of stopping the vote count commonly known as exceptionally conservative (“Supreme Court Case Study: Bush v. Gore,” n.d.). Whether or not the justices were conservative or libertarian, the president of the United States in 2000 was still determined by nine people of the wealthy class rather than the majority of the American population.

While it is true that there are occasions when political freedoms bare no fruit for the common citizen, some believe that having a say that is heard eighteen percent of the time is

better than having no say at all. But what if one's political freedoms endowed by the constitution are taken away? This occurred countless times in our country's history when the government suppressed various unions in order to protect the functionality and prosperity of businesses. Seen various times in our countries history, the suppression of Unions still occurs today with much encouragement from members of the economic elite, including the Koch industries which "spent \$1.2 million in the last election helping to elect Republican governors who are now trying to take away bargaining rights of state workers" (Salant, 2011). This and other forms of democratic suppression occurred especially during the Red Scare of 1919-1921 in which the United States government appropriated its citizens' rights "by suppressing radical publications, issuing injunctions against strikes, and violently mistreating strikers...All repressive measures were designed to suppress labor unrest and anticapitalist ideas" (Parenti, 1996).

In the modern day context, even with communist no longer a foreign threat, there are various instances where citizens lose their political liberties. Such was the case in the Occupy Oakland protest movement in which a peaceful demonstration resulted in violence, 80 arrests, and the injuries of five civilians. Aiming to protest against the concentrated wealth of the one percent, members of the Occupy Oakland movement simply exercised their First Amendment right of the freedom to assemble, doing so for twelve peaceful hours. Unfortunately, however, a passive demonstration was later ended by an hour of violence featuring police brutality against the peaceful protesters, who inevitably retaliated with force to defend themselves (syracuse.com, 2011). Although this specific instance is not the only example of a direct governmental inhibition of a protest, it is uncanny that the various times in history when aspects of capitalism were challenged by the common person—the formation and workings of unions, the voices of anticapitalists and radicals during the Red Scare, and the Occupy movement—those exercising

their First Amendment rights were often met with government intervention and ultimately the suppression of political freedoms.

Despite the aforementioned setbacks to a citizen's freedom, it is true that most of the time Americans have the freedoms of speech, property, assembly, etc. Surprisingly, corporations, the fruits of capitalism, were also given these freedoms in 1886 by the Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad case. That year, chief justice Morrison Waite and the Supreme Court granted all corporations the rights endowed by the fourteenth amendment, which states:

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (“14<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” n.d.).

Nowhere within the Fourteenth Amendment are corporations or other inanimate objects addressed. However, a law and history professor from Yale University admitted that “the law has treated corporations as what some lawyers call metaphysical persons. That is, they're persons for some purposes, and they're not persons for others” (Block, 2011). This means that case by case, it is entirely up to our legal systems and government to decipher whether corporations receive the rights that citizens do.

The average citizen would hope that government officials can be moral enough to determine the rights of corporations in correspondence to the rights and needs of the majority. Such was not the case in the Burwell v. Hobby Lobby case of 2014, which allowed companies to refuse to pay for health care for women seeking contraceptives on the basis that it was against

their religion, a right protected for all “citizens” under the First Amendment. With companies having the same rights as a person by *Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, they now have the right to limit the health care of their employees. But if one were to keep the goals of democracy in mind, he or she should realize that there are definitely more employees than there are corporations. By ruling in favor for the corporations’ rights, the majority is not being served (Liptak, 2014).

It is understandable, however, that with lobbying from these corporations influencing which governmental officials enter office and which policies these officials support, and capitalism inevitably pulls away from the goals of democracy. It should be apparent that campaign contributions might inevitably lead to bribery, but it was our Judicial Branch, the moral interpreters of the Constitution that determined that giving money to candidates was a form of speech in 1976 in the *Buckley vs. Vallejo* decision, saying that “a contribution serves as a general expression of support for the candidate and his views, but does not communicate the underlying basis for support” (“*Buckley v. Valeo*,” n.d.). But with 99% of the population lacking the wealth to have a similar form of speech heard in the government, this decision once again alters political representation in favor of the economic elite. The Supreme Court further explains their decision, emphasizing that giving money simply demonstrates support for the candidate. Besides, one cannot prove that a candidate’s political decisions were influenced by their donors.

