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Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.
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US “democracy” abroad. After the invasion of Iraq, “a new form of rule” arose of military occupation +privatization + ‘civil society’. “This tried-and-tested formula has already wrecked much of Latin America and the whole of Africa. The dictatorship of capital. . .” Bush in Babylon by Tariq Ali, p. 3.

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[The following is Wolin’s explanation of the creation of the concept of “inverted totalitarianism” published in *The Nation* shortly before publication of his book. –Dick]


The war on Iraq has so monopolized public attention as to obscure the regime change taking place in the Homeland. We may have invaded Iraq to bring in democracy and bring down a totalitarian regime, but in the process our own system may be moving closer to the latter and further weakening the former. The change has been intimated by the sudden popularity of two political terms rarely applied earlier to the American political system. “Empire” and “superpower” both suggest that a new system of power, concentrated and expansive, has come into existence and supplanted the old terms. “*Empire*” and “*superpower*” accurately symbolize the projection of American power abroad, but for that reason they obscure the internal consequences. Consider how odd it would sound if we were to refer to “the Constitution of the American Empire” or “superpower democracy.” The reason they ring false is that “*constitution*” signifies limitations on power, while “*democracy*” commonly refers to the active involvement of citizens with their government and the responsiveness of government to its citizens. For their part, “empire” and “superpower” stand for the surpassing of limits and the dwarfing of the citizenry.

The increasing power of the state and the declining power of institutions intended to control it has been in the making for some time. The party system is a notorious example. The *Republicans* have emerged as a unique phenomenon in American history of a fervently doctrinal party, zealous, ruthless, antidemocratic and boasting a near majority. As
Republicans have become more ideologically intolerant, the Democrats have shrugged off the liberal label and their critical reform-minded constituencies to embrace centrisation and footnote the end of ideology. In ceasing to be a genuine opposition party the Democrats have smoothed the road to power of a party more than eager to use it to promote empire abroad and corporate power at home. Bear in mind that a ruthless, ideologically driven party with a mass base was a crucial element in all of the twentieth-century regimes seeking total power.

**Representative institutions** no longer represent voters. Instead, they have been short-circuited, steadily corrupted by an institutionalized system of bribery that renders them responsive to powerful interest groups whose constituencies are the major corporations and wealthiest Americans. The **courts**, in turn, when they are not increasingly handmaidens of corporate power, are consistently deferential to the claims of national security. **Elections** have become heavily subsidized non-events that typically attract at best merely half of an electorate whose information about foreign and domestic politics is filtered through corporate-dominated media. **Citizens** are manipulated into a nervous state by the media’s reports of rampant crime and terrorist networks, by thinly veiled threats of the Attorney General and by their own fears about unemployment. What is crucially important here is not only the expansion of governmental power but the inevitable discrediting of constitutional limitations and institutional processes that discourages the citizenry and leaves them politically apathetic.

No doubt these remarks will be dismissed by some as alarmist, but I want to go further and name the emergent political system “**inverted totalitarianism**.” By inverted I mean that while the current system and its operatives share with Nazism the aspiration toward unlimited power and aggressive expansionism, their methods and actions seem upside down. For example, in Weimar Germany, before **the Nazis** took power, the “streets” were dominated by totalitarian-oriented gangs of toughs, and whatever there was of democracy was confined to the government. In the United States, however, it is the streets where democracy is most alive—while the real danger lies with an increasingly unbridled government.

Or another example of the inversion: Under **Nazi rule** there was never any doubt about “big business” being subordinated to the political regime. In the **United States**, however, it has been apparent for decades that **corporate power** has become so predominant in the political establishment, particularly in the Republican Party, and so dominant in its influence over policy, as to suggest a role inversion the exact opposite of the Nazis’. At the same time, it is **corporate power**, as the representative of the dynamic of **capitalism** and of the ever-expanding power made available by the integration of science and technology with the structure of capitalism that produces the totalizing drive that, under the Nazis, was supplied by ideological notions such as **Lebensraum**.
In rebuttal it will be said that there is no domestic equivalent to the Nazi regime of torture, concentration camps or other instruments of terror. But we should remember that for the most part, Nazi terror was not applied to the population generally; rather, the aim was to promote a certain type of shadowy fear—rumors of torture—that would aid in managing and manipulating the populace. Stated positively, the Nazis wanted a mobilized society eager to support endless warfare, expansion and sacrifice for the nation.

