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# Breaking Free of Managed Democracy in the United States

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Honors Project

# **Breaking Free of Managed Democracy in the United States**

## **Part I: The State of Democracy in the United States**

### ***Introduction***

The United States is not and has never been a democracy. It is a polyarchy which views the democratic aspirations of its people as nothing more than something in need of management. This is not altogether damning for the US as almost every state in the world is designed to undermine democracy. The political systems of states around the world are differentiated by the means in which they repress their people. States that rely on physical repression are usually called authoritarian and barbaric, while the states that rely on concealed repression are usually called democratic and enlightened. Although physical and concealed repression are radically different means of repressing one's people, they result in the same outcome: a people whose political will is denied. Since the methods of repression in the US are mostly concealed, it is necessary to spend some time exposing them. The US relies on two main categories of concealed repression: opinion control and structural constraints.

## *A. Opinion Control*

### *1a. A Short History of Democracy in the United States*

There has always existed a need for those in power to manage the opinions of their people. The US is no different. The founding fathers, especially James Madison, did not hesitate to note their distaste for what they deemed “mob rule,” or rule by the people: “they ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than institute a system of political equality, they created a system designed to serve the needs of the wealthy. They gave political power to “the more capable set of men,” that is, those wealthy landowners of the right sex and skin color, and ensured this land was to be protected against “the mob,” that is, everyone else. It was the role of the “enlightened statesmen” to maintain this system of domination by managing the “mischief” of popular opinion that might spark an agrarian revolution, or “sigh for more equal distribution of its benefits.”<sup>2</sup> This was, of course, for the benefit of the people.

Eventually, however, improvements had to be made to the basic political system set up by the founding fathers in order to maintain the same level of control over the people. These improvements came by way of propaganda. Before World War I, for example, when the Congress feared sending all the poor people off to die in Europe might start a revolution, President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information to promote patriotism, and faith in the war effort. Not only did Wilson avoid a revolution, but he whipped up pro-war sentiment, and found a potent new method of managing the people.

The men with “elevated ideals,” who Wilson thought should guide the state, selflessly heralded this new method of propaganda as a higher form of democracy: the “very essence of the democratic process.”<sup>3,4</sup> Prior to WWI, for example, George Creel, chairman of the Committee,

as well as other “elevated men,” believed the Committee's efforts did not amount to propaganda, “for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption;” rather, their effort “was educational and informative throughout, for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that *no other argument was needed* than the simple, straightforward presentation of the facts.”<sup>5</sup> Those facts were suspect, however, as Congressman Robert M. LaFollette noticed in his response to President Wilson’s War Message to Congress:

The espionage bills, the conscription bills, and other forcible military measures which we understand are being ground out of the war machine in this country is the complete proof that those responsible for this war fear that it has no popular support and that armies sufficient to satisfy the demand of the Entente Allies cannot be recruited by voluntary enlistments.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the initial lack of popular support, the Committee’s substantial efforts were able to coerce the people into obedience to state interests. A triumph of democracy!

In the years to come, former members of the Committee, like Walter Lippman and Edward Bernays, continued to glorify the effectiveness of propaganda. They did not refer to it as propaganda, however, as Bernays preferred to call it “the engineering of consent.”<sup>7</sup> A community is democratic, therefore, when the “responsible men” make the correct decisions, that is, those that align with established power, and then convince the “bewildered herd” to nod their heads: to observe but not to participate. This sad description of democracy is what still defines our system today.

But the “engineering of consent” stretches far beyond simply propaganda. The early foray into state-sponsored propaganda was really the first step in the development of a new expertly managed democracy. Bernays, for example, would take his previous experience as a

propagandist and become the “the father of public relations.”<sup>8</sup> Today, the massive PR industry expertly “corrects” public opinion regarding the products they buy, the ideas they hold, and the political figures they support. But not even the PR industry encompasses the entire effort to engineer consent. Almost every facet of society works to engineer consent due to its subservience to market forces, the wealthy, and the state.

Rather than try to provide examples of every facet of opinion control in the US, I will reduce the investigation to only three current practices: the news media, misinformation, and propaganda.

### ***1b. The News Media***

If the opinions of the people are to form the basis of how a community acts, then it would be reasonable for each citizen to do their best to stay informed. Staying informed, however, is difficult. It would be unreasonable to assume that each person would have the time to spend hours investigating every current event, and every important political issue. So, in order to save everyone’s time, the people turn to the news to stay informed. The news media, therefore, plays a vital role in every democracy: keeping the people informed. Ideally, the news media should be composed of thoughtful individuals who objectively and critically report and investigate important current events and political issues. In the United States, however, the news media serves as a mouthpiece for state propaganda and the interests of the wealthy.

The news media in the US is controlled by a small handful of large corporations. These large corporations not only have an incentive to make money, but they have an incentive to weave narratives beneficial to the interests of the corporation and the executives who run the corporation. Corporate news does not only have their own interests, they also have to serve the

interests of the companies who advertise through them. Since the primary source of income for corporate news is advertisements, they have an incentive to take political positions that appease their advertisers. These market forces result in the weeding out of journalists and editors who would publish news that runs contrary to the interests of the companies that they depend on. It is not that all journalists and editors of major news publications and programs are dishonest - although some clearly are - but that those who are allowed to remain have internalized what they can and what they cannot print.<sup>9</sup>

The amount of self-censorship that results from these market forces is astounding. From 1970 to 2000, for example, not one journalist from a corporate-run newspaper mentioned that the US invaded Vietnam - apart from a few times when they were quoting "North Vietnamese propaganda."<sup>10</sup> The result of this market-driven self-censorship is the creation of a narrow political spectrum of what is deemed acceptable for coverage. This narrow political spectrum, forged from the interests of the wealthy, then serves as the basis for political debate among the people who try to stay informed through corporate news. Those radical individuals who form political opinions that would upset major corporations, and thus could not be printed by corporate news, are dismissed as loons, and have no power in the political system.

Not only is the news media subservient to market forces, they are also almost completely reliant on states for their information. Government officials, for example, make up 75 percent of all of the sources in all of the news stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.<sup>11</sup> In addition, 70 to 90 percent of all news stories originate from situations where government officials have control over the information revealed: 25% from press conferences, 25% from interviews, 17% from press releases, and 13% from official proceedings.<sup>12</sup> The majority of news that appears on television or in newspapers is handcrafted by government officials with the

purpose of benefiting those officials.

In addition, since the government is the source of nearly all of corporate news, journalists and editors have an incentive not to publish stories that are overly critical of government officials. The pressure to be obedient to the state is frequently put on display by presidential administrations that refuse to cooperate with television or print news if they do not follow along with the “right” narrative, or they start asking critical questions. Usually, however, corporate news sensors itself. For example, Cenk Uyger, a progressive anchor on MSNBC who is frequently critical of President Obama, was told by Phil Griffin, the President of MSNBC, to “tone it down” because “people in Washington” were starting to get concerned.<sup>13</sup> When Uyger refused, Griffin tried to explain that, “Outsiders are cool, but we're the establishment.” When that failed Uyger was fired. Since corporate news has to be obedient to both corporate power and the state to operate, it is not surprising there is little to no deviation from the acceptable political spectrum.

So, how should one view the output of a news media that uncritically regurgitates around 90% of their news stories from situations where the government has control over the information, and whose sources are composed of government officials over 75% of the time? One can only conclude that the news media in the US is not producing news, it is faithfully producing state propaganda. The basic relationship between the state and the news media is as follows: the state has an interest somewhere in the world; they send “unnamed government officials” to ask for interviews with the news media in order to spread propaganda; the news media faithfully repeats the propaganda, and; finally, the people form their political opinions based on this propaganda. By default, therefore, one should be suspicious of any popular topic covered by the news, or of any narrative they are peddling, that uses these government officials

as sources, because these efforts reflect state interests. This does not mean that one should dismiss everything the news media prints or says. It simply means that one should treat the news media as what it is - a mouthpiece for state propaganda - and be weary of forming opinions solely based off of the information they provide. It is important, however, to read corporate news because it gives you a direct line into what the state wants you to think.

### *1c. Misinformation*

The generation of misinformation, as discussed previously, is a powerful method of opinion control. Corporate news and the state are the two main sources of misinformation. Corporate news either gets its misinformation from the state, or it creates their own to benefit themselves and to serve market forces. The understanding of climate change in the US is one example of corporate news bending to market forces. Despite more coverage on climate change in the last few years, the basic understanding of climate change has worsened substantially. Only 57% of Americans, for example, believe there is evidence that the earth is even getting warmer.<sup>14</sup> They are unaware that thermometers show the temperatures going up decade after decade. In addition, only 36% of Americans believe the warming is primarily caused by humans. Yet, on the other hand, over 98% of climate scientists believe this.<sup>15</sup> And, despite there being decades of overwhelmingly strong consensus about human-caused global warming among scientists, only around half of Americans realize this is the case. People are becoming more and more misinformed about climate change because the information is presented to them in a way that undermines climate science. The same phenomenon happens with a number of other important political issues.

The state also plays an important role in generating misinformation. The Obama

administration, for example, continuously claims there have been either zero civilian deaths, or a very low amount of civilian deaths, as a result of their drone strikes.<sup>16</sup> But an initial report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that around 2,700 people have died from 306 separate drone strikes.<sup>17</sup> A minimum of 392 civilians, including 175 children, were directly verified to be among the dead. The death of children contradicts the claim that there have been no civilian losses, and it puts the status of other deaths - insurgents or civilians - in question. In addition, the Obama administration has a policy of not only bombing a certain location, but then waiting for rescuers to come, or for funerals to be held, and then bombing it again.<sup>18</sup> The justification for this policy is that those who try to save targets of drone strikes, or those who mourn for them, must be terrorists themselves, and their killing is justified. The Bureau was able to find that a minimum of 50 civilians were killed after trying to rescue victims, and over 20 were killed for attending funerals.