However, it is highly suspicious how a lobbyist, a person already of the one percent, receives an average 22,000% return from the money they donated to candidates. One such lobbyist received 50 million dollars, money that was intended for social security for injured workers. Hardly ever do members of the 99% relish in such generous benefits, with the bank

account of a college-bound student only receiving a 2% return (Ennis, 2014). Equally interesting was Obama's response to the BP oil spill of 2010, in which many criticized him for having a "lack of urgency" to reprimand the oil company and clean up the 200 million gallons of oil in the Gulf of Mexico. Four years later, scientists are still observing detrimental effects the oil spill had on the marine environment and the Louisiana wetlands (Shleifstein, 2014). BP spent approximately 13 billion dollars to pay off damages done to the surrounding community and small businesses, but an attorney from New Orleans estimates that there are several thousand of claims from small businesses that went bankrupt but do not see a dime from BP (Brady, 2014). While big corporations like BP received \$700 billion from the government for bail-out in 2008, the American legal system enables BP to refuse to compensate the hundreds of small businesses that had to close because of the company's mistake. BP continues to operate and receives no other repercussions to Obama, who interestingly enough, was their largest donation recipient with a total of \$77,051 (Lovely, 2010). Again, there is no concrete evidence that BP's donation influenced Obama's mild reaction to the largest human-caused environmental disaster of the history of the United States but the facts and figures sparks definite suspicion.

Still, with the *Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad* case, one would think that BP would face harsher repercussions after the damage they caused to the surrounding environment and local businesses. After all, in California, there is a \$1000 fine for littering something as small as an empty bag of chips on the highway, let alone 200 million gallons of oil in the ocean. For some, however, littering might be seen as a small crime and some might excuse the BP oil spill. But worse is the faulty ignition switch of cars produced by GM Motors, a problem which the company knew about for eleven years but failed to mention until this year. This malfunction is known to have caused over thirteen deaths and instead of GM Motors going out of business or its

CEOs going to jail for neglecting to secure the safety of its customers, the corporation only had to pay a fine of \$35 million. The company could have recalled their products sooner, but knowing that the cost of reproduction would have been more than being sued, the company kept faulty cars on the market. Although the families of the deceased might argue that \$35 million will never bring their loved ones back, the CEOs were just practicing their right to make a profit under our country's capitalist economy (Associated Press, 2014).

But corporations that flourish under capitalism do not always prove detrimental to society and the environment. Many highlight capitalism for the technological innovations and efficiencies of today. Furthermore some say that in capitalism, "the principle is that the productive [corporations] may enjoy the [monetary] fruits of their efforts only on condition that their efforts benefit others as well" (Palmer, 2011). But already we can see in the cases of the BP oil spill and the faulty ignition switches from GM Motors that others might not benefit but are actually hurt by the monopolies of capitalists. Furthermore, how much of a monetary reward should capitalists receive, especially if the profits are exponentially increasing? Are corporations really contributing that much to society that CEOs deserve 331 times the amount of income as one of their workers? (Biron, 2014). Yes, in an ideal setting, free market and corporations would serve society and the common person. But in reality, the encouragement of personal profit inevitably leads to greed in today's economic system and creates an environment in which only one percent of the population is served.

The social justices of income difference aside, the real question is—does capitalism deter Americans' hope for democracy? In modern day society, it seems that the members of the elite class are the main ones benefiting from democracy's freedoms. Some believe that although current conditions remain less democratic than hoped for, capitalism does not necessarily have to

be removed but improved. After all, large corporations were not as prominent as they were during the founding of our country. Thus, the limiting of corporate powers was not a common consideration when constructing the Constitution. Still, even if our Founding Fathers could revise the Constitution to address potential problems with corporations, the economic system might stray away from capitalism and towards socialism. However, until the government addresses corporations as threats to the United States democracy, with the disparity of policy implementation according to the average citizen and the one percent, the suppression of political freedoms for the American citizen, the ineffectiveness of the majority's opinion, and the lobbying for more political pull and economic benefits, deterring from the needs of the majority, democracy is constantly challenged by the realities of capitalism. Therefore, as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis worded it, "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).

### **Corporate Ownership of Media**

In a government such as democracy in which the common man is supposedly given the political power, it is of utmost importance that each citizen be thoroughly educated in order to produce a just, efficient, and fully-functioning government. In the early days of democracy in Ancient Greece, civilizations lacked the enormous populations of modern day society. Back then, political issues traveled frequently through word of mouth amongst citizens. Thus, a form of mass media was unneeded. However, in today's world with larger populations and busier citizens, the ordinary citizen relies on the media to inform him of the current events or issues circulating within the government and economy. With a properly informed and educated populace, citizens are able to make their own judgments as they see fit, enabling them to contribute to the construction of the most fair and productive government possible.



Throughout United States history, the press was viewed as a “surrogate for the larger public” (Milovanovich, n.d.). Newspaper, radio, newscasts, etc. functioned as a liaison between the general public and the political and economic administration. Aside from connecting the two entities, the free press is meant to serve the citizens, making it so that the majority rather than the governing body or a small elite group would accrue the political and economic benefits.

Therefore in the broadest sense,

A free press can serve as: (1) a watchdog against abuse by those in positions of power, (2) a source of substantial information for citizens about social and political issues, and (3) a forum in which diverse opinions can be communicated to others. Each of these functions, which overlap and are inter-connected, deserves closer consideration.