While the Nazi totalitarianism strove to give the masses a sense of collective power and strength, *Kraft durch Freude* (“Strength through joy”), inverted totalitarianism promotes a sense of weakness, of collective futility. While the Nazis wanted a continuously mobilized society that would not only support the regime without complaint and enthusiastically vote “yes” at the periodic plebiscites, inverted totalitarianism wants a politically demobilized society that hardly votes at all. Recall the President's words immediately after the horrendous events of September 11: “Unite, consume and fly,” he told the anxious citizenry. Having assimilated terrorism to a “war,” he avoided doing what democratic leaders customarily do during wartime: mobilize the citizenry, warn it of impending sacrifices and exhort all citizens to join the “war effort.” Instead, inverted totalitarianism has its own means of promoting generalized fear; not only by sudden “alerts” and periodic announcements about recently discovered terrorist cells or the arrest of shadowy figures or the publicized heavy-handed treatment of aliens and the Devil’s Island that is Guantánamo Bay or the sudden fascination with interrogation methods that employ or border on torture, but by a pervasive atmosphere of fear abetted by a corporate economy of ruthless downsizing, withdrawal or reduction of pension and health benefits; a corporate political system that relentlessly threatens to privatize Social Security and the modest health benefits available, especially to the poor. With such instrumentalities for promoting uncertainty and dependence, it is almost overkill for inverted totalitarianism to employ a system of criminal justice that is punitive in the extreme, relishes the death penalty and is consistently biased against the powerless.

Thus the elements are in place: a weak legislative body, a legal system that is both compliant and repressive, a party system in which one party, whether in opposition or in the majority, is bent upon reconstituting the existing system so as to permanently favor a ruling class of the wealthy, the well-connected and the corporate, while leaving the poorer citizens with a sense of helplessness and political despair, and, at the same time, keeping the middle classes dangling between fear of unemployment and expectations of fantastic rewards once the new economy recovers. That scheme is abetted by a sycophantic and increasingly concentrated media; by the integration of universities with their corporate benefactors; by a propaganda machine institutionalized in well-funded think tanks and conservative foundations; by the increasingly closer cooperation between local police and national law enforcement agencies aimed at identifying terrorists, suspicious aliens and domestic dissidents.
What is at stake, then, is nothing less than the attempted transformation of a tolerably free society into a variant of the extreme regimes of the past century. In that context, the national elections of 2004 represent a crisis in its original meaning, a turning point. The question for citizens is: Which way?


Publisher’s description: Democracy is struggling in America--by now this statement is almost cliche. But what if the country is no longer a democracy at all? In *Democracy Incorporated*, Sheldon Wolin considers the unthinkable: has America unwittingly morphed into a new and strange kind of political hybrid, one where economic and state powers are conjoined and virtually unbridled? Can the nation check its descent into what the author terms "inverted totalitarianism"? Wolin portrays a country where citizens are politically uninterested and submissive--and where elites are eager to keep them that way. At best the nation has become a "managed democracy" where the public is shepherded, not sovereign. At worst it is a place where corporate power no longer answers to state controls. Wolin makes clear that today's America is in no way morally or politically comparable to totalitarian states like Nazi Germany, yet he warns that unchecked economic power risks verging on total power and has its own unnerving pathologies. Wolin examines the myths and mythmaking that justify today's politics, the quest for an ever-expanding economy, and the perverse attractions of an endless war on terror. He argues passionately that democracy's best hope lies in citizens themselves learning anew to exercise power at the local level. *Democracy Incorporated* is one of the most worrying diagnoses of America's political ills to emerge in decades. It is sure to be a lightning rod for political debate for years to come. In a new preface, Wolin describes how the Obama administration, despite promises of change, has left the underlying dynamics of managed democracy intact.