Other casualty estimates, like the ones conducted by Noor Behram, paint a far deadlier image of the drone strikes.<sup>19</sup> Behram, a photographer and journalist, was able to document 60 different drone strikes in North and South Waziristan where he estimates that for “every 10 to 15 [innocent] people killed, maybe they[the US] get one militant.” Behram also notes that the impact of the drone strikes destroys nearby homes - as they are usually made of baked mud - crushing all those inside. In addition, counterinsurgency specialist David Kilcullen - advisor to Condeleeza Rice and General David Petraeus and planner of the 2007 Iraq surge - claims that drone strikes have killed, “50 civilians for every [mid to high level]militant killed, a hit rate of 2 percent — hardly ‘precision’.”<sup>20</sup> The amount of dependable information available on the impact of drone strikes is staggering, yet corporate news purposefully underreports the massive amounts of civilian deaths, the attempt to cover these deaths up, and the policy of targeting rescuers and

mourners. They have only sporadically mentioned such events, and have done so in a manner designed to undermine their significance. They have, however, continued to parrot that there has been either zero or a very small amount of civilians killed by drones.

The ultimate goal of generating misinformation is to keep the people from being informed, and to force them to use misinformation as the basis of their political opinions. There are other methods, however, to keep people misinformed. Withholding information, rather than generating it, is one of these other methods. The US government avoids transparency by hiding behind national security interests, and classifying a large portion of what they do. The lack of transparency results in a citizenry that does not even know what their government is doing, rendering them incapable of passing judgment on those actions.

This attempt to keep the citizenry blind to what the state is doing is infrequently upset by whistleblowers attempting to spread information they believe should be open to every citizen. Unfortunately, spreading harmless information - in terms of national security - that reveals what the US is doing, is treated as an unspeakably horrible crime. The Obama administration has already prosecuted six individuals with “espionage for leaking [information] to a journalist.” Before Obama, there have only been “three cases in history.”<sup>21</sup> In the case of Wikileaks, for example, the Obama administration concluded that “all of the information allegedly leaked was either dated, represented low-level opinions, or was already commonly understood and known due to previous public disclosures,” and was not damaging to national security; however, the lack of any real damage did not stop them from apprehending and subsequently torturing Bradley Manning, the suspected leaker.<sup>22, 23</sup> Another whistleblower, John Kiriakou, who discussed using waterboarding as a CIA interrogator, is faced with two counts under the Espionage Act of 1917. This odd situation - where those who leak information about war crimes or the use of torture are

punished, rather than the people who actually committed war crimes or issued torture - was noticed by Mazahir Hussain who jokingly claimed, “Bradley Manning should’ve really considered committing some war crimes instead of exposing them.”<sup>24</sup>

My claim that the state and the corporate media use misinformation and secrecy to maintain an uninformed populace may sound rather conspiratorial. If I had to give a reason as to why this sounds conspiratorial, I would say it is because this kind of talk lies outside of the acceptable political spectrum forged from the interests of the corporations and the state. But this answer would not really help me sound less conspiratorial. So, in order to defend my claim, I will analyze a recent event - the intervention in Libya - and show how viewing the corporate media as an arm of propaganda is the best way to evaluate their claims.

About a year ago, an influx of stories about Libya started to show up in corporate newspapers and television programs. These stories initially focused on the violent reaction to street protests in a number of Libyan cities, but they quickly escalated to a startling level. These startling claims were primarily supported by “unnamed senior US officials,” and “unverifiable reports” from political actors in Libya - such as defectors and rebels. The claims were then repeated by pretty much everyone else, giving them a sort of credibility. But before the claims of violence reached a startling level, both the US government and corporate news were quick to focus on the violent reaction to the “peaceful” protests, and to strongly condemn Gaddafi for violating his people’s human rights.

It is at this point that a reader or watcher of corporate news, or a listener of political speeches by US politicians, should be skeptical. One should wonder why the US and corporate news is so concerned about this particular human rights violation when they consistently ignore a long list of other and far more widespread human rights violations in many other states including

those that the US currently occupies or directly supports. Why, one should ask, is the US selecting this particular state to be outraged about? After asking this question, it seemed clear the US wanted something, otherwise they would not have their “senior officials” working so hard to get the news to cover the story.

It was difficult to maintain this skepticism, however, as a stream of horrifying stories started to pour out of Libya. Some of these many stories included Gaddafi indiscriminately bombing civilians with airplanes; using helicopters, tanks, and small arms to massacre civilians in towns and cities; ordering his men to commit mass rape and even providing Viagra to aid in the effort; executing any soldier who refused to massacre civilians; importing a huge mercenary army that would be more willing to resort to violence against civilians; and, calling for and actively pursuing “genocide” against the civilian population of Benghazi and Libya as a whole. The stories were truly horrifying.

Of course, none of them actually happened.<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International failed to find evidence for large-scale human rights violations. They did, however, discredit many claims, and found “on several occasions the rebels in Benghazi appeared to have knowingly made false claims or manufactured evidence.” In terms of mass rape, Amnesty reported that “we have not found any evidence or a single victim of rape or a doctor who knew about somebody being raped.” Human Rights Watch also reported, “We have not been able to find evidence [of rape].” Both organizations also concluded that the Viagra story was pure propaganda created by US-backed Libyan rebels, and then uncritically repeated by reporters. The massive mercenary army turned out to be an excuse to kill black African migrant workers. According to Amnesty, “Those shown to journalists as foreign mercenaries were later quietly released... Most were sub-Saharan migrants working in Libya without documents... The politicians kept talking about mercenaries,

which inflamed public opinion and the myth has continued.”

In a country where mobile phones abound, there is not only no videos or recordings of Gaddafi using planes, helicopters, and tanks against his people, but there is no evidence of large munitions used in any town or city. In addition, the video evidence used to show that Gaddafi executed his soldiers was brought under question when, “amateur video shows them alive after they had been captured, suggesting it was the rebels who killed them.” And according to the International Crisis Group, there is no evidence of genocide. Even the “genocidal language” used by Gaddafi - which is typically unchecked and therefore ignored by other states - had to be distorted to make it sound as if he was calling for the death of all civilians in Benghazi when he actually referred to, “rebels only [and] promised amnesty for those ‘who throw their weapons away’ . Khadafy even offered the rebels an escape route and open border to Egypt, to avoid a fight ‘to the bitter end’ .”

Most of the people who read about Libya in the US and elsewhere did not and still do not know that the claims used to justify military intervention were falsified. The amount of misinformation created by the state and the rebel forces they armed and trained made it almost impossible for a US citizen to make an informed decision about what should be done in Libya. Yet while this confusion abounded, corporate news and politicians like Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama warned another genocide similar to “what happened in Rwanda” would happen if the traditional imperial powers did not intervene militarily.<sup>26</sup>

For the ordinary citizen who follows corporate news, it seemed sensible to remove a dictator who was distributing Viagra to his soldiers in order to more efficiently rape his people, and who was calling for his soldiers to massacre entire cities. It is precisely in times like this that a thoughtful and critical news media is so vital for the health of a democracy. But the news

media in the US and elsewhere did not challenge government sources or rebel propaganda: they served as the greatest mouthpiece of that propaganda. When Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was asked at the beginning of the conflict if there was any evidence of Gaddafi bombing or massacring his people, he replied that there was no evidence, only reports in the news.<sup>27</sup> Yet the sources for the news reports were either “anonymous senior US officials” or unnamed witnesses. Around and around they go!

Similar attempts to generate misinformation have clouded a number of political issues in the US including not only Libya, but Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and more. The state and its faithful servant have worked to undermine the citizen's ability to have informed opinions about the actions of the US government. The goal of this misinformation is to force citizens into obedience to state interests, and to limit the ability for “radical” individuals to make headway in their opposition of these interests.

### ***Id. Propaganda***

Despite the efforts of both the state and the corporate news media to control opinion, there still exists a fear the system will break down, and citizens will find new sources of information and start thinking in ways contradictory to the interests of the state and the wealthy. At various times in the history of the US these fears have boiled over and led to the institution of more traditional forms of propaganda. One such occasion was mentioned previously: the fear of revolution prior to WWI. But a more recent example would be the fear over the disobedience of the corporate news media, and the actions of citizens during the Vietnam era. Even though claims that the corporate news media lost the Vietnam War for the US are grossly exaggerated, and that there was virtually zero opposition to the war prior to 1968, and the post-1968 criticism

was hardly radical and was only acceptable because it reflected a growing opinion in the government and among the wealthy that the war was a strategic and economic mistake - not a moral one - it is obvious the state and the intellectuals in the US were sufficiently worried about what was going on.

This fear was reflected in a 1976 report written by Samuel Huntington that warned of a “crisis of democracy.”<sup>28</sup> He feared that political participation and reflection, and the spread of ideas not approved by established power were undermining the authority of the government, and damaging the common good. If the corporate news media forgot their place and disobeyed the state, and if the people were practicing an “excess of democratic activity,” then the government should consider taking over the media, and enhancing the use of traditional forms of social indoctrination. These drastic steps were not needed, however, as government pressure and market forces were more than enough to keep corporate news and the activities of the people in line. But there still remained a fear that the public would once again turn against the US war machine. So, in order to limit criticism of the US military, the state doubled its propaganda efforts.