(Croteau and Hoynes, 1999).

From the beginning of the formation of United States government, the Founding Fathers realized the importance of the press, addressing the issues within the First Amendment and stating that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...” (“First Amendment-US Constitution”, 2014). The Founding Fathers firmly addressed the prohibition of government intervention within the media but failed to address a larger threat—corporations. With the lack of corporate power present in the writing of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers failed to address the now relevant threat of corporate interference in mass media. With the interference from large businesses, the press fails to truly be “free” and thus inhibiting its roles as informant and watchdog to the general public.

In the past, there have been instances where the duties of the free press were upheld. These were the times that the press remained “free” from either governmental control or corporate monopoly. The media’s role as a watchdog was most notably met by the muckrakers of

the early 1900s. One of the most notable muckrakers, or journalists exposing the injustices of corporate or governmental policies, was Upton Sinclair who published *The Jungle*, a book exposing the Chicago meatpacking industry for the extremely unsanitary conditions and components of its sold products. Following the book's publication, the nation protested in disgust and President Roosevelt reacted by signing for the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906. Because of the freedoms endowed to the press, Sinclair was able to oust the terribly unsanitary conditions of food companies, forcing the population and the government to action, which concluded in political measures meant to protect the common citizen ("Muckrakers", n.d.)

Whereas Sinclair's journalistic tactics were praised, the journalists of today are hesitant to expose corporations to such extreme lengths. Anything that can prove to be detrimental to a corporations' profit or image is frowned upon in a media largely owned by the top corporations themselves. In 1994, ABC News hosted a program informing the public that two tobacco companies, Philip Morris and R. J. Reynolds, had manipulated the nicotine control in cigarettes so that users would keep smoking. In response, the tobacco companies sued the owner of ABC news, Capital Cities/ABC Inc., for libel. In the end, ABC News publicly apologized saying, "...we should not have reported that Philip Morris and Reynolds add significant amounts of nicotine... We apologize to our audience, Philip Morris and Reynolds." Many lawyers believed that Capital Cities/ABC Inc. could have fought the tobacco companies in court since their facts about the nicotine was essentially accurate. However, the tobacco companies sued Capital Cities/ABC Inc. for \$3 million and further challenging in court could have potentially cost the media company \$10 billion, which was much more than their 1994 total revenue of \$6.4 billion. John Coal, a lawyer with a history against large tobacco companies in court, said, "The evidence

is overwhelming that ABC could have successfully defended this case... This is a corporate sellout, pure and simple” (Landler, 1995).

This hesitancy to publish anything that could lower the profits of larger corporations prevents journalists from publishing any article or story that could potentially help people, which is ultimately the main goal of the free press. Aside from the threat of lawsuits from ousted companies, outside corporations interfere with the freedom of the press in the presence of advertisement. Especially with printed sources, the press seeks sponsorship from corporations to help pay for the cost of production. Without corporations’ advertisement, the cost of newspapers and magazines would inflate and hardly sell. Unfortunately, companies refuse to sponsor news groups that publish articles that can prove to be detrimental to their business, thus preventing any stories that can potentially help the average American against the occasionally unfair tactics of profit-hungry corporations. It is difficult to imagine TIME magazine criticizing the government bailouts of large banks with a hefty advertisement from Bank of America. In fact, in a study of 150 news editors in 1992, researchers found that 90 percent of the editors had dealt with advertisers attempting to intervene with the published content, 70 percent said that advertisers had attempted to rid of whole stories, and 40 percent of the advertiser’s attempts had succeeded in distorting a story (Cromwell, 2002). This complication of corporate interference is especially apparent on a local level. An article had been published in the San Jose Mercury Newspaper, sharing inside information on how to make the lowest deal possible at the local car dealerships. Coincidentally, the car dealerships were sponsors of the local newspaper and forced the news company to deny their previous information and publicly apologize. Although the article had the potential to benefit the local citizens, the interference of corporations yet again inhibits the press from serving the common man (Media Education Foundation, 1997).

Aside from watchdog or informant, the press is supposed to provide a forum for people and groups of different perspectives to discuss their viewpoints. In journalism, however, it is important that the information remain accurate, from reliable resources, and lacking of any bias. Consequently, in an effort to remain unbiased, the press oftentimes fails to allow a common citizen voice his or her opinions since the thoughts of a humble worker seem to lack reliability. Political commenter Noam Chomsky believed that, “The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest”, thus the voices of those with large governmental or corporate offices, or “specialists”, are amplified whereas the opinions of oftentimes educated citizens are ignored, creating an imbalanced platform for political and economic discussion (Cromwell, 2012).