**Sheldon Wolin and Inverted Totalitarianism**

Sheldon Wolin, our most important contemporary political theorist, died Oct. 21, 2015, at the age of 93. In his books “Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism” and “Politics and Vision,” a massive survey of Western political thought that his former student Cornel West calls “magisterial,” Wolin lays bare the realities of our bankrupt democracy, the causes behind the decline of American empire and the rise of a new and terrifying configuration of corporate power he calls “inverted totalitarianism.”

Wendy Brown, a political science professor at UC Berkeley and another former student of Wolin’s, said in an email to me: “Resisting the monopolies on left theory by Marxism and on democratic theory by liberalism, Wolin developed a distinctive—even distinctively American—analysis of the political present and of radical democratic possibilities. He was especially prescient in theorizing the heavy statism forging what we now call neoliberalism, and in revealing the novel fusions of economic with political power that he took to be poisoning democracy at its root.”

Wolin throughout his scholarship charted the devolution of American democracy and in his last book, “Democracy Incorporated,” details our peculiar form of corporate totalitarianism. “One cannot point to any national institution[s] that can accurately be described as democratic,” he writes in that book, “surely not in the highly managed, money-saturated elections, the lobby-infested Congress, the imperial presidency, the class-biased judicial and penal system, or, least of all, the media.”

Inverted totalitarianism is different from classical forms of totalitarianism. It does not find its expression in a demagogue or charismatic leader but in the faceless anonymity of the corporate state. Our inverted totalitarianism pays outward fealty to the facade of electoral politics, the Constitution, civil liberties, freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary, and the iconography, traditions and language of American patriotism, but it has effectively seized all of the mechanisms of power to render the citizen impotent.

“Unlike the Nazis, who made life uncertain for the wealthy and privileged while providing social programs for the working class and poor, inverted totalitarianism exploits the poor, reducing or weakening health programs and social services, regimenting mass education for an insecure workforce threatened by the importation of low-wage workers,” Wolin writes. “Employment in a high-tech, volatile, and globalized economy is normally as precarious as during an old-fashioned depression. The result is that citizenship, or what remains of it, is practiced amidst a continuing state of worry. Hobbes had it right: when citizens are insecure and at the same time
driven by competitive aspirations, they yearn for political stability rather than civic engagement, protection rather than political involvement.”

Inverted totalitarianism, Wolin said when we met at his home in Salem, Ore., in 2014 to film a nearly three-hour interview, constantly “projects power upwards.” It is “the antithesis of constitutional power.” It is designed to create instability to keep a citizenry off balance and passive.

He writes, “Downsizing, reorganization, bubbles bursting, unions busted, quickly outdated skills, and transfer of jobs abroad create not just fear but an economy of fear, a system of control whose power feeds on uncertainty, yet a system that, according to its analysts, is eminently rational.”

Inverted totalitarianism also “perpetuates politics all the time,” Wolin said when we spoke, “but a politics that is not political.” The endless and extravagant election cycles, he said, are an example of politics without politics.

“Instead of participating in power,” he writes, “the virtual citizen is invited to have ‘opinions’: measurable responses to questions predesigned to elicit them.”

Wolin embodied the qualities Weber ascribes to the hero. He struggled against forces he knew he could not vanquish. He never wavered in the fight as an intellectual and, more important, in the fight as a citizen. He was one of the first to explain to us the transformation of our capitalist democracy into a new species of totalitarianism. He warned us of the consequences of unbridled empire or superpower. He called on us to rise up and resist. His “Democracy Incorporated” was ignored by every major newspaper and journal in the country. This did not surprise him. He knew his power. So did his enemies. All his fears for the nation have come to pass. A corporate monstrosity rules us. If we held up a scorecard we would have to say Wolin lost, but we would also have to acknowledge the integrity, brilliance, courage and nobility of his life.

Inverted Totalitarianism

By Mike Masterson
After reading my recent column (more like a tirade) on the dysfunction posing as governance in our nation’s capital, a valued reader suggested the explanation lies in a 9-year-old book by Princeton political philosopher Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*.