US citizens who watch television, videos on the Internet, or even go to a movie theatre, are met with endless numbers of military recruitment videos. In new Navy recruitment videos, for example, a narrator with a deep, gravelly voice lavishes praise on the soldiers. We learn that the men and women of the Navy are “infinitely more courageous and more driven” than other citizens. In the background we watch massive battleships fire their cannons while young men and women jump out of planes and helicopters, and walk around with their faces painted. The Army, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps are no different. All four branches preach they are not only sacrificing themselves to make the US safe, but they are helping people in need in the

US, and all around the world. A “global force for good” as the Navy would say.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to a constant barrage of military advertisements, the military also has a partnership with Hollywood, and the video game industry. With movies:

The scheme is simple: The Pentagon allows studios to use military hardware and bases at a discounted, taxpayer-subsidized rate. In exchange, filmmakers must submit their scripts to the Pentagon for line edits. Not surprisingly, those edits often redact criticism of military policy, revise depictions of historical failures, and generally omit anything else that might make audiences wonder if our current defense policy is repeating past mistakes.<sup>30</sup>

In a recently released movie, *Act of Valor*, the military went a step further: providing not only the stage and the script, but the actors as well. The main action scenes were composed of various Navy training sites.<sup>31</sup> The high-tech military equipment and weapons were provided by the Navy. And active-duty Navy SEALs were ordered to not only serve on the advisory board for the movie, but they were ordered to act in it as well.<sup>32</sup>

*Act of Valor* and the military also coordinated with the video game company Electronic Arts to tie the movie in with a modern day shooting game called Battlefield 3.<sup>33</sup> Games like Battlefield 3 also benefit from a similar relationship with the military: the military allows them to study and record different weapon and vehicle sounds so they can provide a “realistic” gaming experience, and in exchange the companies glorify the US military. These games are located in real locations in the world, use modern day weapons and equipment, and let you play as real members of various military organizations. The military, specifically the Army, even creates their own video games. There have been three games in the popular America’s Army series all of which have been distributed for free. Of course, those who play these games are constantly

surrounded by Army slogans, symbols, and nudges towards where one could find more information on how to join the real Army.

Like movies and video games, the sports entertainment industry also has a partnership with the military. On Independence Day last year:

The Red Sox provide the stage, and the Pentagon the props. In military parlance, it is a joint operation. In front of a gigantic American flag draped over the left-field wall, an Air Force contingent, clad in blue, stands at attention. To carry a smaller version of the Stars and Stripes onto the playing field, the Navy provides a color guard in crisp summer whites. The United States Marine Corps kicks in with a choral ensemble that leads the singing of the national anthem. As the anthem's final notes sound, four U. S. Air Force F-15C Eagles scream overhead. The sellout crowd roars its approval.<sup>34</sup>

After the introduction, the announcer calls a military family onto the field under the guise that they have won some sort of prize. They are then directed towards the jumbo screen where they see their daughter proudly greet them while on an aircraft carrier. While they are distracted by the video of their daughter, she surprisingly emerges onto the field:

In the stands pandemonium erupts. After a moment of confusion, members of her family — surrounded by camera crews — rush to embrace their sailor, a reunion shared vicariously by the 38,000 fans in attendance along with many thousands more watching at home.

This remarkable amount of coordination between sports teams and the military is frequently put on display.

All of these examples reveal how integrated the US military is in our entertainment

industry. Their goal, however, is not to entertain, but to mold opinions, change history, and gather new members. And they are remarkably effective at doing so. One example of this effectiveness is the amazing difference in opinion regarding official US soldiers and Blackwater mercenaries.<sup>35</sup>

The current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are contentious issues, but this contention does not spread to the soldiers, who are seen as honorable men and women defending our country. The 'other' type of soldier we employ, however, Blackwater mercenaries, are absolutely loathed. This hatred is fueled by both the politicians and the people, who see Blackwater employees as bloodthirsty criminals with no accountability and little moral value. But Blackwater employees are almost exclusively ex-American soldiers who are paid higher wages to fight in the same wars as our revered soldiers - giving them the exact same ability to claim they are defending America and sacrificing themselves to do so. And even though there have been a number of despicable incidents carried out by Blackwater mercenaries, they pale in comparison to the number of atrocities committed by official US soldiers. Moreover, the same outrage applied to Blackwater mercenaries is rarely applied to American soldiers. When an American soldier commits an atrocity it is treated as an isolated event not representative of the military as a whole, but when Blackwater mercenaries commit an atrocity the condemnation is applied to every individual in the entire organization.

Granted, there are minor differences between the two forces - such as higher wages and less legal obligations - but I doubt a wage increase would be the cause of such hatred, and the complaint that they operate under less legal obligations seems odd because punishments for US soldiers are near nonexistent. Unless you take a picture of yourself posing with the dead body of the civilian you just murdered, collect body parts from civilians you hunt for sport, or, god-

forbid, leak classified documents detailing US war crimes, you will probably get by with just a slap on the wrist. Since Blackwater employees are essentially better paid US soldiers, the tremendous difference in public support of US soldiers versus Blackwater mercenaries reveals the power of state propaganda, and the dark place our current soldiers would be relegated to without it.

### ***B. Structural Limitations***

Apart from controlling opinion, another form of concealed repression comes by way of structural limitations. Structural limitations refer to ways the economic or political system is set up that benefits established power by limiting the power of the people. The influence of money in US politics is one example of a structural limitation. In the current system, if you want to get elected, you need to raise money for political advertisements and a large staff to organize your campaign. This money is primarily garnered through vast donations from wealthy individuals and businesses. Once election time comes around, the only candidates that people hear of, or are allowed to vote for, are ones that have been pre-approved by the wealthy minority who backed their campaigns.

The victor who eventually emerges from the small pool of rich-backed candidates does so because they raised more money. In 2004, for example, candidates for the House of Representatives who raised more money than their opponents won 98% of the time.<sup>36</sup> And in most of the rare cases where a candidate wins with less money it is because the difference in the amount of money raised was negligible. In addition, the amount of money raised should not be confused with support from the people, as most of the money comes from wealthy individuals and businesses. Mitt Romney, for example, the leading Republican presidential candidate, has

currently raised over fifty-three million dollars, but only 9% of that fifty-three million comes from small donors.

The recent combination of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *Speechnow.org v. FEC* rulings has also made the rise of Super PACs possible.<sup>37</sup> Super PACs allow for unlimited donations to political groups who in turn spend the money on advertisements, media, and organizers for presidential candidates. Super PACs have ushered in a new period of almost complete domination by corporations, millionaires, and billionaires with the desire to buy their own presidential candidates. Charles and David Koch, for example, are expected to raise \$240 million dollars in their campaign against President Obama.<sup>38</sup> After reading of the power of Super PACs, Brian Leiter jokingly wrote, “Maybe we should just skip the electoral charade, and let the billionaires gather and vote? Some of them are at least socially liberal and tolerant.”<sup>39</sup> The level of income inequality in the US - where the Bush Tax Cuts, for example, save the top 1% more money in taxes than is earned by the bottom 90% in income - only worsen the situation.<sup>40</sup> The influence money has almost entirely eclipsed the power of the citizenry. As a result, popular opinion is ignored to make room for the interests of the wealthy. The lack of power held by the citizenry is evidenced by the state ignoring popular opinion regarding the three major domestic issues of the Obama presidency - healthcare, financial bailouts, and financial regulation. As Noam Chomsky puts it, these issues, “didn’t have ‘political support’, just the support of the majority of the population.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the influence of money, the two-party system helps to reinforce established power. Although the creation of other parties is not banned, it is exceedingly difficult to get a new party on just one ballot, much less every ballot in the country. New parties also have to contend with a political infrastructure - such as party-specific corporate news programs and

papers - that would be resistant to change as it would risk losing portions of their viewership or readership. The way the US operates also makes it difficult for certain parties to gain any power. A party that took positions contradictory to the interests of corporations and wealthy individuals, for example, would be incapable of getting support from the most powerful political actors in the system.

The two-party system is also a useful means of controlling opinion as it divides the country into two superficial groups people use to draw their political identity from. Advertisers and propagandists have succeeded in turning these political identities into pathetic, tribal teams. Political discussions become but regurgitated summaries of what someone read in this magazine, or what inane banter they absorbed from whatever talk-show has been selected for their respective party. Issues are not framed in terms of how they will affect citizens, or humans around the world, but how they are going to affect a certain party's political influence, or what each party will have to say to get the best 'voter' response. A two-party system also helps to legitimize the narrow spectrum of acceptable political discussion by creating two false polarities, and it helps to remove the discussion of vital issues when they are agreed upon by both parties - as agreement by both "sides of the debate" must mean that the issue is so obvious as to not warrant discussion.

In addition to the influence of money and the two-party system, the election process itself also serves to undermine political action, and therefore supports the status quo and established power. If you have a legitimate election system, then it would make sense for each citizen to focus primarily on developing their political thought through the acquisition of new knowledge, critical reflection and debate. When elections reflect free popular opinion, then refining your political knowledge would carry over into how you vote, and then who gets power. But if your

election system is flawed, and popular opinion is managed, then focusing all of your political efforts into the forming of opinions and the participation in elections - rather than pursuing other means of political action - is a means of reducing your political power. When the election system itself is fundamentally flawed and incapable of bringing about meaningful change, then one must turn to other means of political action.

A flawed election process also creates a toxic environment for citizens. When people focus so heavily on the election process, they conclude that if a policy is not voted for, it is the fault of other citizens for not voting correctly. The election process turns citizens against other citizens when they should really blame the repressive system itself. The hyper-focus on elections is also used by political leaders as an excuse for dismissing the people. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, for example, accused those protesting his anti-union legislation of undermining democracy. After all, if they really wanted to stop him, then they should behave like normal citizens and be complacent until the next election comes. The same underlying belief, that one must create political change through elections, is a major reason why political activism is not more widespread.