In the past, the government had made efforts to create the open forum that Croteau and Hoynes prophesized, enabling the general public to hear both sides of every story. In 1949, the Federal Communications Commission instilled the Fairness Doctrine, which would officially implement this balanced forum for open discussion. Although the doctrine was only applicable to broadcasts, it represented the ideality of the free press, mandating that broadcasters include air time from the opposing view of the original segment, when requested. The doctrine did not force broadcasters to implement equal airtime, but simply to allow the opposing perspectives a slight opportunity to defend their case. Later, companies like Red Lion Broadcasting would argue that the Fairness Doctrine interfered with their freedom of speech. In the forming of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers established the freedom of speech for the citizens, not intangible corporate powers, of the country. However with the Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad case in 1886, corporations were officially granted personhood like any other citizen. With this principle established, the Fairness Doctrine was later deemed unconstitutional and ended in 1987, thus

allowing room for the broadcasting discussions to be heavily biased, and resulting in the media's failure to provide the general public of a complete view of current issues (Walker, 2012).

Not only does a lack of a policy like the Fairness Doctrine limit the amount of perspectives available in the press, but with the current monopolization of the media, only a select few companies are controlling the wide variety of what the public sees, hears, or reads each day. In 1983 it was troubling that approximately 50 companies controlled the majority of media in the United States (Snyder, 2010). However, now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, only six corporations control 90% of the vast mainstream media of the U.S.—General Electric (Comcast, NBC, Universal Pictures), News Corp (Fox, Wall Street Journal), Disney (ABC, ESPN, Pixar), Viacom (MTV, CMT, Paramount Pictures), Time Warner (CNN, HBO, TIME), and CBS (Showtime, 60 Minutes, Smithsonian Channel). Within these six companies, 232 media executives are managing the information that reaches 277 million people, which is essentially one person controlling the stories, opinions, and propaganda presented to 850,000 Americans every day. With such a limited scope of sources for information, the American public is presented with an “illusion of choice”. In this illusion, it's difficult for a citizen to expose him or herself to the wide variety of viewpoints of issues and events (Lutz, 2012).

Aside from not receiving a complete picture, citizens are more likely to receive distorted stories if the press consists of only six sources. Such was the case in the widely publicized “Saving Private Lynch” media movement in 2003. Private Lynch's company had been ambushed and while she was being taken care of at an Iraqi hospital, the media in the United States carefully crafted their own story of a captured heroine in need of rescuing. While the American army was fueled by the country's public opinion on saving Private Lynch, the force extracted onto the Iraqis was unneeded in that instance. In fact, in an effort to deliver Private Lynch back

to the Americans, American troops began firing at the delivering ambulance, almost killing their publicized heroine (Kampfner, 2003). This occurrence of sensationalism, although entertaining and exciting, is misleading the general public. Yet with the six large corporate powers owning 90 percent of the American media, it is understood, especially under a capitalist system, that the media companies would be concerned with what sells.

According to the study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 85 percent of the general American public feels that “newspapers over-dramatize some news stories just to sell more papers”. Even more surprising was that “48 percent of the public sees misleading headlines in their paper more than once a week” (“Current Problems in the Media”, 2014). In 2010, it seems that the media corporations were successfully fulfilling their capitalistic ideals with a total income of 275.9 billion dollars, which is enough money “to buy every NFL team 12 times” (Lutz, 2012). While these six media companies are heavily benefitting from the “free” press, the American public is left misinformed.

Aside from a distorted retelling of occurrences, the big six corporations of the mainstream media have the power to neglect whole stories as well. With such few sources of information, the informants are able to pick and choose the information distributed to the public. Although the press is meant to be an informant of political issues, current research shows that from 1977 to 1997, the coverage of government from mainstream media like the *New York Times*, ABC, CBS, *TIME*, etc. has “dropped from one in [every] three [stories] to one in five, while the number of stories about celebrities rose from one in every 50 stories to one in every 14”. Some might argue that celebrity coverage is what the general public wants. Still, the press’s initial and main role is to inform the American masses of the governmental and economic events and issues rather than who Kim Kardashian is married to. Furthermore, it seems that even the

stories the general public are interested about are being neglected. Polls demonstrate that although over 80 percent of Americans seek improvements in environmental policy, a recent study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs discovered that the coverage of environmental issues dropped from 377 in 1990 to 131 in 1999, while the stories of celebrities continued to increase (“Current Problems in the Media”, 2014).

Especially relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the media coverage of the Middle East. Stories about American tragedy in the Middle East or terrorist strikes from the al-Qaeda were and still are quickly produced in the press, but the stories of families, villages, and whole cities being demolished by American troops hardly ever reaches the ear of the common American without intentional research. Interestingly enough, one of the mainstream media powerhouses, General Electric, is also a mass-weapon producing corporation. From selling arms alone, General Electric received \$4.3 billion in sales (Lee & Johnson, 2012). With General Electric being a mass producers of warfare machinery in the United States, it makes its position as one of the six companies controlling what 90 percent of what the American public hears all the more convenient. With such highly publicized inaccuracies such as the “Saving Private Lynch” story, it remains questionable whether the war in the Middle East actually benefits the American majority or whether the stories and sentiments spouted by the press are fueled by alternative incentives. While it is apparent that General Electric is wreaking benefits from the opinions and ideas shaped by the mass media, it is exceedingly doubtful that the American public, the supposed sole benefactor of the free press, is being served.