Despite its densely academic title, the basic concept Wolin presents seems fairly understandable and intriguing to a boy from the Ozark hills.

Wolin certainly raised a valid question: Has our America been transforming into some strange political beast where democracy is managed and government and economic interests are blended to create insurmountable power?

Portions of Wolin's views even in 2008 appear to make sense in helping explain why things have become increasingly fouled in the swamp of lucrative dishonesty permeating our D.C. government.

Care to take a stab at guessing what Wolin claims provides root for this destructive political condition? If you said lucre, you'd be right on the money.

In essence, Wolin's inverted totalitarianism describes a modern-day form of government increasingly morphing into an "illiberal democracy." It's a system, Wolin contends, where corporations have corrupted and subverted democracy to the point where cost-effective economics trumps our republic of, by and for we the people.

It's also a philosophy where everything is made a commodity and exploited to collapse. Meanwhile, the citizenry is lulled and manipulated through pervasive consumerism and sensationalism into surrendering liberties and active participation in government.

We need not look far to see how special-interest lobbying, a sensationalist national media, pervasive governmental spying, the exorbitant cost of seeking public office, the lying and scheming for personal public-service advantage, as well as the trend toward ignoring our Constitution appears to mesh with Wolin's philosophy.

Inverted totalitarianism is neither Republican nor Democratic in nature. Rather, it's a perverted form of gaining control. Government is created and democracy becomes managed while leading America into a larger, calculated order of things globally.

Wolin's concept fit better before the phenomenon of independent-minded tycoon and political neophyte Donald Trump turned the professor's idea on its head last November.

No doubt Trump hasn't been--and still isn't--part of the entrenched political establishment that for years has been on the receiving end of corporate and special-interest lagniappe. He didn't need their money, did he? He only needed (and got) enough Americans who were sick of it all.
Coming from the corporate side, Trump's role instead has been one of thriving on consumerism as well as being the corporate giant buying the influence with politicos of both parties. He understands the corruptive game.

Wolin's analysis also could apply in significant measure to state governments, where special interests and money often take precedent over the wants and needs of voting citizens. Whenever decisions in the seat of any government don't seem logical, behind-the-scenes influence is likely.

Wolin cites three primary ways in which his concept is the inverted form of classical totalitarianism.

First, rather than government dominating economic actors, in inverted totalitarianism, corporations become dominant, with government acting to serve their special interests. This approach soon is considered normal.

Secondly, voting is the only political activity expected or desired from citizens. Low turnouts are interpreted as an indication that most of the population has given up hope that the government will help. That didn't work out as projected in Trump's case, now, did it?

Third, rather than openly mocking democracy, the U.S. maintains the idea that it is the global model of democracy. (Hard for me to call today's turbulent nation a model for anything but democratically divided). In short, inverted totalitarianism reverses our expected classical view of government first being answerable to the people.

"It's all politics all the time," Wolin writes, "but a politics largely untempered by the political. Party squabbles are occasionally on public display, and there is steady and continuous politics among factions of the party, interest groups, competing corporate powers, and rival media concerns.

"And there is, of course, the culminating moment of national elections when the attention of the nation is required to make a choice of personalities... . What is absent is the political, the commitment to finding where the common good lies amidst the welter of well-financed, highly organized, single-minded interests rabidly seeking governmental favors and overwhelming the practices of representative government and public administration by a sea of cash."

His message, right or wrong, should be enough to make us ask what's truly going on within what we've always been simplistically led to view as our democratic republic. Who does government answer to nowadays?

As one reviewer explained: "[W]e need to understand the deep roots of our present troubles ourselves, and Wolin's book is an excellent beginning."