### ***C. Physical Repression***

Although concealed repression is the primary means of repressing the US people, physical repression is used as well. The US maintains by far the world's largest prison system to house and dehumanize the poor and unruly.<sup>42</sup> Despite only having 5% of the world's population, close to 25% of the world's inmate population is housed in the US.<sup>43</sup> These expansive prison systems also justify the militarization of the police, who in turn intimidate and repress political movements. Large police forces like the NYPD are not only able to dismantle political

movements like Occupy Wall Street, but under broad interpretations of the PATRIOT Act they have been able to practice large-scale operations designed to spy on Muslim communities and individuals.<sup>44</sup> The FBI also abuses the PATRIOT Act to justify their spying on “radical” political groups that advocate for more robust environmental policies or more equal distribution of wealth.<sup>45</sup> As a result of the over-extension of anti-terrorism laws, people are afraid to donate to political causes due to the worry that they will draw unwanted attention from the government. When Wikileaks was under attack by the US government, for example, people were afraid to donate to them under the fear that Wikileaks would be labeled a terrorist organization. Donating to a designated terrorist group is punishable by law ever since the *Holder v. Humanitarian Law* ruling.<sup>46</sup> Although physical repression is not as pervasive as concealed repression, it still serves to prevent the people from political action that threatens the interests of the state and the wealthy.

### ***Conclusion***

These examples of both concealed and physical repression reveal that the primary concern of the US is to manage the opinions of the people through propaganda, the corporate news media, misinformation, and through a broken two-party electoral system fueled by the wealthy. The corporate news media serves as the propaganda arm of the state by faithfully reproducing state propaganda. They also help to create a political spectrum of acceptable debate which is based upon their own calculations of what political approaches would or would not be acceptable to their corporate backers. The generation of misinformation by the state and the corporate news media also helps to maintain an uninformed citizenry completely obedient to state interests. Any perceived weaknesses in the propaganda relationship between the state and the news is reinforced by propaganda in mediums outside of the news. In addition, the influence

of money in politics, the two-party system, and a hyper-focus on elections have all reduced the amount of political power held by average citizen in the US. The result of all of these efforts is a people whose political ambitions and opinions are caged, expertly managed in order to protect against change that threatens the interests of the state and the wealthy: the “enlightened men” of our day.

## **Part II: What is true democracy?**

If the opinions of the people in the United States are either managed, ignored, or violently repressed, why is the US still called a democracy? The reason why people call the US a democracy is not because it ever was a democracy, but because they have forgotten what democracy in the US is or what it would look like. A long time ago clever politicians noticed the people associated a great deal of moral authority to the basic tenets of democracy: people power and equality. So, being expert opportunists, these politicians co-opted the moral forces of democracy, and used them to support their own creation of non-democratic political systems. This is the greatest achievement of the Founding Fathers: they created the same repressive political system, infused it with democratic language, and the people have adored it for centuries. And after centuries of the misuse of democracy, the people have now associated the destruction of democracy with democracy itself. Because people have forgotten what democracy is, it is now necessary to distinguish between what democracy is today, and what true democracy is.

The process of rebranding the destruction of democracy as democracy serves as one of the most effective tools for managing one's people. The US, as well as repressive regimes around the world, make use of the same rebranding process. Managed democracy in the US, for example, is not altogether different from the former political system in Egypt. There are major differences of course; for example, if I wrote and presented this paper in Egypt a few years ago, or even today, I would be putting myself in danger from state retaliation. So, it is true there are certain freedoms granted to me in the US that are not granted to those in Egypt. But in terms of political power for the average citizen, there is no difference between those in Egypt, and those in the US. Officially, we are both powerless; all we have is the threat of rebellion.

But how could this be true; after all, the Egyptian people have lived under a series of dictators for decades, while US citizens have freely elected their leaders? Actually, the Egyptian people have not lived under a dictator; they have lived under a “president.” Hosni Mubarak, the last president of Egypt, for example, was elected to serve for over twenty-nine years! He must have been really popular! He was also the chairman of the National Democratic Party (NDP). When he first became president, Egypt was a single-party electoral system, but over time Mubarak expanded the Egyptian election system to allow for multiple parties, and he gave more control to other bodies in the government. A political system that allows its people to elect leaders and lesser officials in a multi-party system sounds pretty democratic.

But who am I kidding, Egypt was not a democracy: the news media was heavily controlled, anti-terrorism laws were used to limit and monitor political protest, the political system was designed so established power could not be overthrown, and elections were rigged. Even though the Egyptian political system under Mubarak was designed to undermine and destroy democracy, the leaders continued to use inspiring democratic language when talking to the people. According to Mubarak, for example, these repressive systems were put in place to, “confront terrorism [and] protect democracy and stability.”<sup>47</sup>

It was when the Egyptian people no longer bought the democratic language that the leaders had to add new democratic features. When the people realized a system where only one-party could be elected was somewhat undemocratic, the leaders created a multi-party system while also ensuring the new system could be easily managed as to not upset their power. The history of democracy in Egypt is composed of a series of these small changes to the political system that, while making it appear more democratic, are actually more and more refined systems designed to undermine and destroy democracy. The feigning of democracy in Egypt was

able to appease the Egyptian people for over sixty years.

Maye Kaseem, in her book *Under the Guise of Democracy: Government in Contemporary Egypt*, said the state under Mubarak imposed “a number of constraining conditions in order to ensure that the arena of political contest remains under their stringent control.”<sup>48</sup> She called this form of democracy, “democracy by decree.”<sup>49</sup> A similar thing - albeit I call it “managed democracy” - exists in the US. The political system in the US, however, is a few steps further down the evolutionary road of managed democracy. The result is that the US appears more democratic than Egypt, but it still maintains a political system designed to undermine and destroy democracy.

In fact, managed democracy in the US is more powerful at managing its people than managed democracy was in Egypt; after all, Mubarak’s managed democracy completely collapsed under the weight of a rebellious people. Unfortunately, the old managed democracy is now being replaced by a new, more refined one. When the protests initially began, Mubarak and the Egyptian state resorted to the same tactics they have always used: offer up easily managed “democratic reform.” Since the people’s target was Mubarak himself, he announced he would not run for office in the future. The protesters, however, were not appeased. They knew the system in place would only bring another Mubarak, and so they did not give up on democracy. This realization that the system is flawed, rather than the candidate, is a realization that fails to occur on a widespread basis in the US. The citizens of the US are easily appeased every four years when they get to select one of a handful of new wealthy-approved candidates.

Luckily, however, the Egyptian people continued to protest until Mubarak fell, and the military took control of the government. The resulting political system, or at least the one the military promises, is now more akin to managed democracy in the US. A number of Egyptian

candidates have emerged, and the people will be able to select their favorite through a free election process. Over half of the leading candidates, however, were banned from participation by the military-run state for holding unsavory political positions.<sup>50</sup> Protests that broke out over this antidemocratic move were silenced lethally by the military. The candidates that have been approved by the military are given more coverage by the news, and thus more money to run their now enormous political campaigns. Even the absurd televised presidential debates that plague the US have begun in Egypt. The topic of the first televised debate: character assassination!<sup>51</sup> The Egyptian people can now gather and cheer while their pre-selected candidates insult each other's characters. This is what Egyptians fought and died for in the streets: a pathetic, political charade that by its very existence mocks the Egyptian people's democratic hopes.

But the people are not appeased! They are once again taking to the streets, and calling for the military to hand over power. Their goal will be realized. Sometime in the future the military will transition out of the spotlight, and hand over the appearance of power to a candidate they have already pre-approved of, and who fights for their interests. The illusion of democracy will be stronger than ever. The only hope is that the Egyptian people will not be appeased by their latest and most refined form of managed democracy. If they fail to recognize their leader's latest attempt to rebrand managed democracy as democracy, then they will suffer the same fate as US citizens: they will become politically frustrated sponges of state propaganda lashing out against each other, as opposed to united in the streets against the system designed to repress them. The cries of the Egyptian people would no longer be directed at a dictator whose very rule opposes their power; rather, their cries will be absorbed and dismissed by an expertly managed system masking itself as a democracy while it works to undermine and destroy democracy.

So far the reason why the Egyptian people were able to spark change in their political

system is because they were united by a desire for democracy. If they acquiesce, however, and mistake a managed democracy for democracy itself, then they remove the uniting power of democracy. If you already believe you live in a democracy, then democracy is no longer something yet to be attained; it loses its power to unite the people, and as a result reduces the threat of rebellion in the eyes of state leaders. Since democracy is such a powerful force among the people, the primary goal of a managed democracy is to fool the people into believing a system designed to undermine and destroy democracy is democracy itself.

The citizens of the US have not only accepted their fate in a managed democracy, but they are incapable of recognizing or understanding what democracy or a democratic movement would even look like in the US. They do, however, know what democracy looks like in other states. They knew, for example, that the Egyptian protesters were protesting against a political system that was undemocratic. Unfortunately, despite understanding the democratic desires of the Egyptian protesters, the majority of US citizens believed the US should not back democracy in Egypt if it could bring a political party into power that was critical of the US - only 32% approved of supporting democracy.<sup>52</sup> The US state feels the same way as its citizens about democracy in Egypt: it is dangerous and so must be managed. It is for this reason that the military in Egypt has banned candidates that hold opinions the US does not like.<sup>53</sup>

Regardless of the widespread hatred of democracy in the US, US citizens knew they were opposing democracy in Egypt. In the US, however, US citizens cannot even recognize a democratic movement when they see one. According to an October 2011 Gallup Poll, when asked whether people supported the goals of the Occupy movement, 63% of respondents simply had no idea what the goals were.<sup>54</sup> The Occupy movement has been derided for being aimless, and for having no concrete goals to achieve. After all, the Occupy movement complains about

the overall financial system, the corrupt and cruel practices of banks, the election system, the influence of money in politics, the horrid state of social programs, and much more. Such a wide range of topics, we are told, showcases a lack of focus, but these attacks are all directed at practices that strip the people of power. The first section of my paper did the same thing: a survey of a variety of repressive systems that undermine the people's political power.