With corporations obsessed with profit-making controlling 90 percent of what Americans hear, it is no surprise that the general public is slowly mistrusting the press. According to a recent study, only a low 40 percent of Americans still hold trust in the mass media (McCarthy,

2014). This lack of trust is understandable considering the interferences from corporations, whether by the filtering for advertising companies, the distorting of information to sell more newspapers, or the hesitancy to publish potentially helpful stories in fear of a corporate lawsuit. Although there were instances of a truly free press previously in American history, with the large presence that corporations hold in mainstream media, it is a sad fact that the press no longer remains “free”. A “free” press implies that there are no filters and are no concerns of whether for the revenue of large corporations; in a “free” press the only entity that the media should serve is the general public. In order for the press to be for the people, it needs to solely be written and published by the people, not headed by an elite class primarily interested in making profit. In the future, having a government-sponsored media headed by citizens who are concerned with the awareness of the public seems most ideal. Although some might argue that the taxes would be significantly higher, with a populace more informed of what is going on within the governmental and economic structure, citizens will be more educated and able to contribute to policy decisions. However, with only a few members of the economic elite controlling the information that the masses are exposed to, it is a matter of question whether the American citizens have original ideas or are lead into regurgitating the information and sentiments given to them by a press with alternative incentives. Until the mass media regains its focus on benefitting the general public rather than benefitting large corporations, the ability of the American majority to properly contribute to the government and will be hindered and the goals of democracy will be unmet.

### **Evaluating Higher Education Policy**

While the stories of the mass media provide information about the governmental and economic occurrences, it is higher education that teaches the average citizen how to think critically, enabling them to create and decide upon policies that are most beneficial to the nation.



With higher education readily available to the public, there would potentially be a large majority ready and willing to participate in governmental decisions rather than a select few educated individuals dictating the policies that everyone must abide by. Simply put, the majority of citizens should be as educated as possible to achieve the most efficient and fully-functioning democracy. In a society where the majority has obtained a higher education, there are more people independently thinking, pondering how to best serve the nation as a whole.

In a democracy, a government by the people for the people, it is expected that the majority would have influence over the implementation of governmental policies. However, as demonstrated by the aforementioned research of Gilens and Page, policies supported by the average citizen are not always employed. Specifically, they found that policies supported by the majority of average citizens were implemented only 18 percent of the time (Gilens & Page, 2012). Nevertheless, one might assume that policies dealing with education, a prominent component to a democratic society, would be approached with the needs of the majority in mind.

In the past, this was true. In the very beginning of American history, education was seen as a way for “moral development and intellectual uplift of young people”. The importance of education was acknowledged by the early American government, especially during an age of increasing industrial growth. In 1862 and 1890, the American government expressed their support of widespread education when they implemented the Morrill Acts, which created universities with free tuition for those who wished to pursue a higher education but lacked the economic means to do so. Even capitalists Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Peter Cooper saw education as a public service, donating large amounts of money to universities, hoping to benefit individual citizens and to create a better, more prosperous society. Regardless of economic stature, there was a general belief that education was a public good that should be

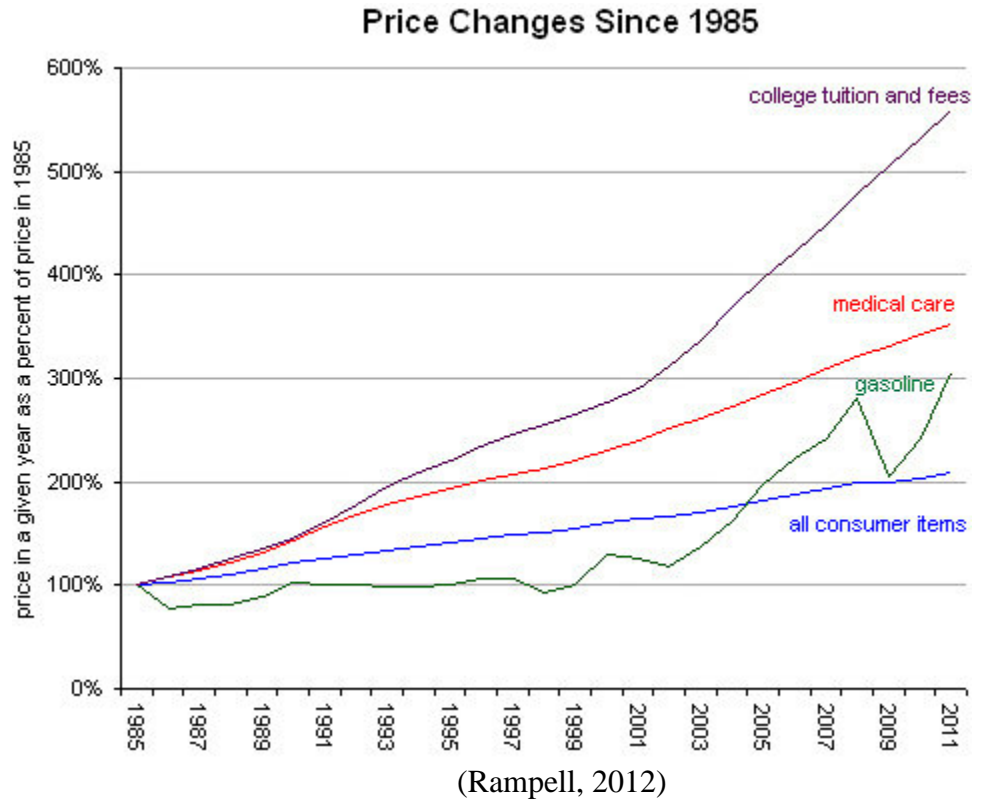
readily available to all citizens. With education benefitting both individual scholars and a whole society, one would hope that under a democratic government, this demand for education would continue being met (Rossi, 2014).