Mike Masterson's column appears regularly in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Email him at mmasterson@arkansasonline.com. Editorial on 04/15/2017
Watch Wal-Mart Ride with Sheldon Wolin’s Help

W-M Slogan 5-3-17: “Let’s Fight Hunger Together.” No, that’s another distraction and deception. You and I are not partners with giant corporations. They molded the system long ago to ensure their profits come first. The way to fight poverty and hunger is to change the economic structure, the system that causes poverty and hunger. Seek causes, roots, not symptoms, if you are serious. One of the fortunately many books for understanding our economic system is Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism by Sheldon Wolin (2008). For starters, the 2009 paperback edition contains a new Preface that offers a brilliant summary. The book is not about Wal-Mart, which is mentioned only twice. Rather, it explains the corporate-government economy Wal-Mart and other corporations ride. –Dick

Wells Fargo Criminals, Corporate Riders of Government Horse, and Sheldon Wolin; or, US Totalitarianism Is Not Nazi.

It’s all in a news report in the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (April 26, 2017), 1D: “At Wells Fargo, All Kept on Board: But Shareholders Angry at Meeting” by Ken Sweet (AP).

Beneath the fragmentation of the typical inverted pyramid news report is this argument, but you must claw your way to it by filling in gaps and fitting the story together: Top management of Wells Fargo over a period of “at least 15 years” committed numerous “scandalous” crimes of permitting or encouraging employees to open “up to 2 million accounts without customer permission as employees tried to meet aggressive sales goals.” That is, the officers and employees of the company committed massive fraud for personal profit. Thankfully we still had a watchdog government for The People that fined the company $185 million. However, because no top manager was prosecuted and imprisoned, business as usual sped on its way. (As I write the Republicans are deleting all the financial regulations they can.) The “board” of the bank (its makeup not explained) only this month told the shareholders the details from the frauds. Their response was anger, but not to the extent of firing the top management. Apparently the bank’s board (composed of Top management?) penalized several top management financially to satisfy the government’s fine, particularly the two top managers of the “community banking division” from whom the Board “clawed back” $75 million. But apparently no Top Manager was fired. I sympathized with the reporter trying to make all this clear in a very brief article.
Relevance of Sheldon Wolin’s *Democracy Inc.?* The US is an “inverted totalitarianism,” in which economic and state powers are conjoined and virtually unbridled with economic powers the owners and riders and the state the horse. And the People? No longer sovereign, The People have become the people who serve the racing business. (Chomsky in *Requiem for the American Dream* points out the persistence of that arrangement since the Founding Fathers, not only from Madison but also Jefferson. See Principle #1: Reduce Democracy.)

The US has become a “managed democracy,” which a rude person might label a plutocracy. A decade ago my metaphor might have seemed to exaggerate the relationship of corporate/government. Wolin calls them “close collaborators.” But the Trump administration exposes in brightest clarity to what extreme corporate power no longer obeys state governance. Many citizens don’t realize it, because the inversion has happened quietly but always steadily since Reagan’s administration, directed by the pervasive propaganda system of its massive concentrated ownership.

Wolin does not forget the inseparable power of the Pentagon, of Eisenhower’s warning of the “military-industrial complex.” The “managed democracy” of inverted totalitarianism depends upon the imperial military: the “huge defense spending accompanied by an aggressive foreign policy, a fervent nationalism, and a military that, unlike the German *Wehrmacht* in its contempt for business values, cohabits comfortably with corporate America” (45). But developing the militarized managed democracy would have required a much longer book—and newsletter. But see the following poem. -Dick

**READING THE NAMES OF THE DEAD**
By Gerry Sloan (2016)

Just fall into line and take a number
for the sequel to "Dumb and Dumber."
If you start to feel war is a bummer,
just ask who is paying the drummer.
Who can fault our method of mass killing

by a coalition of the willing
which governments can duly authorize
through a coordinated pack of lies?
A practice we may seem to decry.
Just don't pretend it is democracy.

CHOMSKY FILM AND BOOK
Chomsky Documentary Film: *Requiem for the American Dream.*

2016

http://requiemfortheamericandream.com/the-film/

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI_Ik7OppE1

REQUIEM FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM is the definitive discourse with Noam Chomsky, widely regarded as the most important intellectual alive, on the **defining characteristic of our time** – the deliberate concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a select few.

Through interviews filmed over four years, Chomsky unpacks the principles that have brought us to the crossroads of historically **unprecedented inequality** – tracing a half-century of policies designed to favor the most wealthy at the expense of the majority – while also looking back on his own life of activism and political participation.