Even in Egypt the protesters targeted a wide range of issues: the laws, the rulers, the election system, and the economic systems, among others. Their various complaints were united by the belief that each issue was creating a situation where the people had little to no political power. But there was no widespread contempt aimed at the Egyptian people for complaining about the many facets of their political system that repressed them. The advice offered to the Occupy movement, on the other hand, is to submit their demands in a form deemed acceptable by the current political system, that is, in a form that is easily managed by the system. Change, we are told, only occurs by going through the system; however, submitting one's democratic goals to a system designed to undermine and destroy democracy is setting yourself up for failure. It is as if one mocked the Egyptian protesters by claiming they should stay out of the street, and instead submit a well-written letter to Mubarak asking for true democracy. The reason why this is absurd and would never work is because the political system in Egypt was designed to undermine and destroy democracy. There is a reason the people took to the streets in Egypt, and there is a reason Occupy took to the streets in the US: their democratic goals are antithetical to the political systems they live in.

Comparing the US to Egypt might seem extreme, but the purpose of doing so is to illustrate that in order for the US to break free of managed democracy, it is necessary for the people to first realize they do not live in a democracy: they live in a system designed to

undermine and destroy democracy. If democracy is no longer associated with a repressive political system, then democracy would once again be freed to serve as a unifying moral force for positive change. The moment enough people in the US realize they live in a political system where they have no political power is the same moment that a legitimate democratic movement could ignite.

The attempt to rebrand democracy as the destruction of democracy is not the only case where a state purposely undermined an emancipatory political concept. Co-opting the language of a movement and turning it against itself is a common tactic practiced by the state. After two Red Scares, for example, US citizens now associate socialism and communism with a brutal form of authoritarianism, and anarchism with bomb wielding maniacs. Yet even with this distorted understanding about what the words represent, people still associate a great deal of moral force with the basic tenets that compose these ideas. When US citizens were asked, for example, what phrases were in the Constitution, almost two-thirds of respondents thought the phrase, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," was in the Constitution.<sup>55</sup> This phrase comes not from the Constitution, but from Karl Marx, one of the most hated individuals by Americans. The reason why this statistic is interesting is not because it shows a lack of knowledge about the Constitution, but because US citizens - who nearly worship the Constitution - thought a basic maxim of Karl Marx had enough moral force where its belonging in the Constitution seemed obvious.

Despite the propaganda that has distorted socialism, communism, and anarchism, there are still a good number of people who can separate the distorted understanding of these ideas from the emancipatory inner core that composes them. With democracy, however, there is a near total inability to separate the distortion of democracy from democracy itself. It is as if people

have either never noticed or completely forgotten that something horrible went wrong with democracy. It is hard to find any serious attacks on democracy in the US; or, at the very least, there is nowhere near the level of dismissal of democracy in the US as there was in Egypt. The best you generally find is someone who argues democracy in the US has weakened, and then they pine for some imagined time in the past when democracy flourished. Bob Herbert of the New York Times, for example, writes, “The Egyptians want to establish a viable democracy, and that’s a long, hard road. Americans are in the mind-bogglingly self-destructive process of letting a real democracy slip away.”<sup>56</sup>

Rebranding democracy as the destruction of democracy has been successful in the US. Just as the effort to associate socialism with Stalin, Mao, and North Korea resulted in Americans being less inclined search socialist doctrine out, rebranding democracy has dulled the people to the cries for democracy because they mistakenly believe they already live in one. By mistaking managed democracy for democracy, the people not only lose their political will to change the system, but they associate all the failure and political frustration they observe with managed democracy with democracy itself. If democracy is but polyarchy, why fight for it? And if democracy, socialism, anarchism, and a number of other emancipatory political ideas are blotted out by state propaganda, what options remain for social betterment? We arrive, as we have in the US, at a point of near-total despair: we have nothing left to hope for.

But why would there be such a strong effort to change the way people think about democracy? There is a strong effort to rebrand democracy as the destruction of democracy because the state and the wealthy hate true democracy. Historically, there have been three arguments made against democracy. The first argument is no longer fashionable, but was popular for centuries: the literal belief in Plato’s myth of metals. This argument claimed rulers were

superior beings, and so they deserved to rule over everyone else. Luckily, this argument no longer holds sway.

The next argument, which still exists today, is an economic concern primarily voiced by the wealthy. The concern is that spreading democracy to everyone, including the poor, would be tantamount to legitimizing theft. Surely, they argue, the horde of lazy, poor people will vote to steal the money and land of the hardworking, wealthy people. This argument was made by the Founding Fathers who feared granting democracy would lead to them losing their land to the peasants in an agrarian revolution, and it is a constant concern among capitalists that democracy might lead to an anti-capitalist system of government. The fear over the spread of socialism, for example, was great enough to warrant major propaganda campaigns in the US, as well as a number of gruesome wars, and the support of a number of brutal dictators.

But the most common argument, and the one scholars have named the “problem of democratic citizenship,” is that citizens are either too stupid, too ignorant, or both. It is very possible, they argue, that the citizenry is simply not up to the task of being an adequate citizen for a completely egalitarian democracy to be desired. There are two primary arguments within this overarching argument. First, it is possible that some citizens are not intelligent or moral enough to make proper decisions - even with adequate knowledge of the political system. And, second, a great deal of knowledge is required to make good political decisions, and the time it would take for a citizen to accumulate this knowledge is impractical.

Luckily, there are a number of proposed solutions to the ‘people are too dumb’ problem. The first solution is a form of managed democracy, what political scientists would call polyarchy. Those who argue for this view are like Huntington, who fear that a politically active populous would only lead to poor legislation. They believe the people are both grossly

misinformed about important political issues, and are incapable of making rational decisions. The solution, therefore, is to keep the illusion of democracy by allowing free, popular elections; however, the candidates who run for these elections must be restricted to those with the proper political ideas, that is, those that support the wealthy. Once the people have chosen one of a few carefully selected candidates, they must then become politically inactive. They must observe, not participate. While apathy sweeps over the people, the important, intelligent, and informed leaders would then run the state free from the opinions of the masses. The election process only serves to satisfy the people's already stifled political needs, and as a practical means of changing those who rule the country. Polyarchy describes the US and managed democracies around the world well.

Many of the “solutions” to the problem of democratic citizenship do not seem particularly democratic. A polyarchy that avoided the ceremonial election process, for example, would become indistinguishable from an aristocracy or an oligarchy. In both a polyarchy and an aristocracy, the people have no official political power; the only real difference is that polyarchies use democratic language and run elections to give the people the illusion of participation. After the democratic showmanship, however, both polyarchies and aristocracies result in a small group of people making the decisions for the people. In many circumstances, it would be easier for true democracy to emerge from an aristocracy rather than a polyarchy because the people in aristocracies know they do not live in a democracy, while the people in a polyarchies are fooled into thinking they live in a democracy. In aristocracies, therefore, democracy can serve as a unifying political force among the people. In the end, it appears the best solution to the problem of democratic citizenship is to not have a democracy at all. After all, there is no problem for a totalitarian state when its subjects are not well-informed about the

actions of the state.

So, if democracy is not ideal, what system would be better? An easy solution to the problem of democratic citizenship would be to create an intelligence-based meritocracy. If the intelligent, moral, and informed people ran the society, then the society would be better off than if the ill-informed, unintelligent and immoral people were allowed to participate. But how do you decide who is intelligent, moral and informed? The easiest of the three to measure would be how informed people are. It is not hard to imagine a test that would require significant political and historical knowledge in order to pass. But what if someone had sufficient political and historical knowledge, but was not intelligent enough to make the most rational choices?

The obvious solution is to measure intelligence. Unfortunately, this is not easy. There have been a number of attempts to measure intelligence in the past. For a long time, measuring the size and shape of someone's skull was the best means of determining someone's intellect. This method would be unfortunate for me, however, as I have a rather small head, and due to its past connection to racism and colonialism it would probably be seen as too barbaric to administer today. The preferred method of measuring intelligence today is through intelligence tests such as the IQ test. It is becoming more common for citizens to demand the issuance of IQ tests prior to giving someone the right to vote. When discussing the election of Barack Obama, for example, one kind gentleman put it:

We must have an intelligence test for voting along with a current events and government test. The last election Americans elected a non-citizen who refused to release any documentation of his entire life. He attended a hateful anti-American racist church for 20 years and is a certified communist. For Americans to elect such a person means that too many ignorant morons, idiots and imbeciles voted. <sup>57</sup>

I wonder how this gentleman would feel if the IQ test he demanded removed his own right to vote.

The demand for IQ tests has become a new means of attempting to suppress the ability of people who disagree with you from voting. The previously quoted gentlemen, for example, actually desired a test that removed Obama supporters from voting, not a test that accurately measured intelligence. The same underlying desire to limit a particular group from voting exists with many arguments for the issuance of IQ tests. The problem with intelligence tests is that they have been shown to measure levels of education, rather than levels of some raw form of intelligence. As a result, they exclude certain minority groups who have been left in a lower socio-economic and educational situation as a result of systemic racism. They also target specific types of intelligence, and ignore creativity and emotional understanding.

But let us assume that there exists some test capable of identifying the most intelligent people in a society. We can now ask whether intelligence is the only thing required for making important political decisions. It does not appear that it is. I have personally known a number of very intelligent people who happen to be impatient and cruel towards others. These people overlook the suffering of others, and, due to their intelligence, are able to rationalize the suffering away. It appears, therefore, that an important part of making political decisions for an entire society is having a robust ability to empathize. So, if you wanted to find the best individuals to make political decisions, you would not only have to find intelligent people, but moral, empathetic people. Finding intelligence through testing is hard enough, but finding truly wonderful people who care about others by looking at the results of a survey they filled out, is even harder. Intelligence tests and moral tests are incapable of locating the individuals most capable of making the best decisions about how a society should operate.