However, with the increasing costs of a college education, it seems that this is not the case. In the spring of 2011, Pew Research Center held a nationally representative survey and discovered that 75 percent of American citizens believe that college is too expensive for most American citizens. Furthermore, approximately half of the Americans of ages 18 to 34 without a bachelors degree were unable to go to college because they simply could not afford it. When asked if college is affordable for most Americans, only 22 percent of the general public agreed, whereas the percent of college presidents agreeing with the statement nearly doubled. Even more interesting was the discovery that 63 percent of college presidents believed that students and their families should pay for the majority of the college tuition whereas over 50 percent of the general public believed the opposite to be true. Instead, they believed that college tuition should be a split responsibility between the student, the federal and state government, and private endowments (“Is College Worth It”, 2011).

Based on the survey’s findings, it appears that the economic policies of a higher education are currently favoring the opinions of the college presidents, people that are averaging an annual income of 254,799 dollars. With the top salary of college presidents totaling around 500,000 dollars a year, it is safe to say that these college administrators are within the economic elite class (“College President Salaries”, 2015). With less monetary support given to students by the colleges equating to more money available to college administrators, it is understandable that most college presidents would believe that students should pay for the majority of their college tuition. Nevertheless, with considerably more college students than there are college presidents

in the United States, it is worrisome that current economic policies are favoring the ideas of a few members of the elite class rather than the majority.

Regardless of who pays for the tuition, there are some discrepancies about whether or not college is becoming too expensive. It is no doubt that the price of college has dramatically increased in comparison to other amenities (see figure right) with the price of college tuition and fees 559 percent



higher than they were in 1985 (Rampell, 2012). Yet some argue that this is merely the sticker price of college and that the actual amount that students are paying (after financial aid is factored in) is less severe. Critics dispute that the net price of education is increasing, but only at the same rate as inflation. Moreover, that the high sticker prices of colleges enable the anchoring effect, a basic capitalist strategy in which expensive colleges are able to offer large scholarships and grants to students to make attending that college more appealing. Aside from the anchoring effect, high sticker prices also enable segmented pricing in which families that can afford the whole tuition pay the allotted amount while families without the financial means are offered

generous financial aid packages, enabling them to attend the same college but for a more realistic price given their specific circumstances (“Is College Really Getting More Expensive”, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the price of college tuitions nationwide have increased solely to utilize the anchoring effect and segmented pricing. With 6900 different colleges in the United States, each one has varying reasons for the steady increase in tuition. Within private schools, institutions not funded by the government, much of the money that was once given to students are put to use elsewhere—hiring more administrators, paying for the most recent research labs and equipment, and building luxurious campus amenities to attract more students. These schools are increasingly becoming mini businesses, focused on attracting students as customers yet unintentionally setting students at a disadvantage in the long run with increasingly steep college tuition. On the other hand, in public schools, the largest component to the rising cost of tuition has resulted from reduced government spending on education (Thompson, 2004). Budget cuts to colleges most notably began with Reagan, who had demanded 20 percent cuts from the higher education funding during his term as a governor in California. He continued this economic policy on a national scale, decreasing the education budget from 12 percent of the federal income to 6 percent by the end of his presidential term (Clabaugh, 2004). As a result, in the past ten years, various other states have cut education funding, giving 1500 dollars less per student each year. As the financial support from the government lessens, the tuition in public universities has risen 1000 dollars per student, in an event economists call “cost shifting” (Thompson, 2004).