Profoundly personal and thought provoking, Chomsky provides penetrating insight into what may well be the lasting legacy of our time – the death of the middle class, and swan song of functioning democracy. A potent reminder that power ultimately rests in the hands of the governed, REQUIEM is required viewing for all who maintain hope in a shared stake in the future.

Book *Requiem for the American Dream*

*BooB*

Paperback

- PaperbackBUY  Mar 28, 2017 | 192 Pages  Ebook +

ALSO BY NOAM CHOMSKY

See all books by Noam Chomsky

THE BEST DEMOCRACY MONEY CAN BUY: A TALE OF BILLIONAIRES AND BALLOT BANDITS by Greg Palast

The companion book
THE BEST DEMOCRACY MONEY CAN BUY: A TALE OF BILLIONAIRES AND BALLOT BANDITS
available from Seven Stories Press


[Palest remains fully relevant. –D]

It’s enough to make one cynical. American elections are manipulated, British parliamentarians are bribed, scientific research is financed by companies who are interested parties, energy crises are rigged, and a score of other varieties of modern-day sleaze.

What’s that? You say you’re already cynical? Well, unless you’re so cynical that you won’t even utter a word in the hope of changing anything, Greg Palast’s new book can be a handy tool.
The Best Democracy Money Can Buy is composed of dozens of essays -- many of which are actually summaries of Palast's investigative journalism escapades – on the myriad ways those of power and wealth have stolen and/or perverted cherished ideas and institutions of the United States and the United Kingdom. William Blum

CORRUPTION, POLITICAL CAMPAIGN FINANCING, AND THE PEACE, JUSTICE, AND ECOLOGY MOVEMENT

Zephyr Teachout, Corruption in America (2014).

This is another essential book for all who yearn for a better USA. It’s a thorough, legal explanation of the harms of Buckley, Citizens United, and McCutcheon, all of which expanded the power of oligarchical money.

The struggle to overthrow these anti-democracy rulings by the Supreme Court (SC) must continue and be amplified. But Teachout shows additional routes to decrease moneymed corruption while the main struggle continues. The Congress or any legislature can create these various remedies, summarized in her Conclusion p. 299-.

1. Absolute ban on staffers or members of Congress taking jobs in the influence industry.

2. Congress: define coordination as “independent corporate spending” so that it is independent.

3. Any legislature: laws banning legislators and staffers from holding stock in companies affected by legislation.
4. **The Public**: oppose any SC nominee that supports the logic of *Buckley, Citizens United, McCutcheon*. (Elsewhere of course she includes public pressure in promoting 1, 2, and 3 remedies.)

5. and 6. But the “two most important solutions that require no Supreme Court blessing are ideas advocated by Teddy Roosevelt: **publicly funded elections** [299-301] and **trust-busting** [“fight against monopolies per se” 301].” These remedies depend upon Congress, legislatures, and mass public mobilization. “...persistent self-government requires persistent vigilance against the use of public channels for private ends” (= corruption).

Teachout’s Constitutional foundation: “Courts should recognize that corruption is as important a concept as equality, or free expression” if we are to have a substantive representative democracy (298).

I am sending this to my lists on the assumption that at the foundation of the peace and ecology movement is JUSTICE (fairness, equity), all of which are undermined by excessive financial inequality. The slogan think globally, act locally is good so long as the local actors understand that individual atoms of action will not change the national structures created by a national politics warped by concentrated money determining our future. --Dick 6-4-16

(Sent to ACLU, OMNI Board, OMNI 350 Book Forum, Chellee and Pat, 3 AR legislators, 10 to 12 selected Sr Dems).

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**Nation on the Take**

*How Big Money Corrupts Our Democracy and What We Can Do About It* by **Wendell Potter, Nick Penniman**. 2015.

**About Nation on the Take**

American democracy has become coin operated. Special interest groups increasingly control every level of government. The necessity of raising huge sums of campaign cash has completely changed the character of politics and policy making, determining what elected representatives stand for and how they spend their time. The marriage of great wealth and intense political influence has rendered our country unable to address our most pressing problems, from runaway government spending to climate change to the wealth gap. It also defines our daily lives: from the cars we drive to the air we breathe to the debt we owe.