When looking at past examples of political systems justified under a type of meritocracy, you find that the individuals running the society abuse those who are not running the society. The basic justification used by both Madison and Wilson for why a particular set of people, as mentioned previously, were most capable of ruling, was that they were the most intelligent, educated, and moral people in the state. The “enlightened men,” however, did not act for the benefit of the people, but for the benefit of themselves. There are also historical examples of more robust forms of meritocracy where those allowed to rule actually had to pass tests measuring their intelligence, their education, and their knowledge about the political system. This type of system was used in China during the Han dynasty. The problem with these tests, however, is that they were restrictive, and so were extraordinarily difficult. As a result, those who wished to become rulers had to spend an enormous amount of time and money on education. As it turns out, those who could afford to spend one’s time studying and hiring tutors happened to be the wealthy members of the state. Many entrance exams today for restrictive professions, for example, have also become so difficult that the ability to spend extra time and money studying has given those with the means to do so an enormous advantage over those without the means to do so. Meritocracies have historically drawn from the wealthy members of society, and have been used to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

Another popular political system suggested to replace democracy is a compartmentalized Aristocracy. In this system, the state would be run by the experts of various disciplines. So, the scientists, for example, would publish their opinions about a particular issue - say climate change - and that opinion would have to be treated as the final say on the issue. The same goes for economists, military leaders, and foreign policy experts. Each compartment of the society would be run by that particular compartment, and there would be a centralized group of experts who

would choose how to prioritize each compartment's suggestions. Apart from issues of favoritism, self-interested evaluations from each compartment, and the ability for money to run the system in the same way it has run our managed democracy, there exists a major problem when political systems do not tie the actions of the state to the interests of the people. In this compartmentalized Aristocracy, the experts running the state would be far more privileged than the average person, and they would most likely resort to the same abuse of the people that self-described and actual meritocracies use. The people could only hope that the experts running their society would care enough about them to take their interests into account.

Another problem with both compartmentalized Aristocracy and meritocracy is that the system is built on the understanding that the people who run the state have the authority. What the state says, therefore, must be treated by everyone as correct. As a result of the state having to protect their authority, the people lose parts of their free speech that relate to important political issues. In China, for example, disagreeing with the party that runs the state on major political issues such as democracy can result in extraordinarily harsh treatment. The very allowance of open political debate runs contradictory to the interests of the state because it allows challenges to their authority, and so they must respond with force. If all the leaders of a state have going for them is their authority with regard to decision making, then any challenge to those decisions is a challenge to the only thing that holds their rule together. If the people think their leaders are making poor decisions, then they will start to think there is no reason they themselves should not be making those decisions.

There also exist others who are worried about the inefficiencies of group-based decision making used in true democracy, managed democracy, meritocracy, and compartmentalized Aristocracy. These people pine for the return of a single ruler. The benefit of a single ruler comes

from their ability to enact massive change quickly. In addition, the power of one ruler is always checked by their need to balance the interests of the wealthy members of the state who support him or her. The result is a system that can respond quickly to disaster, and still keeps the important interests of the wealthy in mind. The obvious problem people realize with a single ruler is that they can go bad. According to Aristotle, the best system of government would be a dictatorship with the most intelligent and moral individual in the state - who would be surrounded by wise advisors – serving as dictator. The worst system of government, however, is when that wonderful dictator either becomes a tyrant, or is replaced by one. The inability of the wealthy to control the desires of dictators in the past, have made them less inclined to accept one in the future.

An entire other group of people dismiss true democracy not out of contempt for the system itself, but out of the belief that true democracy will never emerge given the current economic order of the world. This widespread reluctance to embrace change in the face of adversity is one reason why the people in managed democracies are so politically apathetic. Not only are they too miserable to attempt to break free from managed democracy, but they are too miserable to even embrace small changes within the already existing system of managed democracy. The people in the US, for example, vote for their selected candidate every four years not out of support for that particular candidate, but through the embrace of what they see as a lesser evil. When choosing between Bush and Gore and Bush and Kerry, the Democrats simply voted for their team out of fear of the alternative. They were not pleased with their selection, but the system did not give them any other choice. In the current presidential election process, it is only a matter of time before Republicans completely despair, and vote for a candidate they cannot stand (Romney) as a means of avoiding the candidate they absolutely loathe (Obama).

Although it is true it would be hard for true democracy to emerge given the current economic order of the world that does not mean it cannot happen. Remarkable movements for democracy have occurred in the recent past, and are still occurring around the world today. All it would take for the people of the US to push for democracy would be the widespread realization that they do not live in one.

All of these different methods of avoiding democracy appear to solve the problem of democratic citizenship, but perhaps an even better solution to the problem is to show that there is no problem at all: the people are not stupid, and they do not need troves of political knowledge to make important political decisions. The argument made against the people's intelligence takes advantage of a number of empirical results to show that the people are misinformed, uneducated, and just plain dumb. One might have heard, for example, that 70% of young citizens of the US cannot locate the United Kingdom on a map, or that US citizens are incapable of discerning the differences between major political policies.<sup>58</sup> One might have also seen a video on the television or on YouTube with the goal of displaying how dumb US citizens are. These videos, just as the previous poll questions, focus almost entirely on facts - especially geography. After watching person after person fail miserably in the answering of "What is the currency called in Canada?" or "Who is the Vice President of the US?" the viewer can only conclude that US citizens are stupid, and the state is doomed.

But these results do not show that people are stupid, just ill-informed about particular issues. I would imagine academics would be less capable of correctly answering questions about pop singers than teenagers would be, but this failure does not mean academics are stupid. Now, some factual information is more important when it comes to making political decisions, but pointing to states on a map, or knowing the names of currencies, is not necessary when it comes

to making political decisions. If the US changed its education system so that it drilled the names and locations of states, and the names of currencies, into the minds of each student, would they be more suited for running a society? They would not because the important political decisions - the fundamental questions of how to run a society - are moral questions, and almost everyone forms an intuitive understanding of what is right and wrong based on the society they grow up in.

Knowing the difference between political policies is important when it comes to voting in our particular system, but it is unlikely that people will have enough time to remember these differences, and it should not even have to matter that they do not remember these differences. The inability to know the difference between Barack Obama's healthcare plan, and Hillary Clinton's healthcare plan, does not mean that the people do not know what they want from a healthcare plan.

If we reconsidered the role of the citizen, and what it means to be an intelligent citizen, as the ability to answer moral questions, rather than the ability to accumulate a particular set of facts, then there would no longer be major discrepancies between the abilities of citizens, nor would there be an information gap. When people are asked how they would act in an ethical situation, for example, the answers do not differ even when there is a substantial difference in how they think politically, or how well they are educated. If the role of the citizen was not to accumulate facts, but to provide their opinion on a set of moral questions that revealed how they wanted their society to function, then citizens would be perfectly capable of fulfilling their role as a citizen.

The role of each citizen, therefore, would not be to choose between candidates representing different policies they do not understand, but to answer fundamental moral questions that then set the goals of the society. The job of those officials in the government

would not be to represent the citizens, but to carry out the goals voted on by the citizens, and to issue reports on their ability to meet the expectations of the citizens. State workers would serve the people, not vie for their votes through the use of corporate-backed propaganda. Rather than going to the voting booth to check off someone's name, you would fill out a survey of moral questions about the major political issues of the day.

So, how would this system work in comparison to the system today? For the purposes of comparing the two different approaches, I will use one of the more important political issues in the US today: healthcare. In the current system, the last election was a showcase for various health care plans; however, these healthcare plans did not match popular opinion. The desire for a single-payer system, for example, was immediately dismissed by the major candidates because they needed the support of massive insurance companies to better their chance of winning the election, and universal healthcare was against the interests of these companies.<sup>59</sup> After lobbying from insurance companies, and massive propaganda campaigns, the resulting healthcare plan was merely an old conservative health insurance reform plan advocated by Republicans in the 1990s.

In the new conception of democracy, however, where the citizens provide the goals of the state, rather than vote on representatives, the ultimate result would be different. The people would be asked what they wanted their healthcare system to achieve. Seeing how the US is the wealthiest state in the world, the people might want to spend as much or maybe a little more on the healthcare system compared to other states, and they would expect similar or slightly better results. The state would then create a system designed to meet these requirements, and an independent organization would issue reports back to the people on their success. If the political system was created so that the people had the power, it would be unlikely that a healthcare

system like the one in the US today would exist.

In the healthcare system in the US today, for example, 15% of the population has no health insurance which kills an estimated 45,000 people each year; those who are insured have insurance plans that do not cover severe medical problems resulting in medical bills being the cause of bankruptcy over 60% of the time; 52% of below-average income “Americans avoid necessary medical care or medicine because they cannot afford it;” and still the US spends 16% of its GDP on health care: the highest among OECD countries, and almost double the OECD average.<sup>60, 61</sup> Compared to Japan, for example, the Japanese people visit the doctor over twelve times more frequently than US citizens do, the Japanese have universal healthcare, protection against medical related bankruptcy, a higher life expectancy, and far better results in an overwhelming number of medical success indicators; all the while spending almost three times less money on healthcare per person than is spent in the US.<sup>62</sup> If US citizens were asked if they would like to spend three times less money on healthcare, get universal healthcare, protection against medical related bankruptcy, have lower wait times, and be a lot healthier, I have a hard time believing they would say no. The desire for a better healthcare system exists in our current managed democracy, but the system has successfully undermined the people’s power to push for it. As a result, our healthcare system serves the wealthy, and the interests of major corporations, at the expense of the people.