Especially after the economic crisis and recession of 2008, budget cuts to fund higher education were increasingly implemented, resulting in a 15 percent increase of public university tuition just between 2008 and 2010 (Armario, 2012). The director of the Cornell Higher

Education Research Institute, Ronald Ehrenberg is aware and dismayed of the government administrators' inability to spare higher education in times of economic troubles and believes that that "state legislator(s), look at all (the) state's programs and say, 'Well, we can't make prisoners pay, but we can make college students pay'" (Rampell, 2012).

With the government's waning financial support for higher education, it is apparent that the majority's wishes are not wholeheartedly being considered, but does this gradual cost shifting result in an economic crisis? Currently, "student loan debt in the United States grew to over \$1.2 trillion and tuition increases continued at nearly triple the rate of inflation" (Rossi, 2014). In the graduating class of 2013, the student loan debt had increased 2 percent from the previous year with the average loan debt for the graduating class reaching nearly 30,000 dollars. Also that year, 70 percent of the graduating class of public and nonprofit colleges left with loan debt. Of this 70 percent, one in every five students had private loans, which "charge higher interest rates and offer fewer consumer protections and worse repayment options than federal loans", lacking "features such as unemployment deferment, income-driven repayment, and loan forgiveness" (Shin, 2014). Whether or not the rise in college tuition creates an economic crisis, what is apparent is that the student debt is steadily increasing.

Despite the shocking statistics of student loan debt, many dispute that this in itself is no cause for alarm. Many argue that in today's advanced and large society, it is economically imperative for citizens to pursue a higher education with college graduates earning approximately 50 percent more than a high school graduate and 114 percent more than those who had failed to receive their high school diploma (Ritchie, 2014). Furthermore, some look at the rising student loan debt with nonchalance, claiming that the averages are skewed by outliers who had borrowed too much to attend top schools or by graduates who had majored in a subject

for entertainment, majors that lacked work practicality. New York Times editor and reporter in American policy, David Leonhardt, insists that “student debt is indeed a problem for some young people today, but that it’s not a new phenomenon. For most, the returns on a college education have more than kept pace with the cost” (Leonhardt, 2014). Jeffery Dorfman of Forbes magazine not only believes that there is no problem in the current situation with student loans but also that, “calls to reduce the payment burden of student loans are simply part of a larger movement to make more things in this country free (meaning paid for by somebody else)” (Dorfman, 2014).

In support of their perspectives, both authors heavily referenced a study by Brookings Institution, which found that in a study of “young-adult households”, only 36 percent of the households held loan debt (Leonhardt, 2014). Of those with debt, Brookings Institution reported that only 7 percent had a student debt of 50,000 dollars or over whereas 58 percent had less than 10,000 dollars in debt (Dorfman, 2014). However, the survey consisted of house owners ranging from age 20 to 40. Twenty years ago, when some of the participants of the survey attended college, the cost of tuition was significantly lower than it is today. With the demographics of graduates who attended college in the early-1900s, the Brookings Institution included participants who faced an average debt that totaled less than half the debt that college graduates face nowadays. Furthermore, one-fifth of college graduates under the age of 35 still live with their parents and these are the graduates who are more likely to suffer from large student loan debts (Rossi, 2014).

When looking at current trends and the most recent graduating classes, it is evident that the increasing amounts of student debt are becoming a problem for upcoming college students. Previously, when the United States had not cut budget funding for higher education and college was more affordable, more graduates were more content with the education they received for the

prices they paid for. Approximately 88 percent of American graduates ages 65 and over agree that college was worth the cost, whereas now only 52 percent of American graduates ages 25-34 agree with the same statement. A major setback for newly graduated students, regardless of the amount of loans they need to pay off, is the inability to find an adequately paying job. In two 2012 reports, it was discovered that approximately fifty percent of recent graduates worked jobs that did not require a college education and that 41% of graduates from the nation's most prominent colleges were unable to find an occupation within their selected field of study ("College Degree Hasn't Paid Off, According to 30% of Graduates", n.d.). With the costs of college rising, many potential students, especially those of the middle class, are hesitant about attending college for the whole four years. The Department of Education has found that within the past decade, the enrollment of middle class students has dropped in four-year colleges while simultaneously rising in 2-year colleges (Censky, 2011).

Still, any education beyond the high school level can benefit the financial outcomes of a student. But even though college graduates have higher percentages of finding jobs than their high school graduate counterparts, the underemployment of college graduates makes repaying their student loans considerably difficult. According to a survey held by Pew Research Center, the increasing student loan debt is heavily affecting the way that recent graduates live.

A record share of students are leaving college with a substantial debt burden, and among those who do, about half (48%) say that paying off that debt made it harder to pay other bills; a quarter say it has made it harder to buy a home (25%); and about a quarter say it has had an impact on their career choices (24%). ("Is College Worth It", 2011).