The issue of healthcare is not unlike many of the other important political issues in the US today. The solutions to many of these major problems are abundantly obvious, they are only obscured by an endless amount of political party-based propaganda sponsored by the wealthy with the goal of supporting their own interests and the interests of corporations. If the people were asked basic moral questions about how they wanted various systems to work in the US, an

obvious consensus would emerge on a number of issues.

The emancipatory power of a true democracy could help bring about a radically better society. But before the US can break free of managed democracy and embrace true democracy, they must first realize that they do not live in a true democracy; they live in a system designed to undermine and destroy true democracy. Rather than blame each other for the failure of their managed democracy, the people must align against the system that has pitted them against each other. They must abandon their contempt for one another, and realize that everyone can be a perfectly adequate citizen if only the system was designed with their interests in mind. If the idea of democracy can break free from its association with the destruction of democracy, democracy could once again serve as a unifying moral force for positive change.

### **Part III: How to Promote True Democracy in the United States**

Perhaps true democracy is something to desire, but how does one bring it about? There are generally two different methods of going about promoting democracy. The first method advocates improving the institutions within the current system. The goal is to make managed democracy a little less managed. The second method does not advocate working within managed democracy, but replacing it with a true democracy. Neither of these two methods is inherently better than the other: they both have their positives and negatives. And neither method focuses entirely on the people, or entirely on the institutions. Both methods have to spread a new way of thinking about democracy to the people, and both methods have to eventually confront the practical problems associated with creating democratic institutions. So, rather than focus on one method or the other, I will provide some of my own thinking about how practitioners of both methods can go about promoting true democracy.

Those who would rather work towards a specific change to the current system prefer to focus on the first method. These people might be specifically suited for changing a particular institution within our managed democracy, or they might be weary of the second method's long-term focus on changing how the people conceive of democracy. There are a number of institutions and practices that were discussed in Part I that undermine democracy, and could therefore be improved. These institutions and practices include corporate news, the election system, the wealth gap, financial regulations, education, and others.

As was discussed previously, the news media in any state plays a vital role in informing the citizenry, deciding what political positions are acceptable to talk about, and challenging the state. The current corporate news system in the US fails to accomplish any of these tasks. There

are, however, sufficiently capable independent news sources that are able to fill in the gap left by corporate news. The first of three solutions to the problem of corporate news would be to provide more funding for independent news sources. By providing more funding, a greater number of people would have access to a quality news source. Another solution would be put restrictions on corporate news. It could be mandated that corporate news must draw its claims from specified institutions (for example, scientific claims must be backed up by peer-reviewed scientific journals), that it must present a variety of political opinions, and that it must be monitored by an independent organization to ensure it follows the rules. A third solution would be to completely restrict corporate news from operating on the television, the radio, and in print, and instead provide an independent tax funded news media that must also follow a strict set of regulations monitored by an independent organization. Working towards any of these three solutions would improve the current news media, and improve the democratic power of the citizenry.

Another system that undermines democracy in the US is the election system. There are a number of things that could be done to ensure that a wider range of political ideas are allowed into power. Substantial reform to how political parties are able to register for elections could be used to make it easier for additional political parties to get on the ballot. There would still be the concern, however, that voting for a third party rather than one of the two major parties would be a waste of a vote. A simple solution to this problem would be to grant each voter two votes. By having two votes, citizens could select the major party they would prefer as well as one of the additional parties. Another fix that would provide more representation for smaller parties would be to abandon simple majoritarianism - where the winner receives all of the votes - and establish a proportional representation system. If a smaller party, for example, was able to gather 10% of the vote, rather than leaving with no representatives in power, they would leave with having 10%

of the representatives. This new method would not only make it easier for new political parties to take form, but it would encourage people to move away from the two-party mindset that has created so much political apathy in the country.

Additional changes that could be made to the election system include changing the power of money in politics. A quick change that would only take a simple ruling by the Supreme Court could remove Super PACs, and the unlimited corporate spending they bring along with them. Substantial campaign finance reform could also set a specific amount of money that each candidate could use. By limiting the money they could use, it would lessen the impact of propaganda, and would put more emphasis on their ideas. One could also go a step further, and ban any type of political advertisement. Rather than having elections be decided by who can outspend, and out-advertise their opponent, a new system could be made that forced candidates to focus solely on arguments and ideas.

Another means of improving the election system would be creating more support for deserving candidates. If substantial grassroots campaigns could support a few more individuals with pro-democracy views, then citizens would have better options to choose from, others would have the chance to hear new ideas, and the overall system would be improved.

Improving the economic situation of US citizens is also another way of helping to create a more democratic society. Lessening the wealth gap, for example, would not only reduce the enormous power of the wealthy in the political system, but it would give the people more economic safety, and more free time to pursue democratic activities. Supporting the creation of worker's movements, such as preserving unions, is not only another means of supporting the people's economic situation, but it also provides a direct democratic experience that might later flower into a yearning for true democracy. Another simple solution would be increasing the taxes

on the wealthy, or, at the very least, abandoning the Bush Tax cuts for the wealthy.

Pushing for meaningful financial regulations and reparations is another means of reducing the stranglehold large corporations have on the citizenry. The collapse of pensions and the substantial debt that an endless number of states, cities, and towns, now face is in large part due to the behavior of unrestricted investment firms and banks. There are simple solutions to these problems. Do not allow investment firms to engage in certain risky activities, and either prevent banks from reaching a certain size, or break them into smaller banks when they get too big. Supporting any number of these various economic changes would help empower the citizenry by reducing the power of the wealthy.

The final opportunity for improving our managed democracy that will be discussed here is supporting learning institutions and education reform. Reforming the mandatory system of education in the US so that it is not only better funded, but focuses more on cultivating creativity, critical thought, and reflection would give citizens a better toolset for analyzing the political system they live in. It would also have the added benefit of preparing students for their extended school careers or their future jobs in a more meaningful way. The support of humanities in mandatory schooling, university education, and community education, would also help to foster the same important toolset that would be required to later transcend managed democracy: critical thinking and reflection.

The previous suggestions were all changes that could be made to improve the state of democracy in a system designed to undermine democracy. As a result, they are not particularly satisfying. They would, however, be major improvements to the current system. But in order to break free of managed democracy, one must work to replace the system, not modify it. Those who wish to break free of managed democracy do not advocate the first method that focuses on

particular institutions and practices; rather, they use the second method which focuses on providing a new view of democracy to the people. There are a number of different ways of thinking about democracy that would help the people break free of the managed democracy they live in.

Perhaps the most important idea that could be spread, and one that was discussed numerous times before, is that the US is not a true democracy but a managed democracy. In order for the US to break free of managed democracy, it is necessary for the people to first realize they do not live in a democracy: they live in a system designed to undermine and destroy democracy. The same was true in Egypt: when the people were appeased by minor adjustments to their managed democracy, they accepted their fate; however, when they realized the system itself was undemocratic, they were able to unite against it. The core ideas behind true democracy have the potential to rally the people behind a single cause: promoting their own power. The best way to avoid all of the propaganda created by the current system is to completely reject the current system. If the people no longer saw the current system as legitimate, and realized they have no power within it, then they would be able to embrace a single vision: the realization of a true democracy.

But what does it mean to completely reject the current system? There are generally two historical ways of rejecting a current political system: statist revolution and anarchic revolution. Now, what do I mean by these two terms? Statist revolution focuses primarily on overthrowing the current leaders with the hopes of replacing them with new ones. In Egypt, for example, the people were protesting for the removal of Mubarak, so they could choose a new leader for themselves in a fair election process. The same thing occurred in Libya - albeit through civil war rather than protest - where Gaddafi was overthrown and replaced by a group of rebel militia

leaders. The goal behind statist revolution is to first overthrow the existing regime, second to replace that regime with a new one, and then third hope that regime institutes the people's desired changes.

Anarchic revolution, on the other hand, starts from the ground up, and does not support regime change with a particular group in mind as the new leaders. Anarchic revolution simply ignores the current system and slowly whittles away at it by replacing key features. Their initial focus, therefore, is completely on instituting their own desired changes at the ground level. In early 20th century Spain, for example, a form of anarchism was established through widespread worker's strikes. Once the desired changes of upending the current economic system were mostly successful, the people then focused on forming the additional layers of organization. The ability to create these additional layers of organization was made possible only after the people's changes to the economic system granted them more political power. Both anarchic and statist revolution aim at instituting the changes the people want; however, they go about it in completely opposite ways.

When I talk about rejecting the illegitimate system in the US, I am advocating for a position more akin to anarchic revolution as opposed to statist revolution. Probably the greatest fear associated with revolutions is their susceptibility to being co-opted by the very forces you are trying to get rid of. And, unfortunately, statist revolutions have a long history of being co-opted and undermined by powerful groups that take advantage of the political action of the people. China and the Soviet Union are but two examples where totalitarianism was re-branded as socialism in order to gain the support of mass political movements. By rebranding their form of totalitarianism as socialism, the people were tricked into believing they were achieving their ultimate goal. Unfortunately, socialism never came. So, while the US was rebranding socialism

as brutal totalitarianism, the Soviet Union was rebranding brutal totalitarianism as socialism.

Both powers had completely different motives, but they were both able to undermine socialism in their own way, and for their own agenda.

The recent democratic movement in Egypt is another example of a failed statist revolution. By focusing on removing Mubarak from Egypt, rather than focusing on the underlying problems that continue to bring Mubaraks into power, the people have left an abusive system in place that will ultimately replace their old repressor with a new one. Their choice for a new leader, for example, will be from a series of candidates who believe they have the authority required to guide the people. The authoritative mindset it takes to even run for major political office makes the likelihood that those candidates will abuse the people in order to get reelected much higher. The problem with centralized authority is that it is easily corruptible, and completely reliant on the illusion their authority is legitimate. The revolutions in Egypt and around the world, although inspiring, will most likely devolve into another form of managed democracy because they did not go about their revolution in a way that protected them from the same forces that undermined past change.

Anarchic revolution, on the other hand, does not focus on supporting individuals and groups in the distant hope that these people will fix their problems; rather, anarchic revolution aims to fix the problems first. Anarchic revolutions are leaderless, and run on equality and democracy. They are also decentralized which avoids the problem of widespread political repression from within their perceived ranks. The goal of an anarchic revolution is to create a political situation where democracy can flourish in the future. Statist revolution, on the other hand, is composed of intermittent explosions of democratic behavior in the form of protests. These protests, although effective at instituting some type of change, do not create an

environment for sustained democratic activity. In Egypt, for example, the protests forced the will of the people onto the state, but these protests did not change the fundamental system of managed democracy that will end up undermining their democratic will in the future.

The anarchic revolution in Spain, however, sparked organized but leaderless worker's strikes that completely changed the political environment for the better. After these changes, the people were free to practice political and economic democracy:

I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilized life—snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc.--had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master.<sup>63</sup>

By focusing on the systemic problems in Spain, the people were able to completely replace their old repressive system with a new one. After the people changed the system, they were then able to set up social and economic systems that suited them. Rather than funnel their political will into an authoritative system whose survival depends on suppressing challenges to its authority, the people simply fixed things themselves.

The closest thing to a democratic and anarchic movement in the US is the Occupy movement: supporting it is crucial! The Occupy movement has already embraced traditional forms of protest in the US. They have marched, held signs, blocked entrances to key financial buildings and streets, shutdown banks, ports, and government buildings, and protested and blocked bank foreclosures. Occupy has also encouraged more union activity, and helped create a movement where disparate political elements can unite under. They have, additionally, provided means to ignore the current system. They have set up tents in cities around the world where they often offer free food, clothes, and shelter to those who need it. They have, in other words, established communities outside of the current political and social system. And they have, most importantly, forced reflection on the current political situation in the US and elsewhere. Despite the confusion most people feel towards Occupy, they will have encountered something that is probably new for them, and as a result tried to make at least some sense of it.

The Occupy movement is relatively new, and has the ability to create major change in the US. If Occupy is able to continue to gather more and more support, they will not only force more reflection on the current system, but they will be able to pursue greater changes to that system. If they could provide support for workers strikes similar to those in Spain, for example, they could help ignite a revolution with the potential to change the basic economic system in the US.

In addition to changing the basic economic situation, another method of promoting true democracy is to force critical reflection on true democracy and managed democracy. Conjoining both critical reflection and political practice would result in the benefit of both. While promoting the understanding that the US is not a democracy is vitally important, it is also somewhat difficult. It might be useful, therefore, to reinforce this argument with other arguments designed to undermine the stranglehold managed democracy has over true democracy. Two of these

arguments could focus on de-emphasizing the election process and changing the way people view the role of the state.

In the current system, the election process is treated as the most important democratic act. This is because voting in elections is really the only form of democratic participation that the state approves of. Since the state approves of it, it follows that it has little actual ability to bring change. The focus of each citizen, therefore, should not be directed at electing the lesser of two evils, but of participating in other forms of democratic expression. Criticism of the election process itself, and dissatisfaction with regard to the selection of candidates, continues to become more widespread. It is vital, therefore, to take advantage of this break in managed democracy in order to show how powerless the people are, and how incapable elections are at bringing change.

Forcing people to reflect on the role of the state and the so-called representatives that they elect is another way of forcing reflection on the greater issue of democracy in the US. The traditional role of the people is to elect representatives, and then observe while they do what they want. The hope is that the representative will continue to follow his or her constituents, but this is most often not the case. Popular opinion, for example, has been consistently ignored when it comes to the most important political decisions in the state. In response to representatives ignoring their constituents, citizens either blame themselves or each other for not putting enough pressure on them. But, even with pressure, a representative still has more incentive to listen to the wealthy that back their campaigns. If a representative alienates the majority of their constituency, they still have the power of gerrymandering and a two-party political system to rely on. The resulting relationship between a representative and their constituency is not one where the representative represents the people, but one where the representative abuses the people.

This unusual and overwhelmingly despised system is a perfect target that would help people to reflect on the current system, and rethink how an ideal system would work. The previous system I discussed, where the citizens acted as choosers of the goals of the state, is one example where there would exist a completely different relationship between the people and the state. If the people no longer had to vote for abusive representatives, and the officials in the government were simply there to carry out the demands of the people, then the state would be serving the people, not the other way around. By creating a system where the people weighed in on how they wanted the society to run, rather than simply voting for a person who may or may not support a list of policies they discussed in their propaganda during their election, the state would have a very specific set of demands. The creation of independent organizations tasked with analyzing the state's ability to meet these demands would give the people an understanding of how well the state is serving them.

Accomplishing any of this, whether it is through radical reform or revolution, would be exceedingly difficult, and would take a great deal of time and effort. Attempts at radical reform, for example, would have to overcome a system designed to undermine their efforts. Radical reformers would get little support from the election system, little support from representatives, and little support from corporate news. They would have to battle against a propaganda machine fueled by the established state and economic powers, and they would have to rely almost completely on themselves, and their own ability to organize others.

Those who would push for revolution would have to overcome a political and economic system that dominates the world. Democratic movements like the Occupy movement face extreme physical repression for the smallest political demonstrations. Those who hold signs in public parks are beaten, tear-gassed, pepper sprayed, arrested and shot with rubber bullets and

bean bags. The violence brought down upon these small political acts will only worsen if Occupy is able to grow into a serious threat to the established economic and state powers. In Spain, for example, the major powers of the world all united in their hatred of democracy and anarchism; they descended upon the democratic and anarchic communities with the full force of their militaries. They won: democracy and anarchism was destroyed. If a similar threat to the established economic and political powers was ever to come into fruition, the world would once again descend upon them. The violence brought upon protesters in Egypt, for example, was merely to protect a newly created managed democracy. If the Egyptians were actually achieving true democracy, their state and states around the world would do their best to ensure the people would fail.

### *Conclusion*

The United States is not and has never been a democracy. It is a polyarchy which views the democratic aspirations of its people as nothing more than something in need of management. The guiding philosophy behind the formation of the US was based upon an utter contempt for both democracy and the people.

The same reality exists today: the primary concern of the US is to manage the opinions of its people through propaganda, the corporate news media, misinformation, and through a broken two-party electoral system fueled by the wealthy. The corporate news media serves as the propaganda arm of the state by faithfully reproducing state propaganda. They also help to create a political spectrum of acceptable debate which is based upon their own internal calculations of what political approaches would or would not be acceptable to their corporate backers. The generation of misinformation by the state and the corporate news media also helps to maintain an

uninformed citizenry completely obedient to state interests. Any perceived weaknesses in the propaganda relationship between the state and the news is reinforced by propaganda in mediums outside of the news. In addition, the influence of money in politics, the two-party system, and a hyper-focus on elections have all reduced the amount of political power held by average citizen in the US. The result of all of these efforts is a people whose political ambitions and opinions are caged, expertly managed in order to protect against change that threatens the interests of the state and the wealthy.

Yet, despite their wretched condition, the people in the US do not try to escape from their cage: they do not even realize it exists! The managed democracy in the US is designed to undermine and destroy democracy in the same way as every other repressive regime in the world. The history of democracy in Egypt, for example, is composed of a series of small changes to the political system that, while making it appear more democratic, are actually more and more refined systems designed to undermine and destroy democracy. The US is no different; while the US appears more democratic than Egypt, this is only because the US is a few steps further down the evolutionary road of managed democracy. The advanced managed democracy in the US is actually more capable than its Egyptian counterpart at undermining and destroying democracy. But rather than break free of managed democracy, the people of the US, confined to their cage, decide they would rather lash out against each other. As they flail around and cry over a condition of near-total political frustration, they blind each other to their fate.

The rebranding of democracy as the destruction of democracy is the cage imprisoning the people, and it has severely damaged the possibility of social betterment in the future. Just as the effort to associate socialism with brutal totalitarianism has resulted in Americans being less inclined search socialist doctrine out, rebranding democracy has dulled the people to the cries for

democracy because they mistakenly believe they already live in one. By mistaking managed democracy for democracy, the people not only lose their political will to change the system, but they associate all the failure and political frustration they observe with managed democracy with democracy itself. If democracy is but polyarchy, why fight for it? And if democracy, socialism, anarchism, and a number of other emancipatory political ideas are blotted out by state propaganda, what options remain for social betterment? We arrive, as we have in the US, at a point of near-total despair: we have nothing left to hope for.

Hope can return, however, but, before this happens, the people of the US must first realize they do not live in a true democracy; they live in a system designed to undermine and destroy true democracy. Rather than blame each other for the failure of their managed democracy, the people must align against the system that has pitted them against each other. They must abandon their contempt for one another, and realize that everyone can be a perfectly adequate citizen if only the system was designed with their interests in mind. If the idea of democracy can break free from its association with the destruction of democracy, then democracy could once again serve as a unifying moral force for positive change.

But democratic movements in the past have always been either co-opted and turned against themselves, or outright destroyed. The Occupy movement, the most popular democratic movement in the US today, has already faced extreme violence despite their relatively small size. Setting up a tent in a public park, or holding up a sign in the street, warrants beatings, tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, bean bags, water cannons, and arrest. Those who wish to hold up the torch of democracy should ready themselves. For if a democratic movement was to ever threaten established economic and political power, the whole world would descend upon them.

But those torchbearers cannot let intimidation, the threat of violence, and the difficulty of the road ahead become their new cage.

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