It is pretty evident that increasing amount of student loans will affect the lives of the college graduates, but many fail to realize the larger picture. The crisis is not only found within

the individual graduates themselves, but how their ensuing debt affects the society as a whole. Studies show that those with college loans are unwilling to start businesses of their own in fear of further complicating their financial stature. With 60 percent of American jobs created by small businesses, this hesitancy and the surmounting amount of student loans can prove to be detrimental to a much broader populace (Korkki, 2014). Student loans, unlike any other loans, are never excused, even after if the graduate were to file for bankruptcy. After someone has obtained their degree, there is no collateral to be collected. Even after death, if a student loan has not been paid, that debt would only be transferred to a family member of the deceased. With student loans unable to disappear, that graduate is less likely to buy a home, car, etc. and help stimulate the economy.

Aside from increasing loans debilitating the recent graduate's ability to help the economy, rising student debt also dissuades graduates from taking lower-paid public interest jobs since they need higher paying jobs to pay off their debt. Jesse Rostein of University of California, Berkeley and Cecilia Rouse of Princeton researched the occupation outcomes of a college who had newly implemented a financial policy to meet the full demonstrated needs of its students. They found that before the policy's implementation, "students were more likely to choose well-paid professions like investment banking and consulting" while after the college helped limit student loans, an increasing percent of the students began teaching or working for nonprofit organizations (Korkki, 2014). Large amounts of student debt leaves many unable to follow careers that they wish, careers that could potentially serve the public's needs more than a regular high-paying job could. Therefore, the rising student loan debt is not something one individual bears, but an unfortunate reality that negatively impacts a larger demographic.



Despite these surmounting problems caused by rising student loan debt, there are still large percentages of students pursuing a higher education and dealing with the financial dilemmas afterwards. College students will protest, but knowing the educational and financial benefits in the long run, they will still attend school at whatever cost. Therefore, the rising cost of a college education is not necessarily a national crisis, but a problem that must be addressed and contained. It is true that college should be available as a public good, but that in no way means that a higher education is an automatic right endowed to every American citizen. Rather, it is a service that should be available and accessible for all those who want it. It is understandable that, especially with the current economy, the United States government cannot pay for the education of every citizen, but there should be other methods to pay for college rather than simply taking out more loans. There are several programs like the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program that allow recent graduates with specific kinds of loans to pay off all their college debt by teaching or working in other forms of public service for an allotted time interval. Instead of individual programs, this policy should be utilized by the national government. This way, after their time serving the public, graduates are able to start their lives debt-free and without any unnecessary financial burden. With public service programs lowering or completely ridding the burden of student loans, society as a whole will benefit, both from the public service work of recent graduates as well as the heightened economic and societal potential of a debt-free college graduate. However until such policies are implemented, the average student loan debt and the problems that follow will continue to escalate, heading towards a crisis with unknown repercussions.

### **Conclusion**

It is an unfortunate reality that the democratic government that the United States has prided itself in is a mere façade, with the real economic and governmental power held by the elite class. While it is true that economic policies and governmental administration are, and will always be, closely related, it is unnecessary for one socioeconomic class to dominate both domains.

The United States was constructed in the desire to free itself from the monarchical rule and establish an independent nation ruled by people. Two centuries later, although America has achieved its goal of expanding the governmental rule of one person, the majority is still far from attaining the political power that was designated for them by the Founding Fathers. Although the American government is in a different guise than the formally established oligarchy of aristocracy, the political power is still in the hands of the few, just cloaked under the justifications of capitalism.

Under an economic system that encourages profit-making and serving self-interests, the wealthy class and governmental administrators are able to justify their tactics of accumulating wealth. Under capitalism, wealth and power come hand in hand. With money, the members of the elite can make their voices louder than those of lower socioeconomic classes. For those who try to deny the political benefits of the wealthy, the evidence is in the disproportional policy implementation that favors the elite class's opinions, the ability of the wealthy to lobby for governmental administrators, and the evasion of well-deserved punishment by large corporations.

This wealthy class has not only gained the ability to control government; through the corporate ownership of the media, they now indirectly control the knowledge and opinions of the

average citizen. With only six corporations in control of the information the whole American populace is exposed to, it makes it easier to implement filters, skew or neglect important information, or establish predetermined perspectives for citizens who are too busy to research the media's accuracy.

Aside from the media's sub-par role as an informant, the government oftentimes fails to coordinate policies according to the needs of the majority. Even with an institution as prominent as education, despite a brief history of serving the common man, political administrators and policies are gradually less concerned with the opinions of the majority.

With the media, policy-making, and whole economic system favoring the goals of the elite class, it is extremely difficult for all individuals to maintain political influence. Under these circumstances, the political complications of the elite class theory are currently in play in the American government, leaving the original ideals of equality and democracy as a dream and a mere guise by which the members of the one percent continue to rule.

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