In this powerful work of reportage, Wendell Potter and Nick Penniman, two vigilant watchdogs, expose legalized corruption and link it to the kitchen-table issues citizens face every day. Inciting our outrage, the authors then inspire us by introducing us to the army of reformers laying the groundwork for change, ready to be called into action. The battle plan for reform presented is practical, realistic, and concrete. No one-except some lobbyists and
major political donors-likes business as usual, and this book intends to help forge a new army of reformers who are compelled by a patriotic duty to fight for a better democracy. An impassioned, infuriating, yet ultimately hopeful call to arms, Nation on the Take lays bare the reach of moneyed interests and charts a way forward, toward the recovery of America's original promise.

Reviews

“There could be no more important or timely book than Nation on the Take. Potter and Penniman make a compelling case that moneyed interests have seized control of the levers of power in ways we haven't seen since the Gilded Age. This is a stirring guide for how we can work together to reclaim our democracy and reunify our country.” – Doris Kearns Goodwin,

“Whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent, we are, first of all, Americans. This book makes a powerful case that dark money darkens our democracy, and we must rise and join as patriots to reclaim our cherished right to self-government.” – Senator Alan Simpson, (R-WY, 1979–97),

“Nation on the Take is a timely and inspired book about a uniquely American problem. But Penniman and Potter don’t merely draw our attention to the ways money dominates politics--they expertly show how the crisis connects with our daily lives and offer a path forward that includes people from all walks of life and all political persuasions.” – Arianna Huffington,

“Nation on the Take is a tour de force, a work of immense importance in the seminal debate at the core of all debates: will our nation be sold to the highest bidder or will the American people reestablish the republic our founders intended. A gripping and frightening exposé of the crisis, along with profound yet practical suggestions to repair the dysfunction, Nation on the Take should be required reading for all who care about America.” – Jack Abramoff, author of CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: The Hard Truth about Washington Corruption from America’s Most Notorious Lobbyist,

“If you’re among of the 90% of Americans who think our political system is broken, Nation on the Take is made for you. Wendell Potter & Nick Penniman have compiled a fact-packed handbook for political reform: the nitty-gritty on how billionaires’ campaign contributions and corporate cash have captured both political parties and bought policies for the 1 percent; how each of us pays a price in our daily lives for the runaway political money game; and, most important, specific suggestions on how we can reform our broken system and get our democracy back on track.” – Hedrick Smith, former Washington bureau chief for the New York Times and author of WHO STOLE THE AMERICAN DREAM?,

“The biggest challenge surrounding the issue of politics and money is that so many recognize it is a problem but so few can articulate why and what we can do about it. Penniman and Potter have cut through the clutter and distilled the essence of the challenge in a way that should have people marching in the streets. They make a compelling case that Americans across the political spectrum, from MoveOn Democrats to Tea Party Republicans, should care about this issue because it is an existential threat to our very democracy.” – Mark McKinnon, former communications director advisor for George W. Bush,

“This book is a rare achievement -- a profoundly serious analysis of our politics that is elegantly written, passionately argued, and convincingly detailed. It goes beyond the familiar 'the system is broken' rhetoric to make dramatically clear what's at stake for every citizen
when government is run by a pay-as-you-go band of plutocrats. Moreover, the pieces of the solution are on the table if we find the will to put them back together. It is clear-eyed and direct about a subject that is too often wrapped in opaque policy-wonk prose.” – Landon Jones, former managing editor of People Magazine,

“There is no doubt that our democracy is in crisis. And when democracy is in crisis, so is our economic system. As Nation on the Take so adeptly shows, Big Money and crony capitalism go hand in hand. Any entrepreneur looking to make it today is up against a rigged game -- one that is not just rigged on behalf of billionaire political donors, but also billion-dollar corporations that want to make sure the rules benefit them at the expense of everything and everyone else. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to de-rig the economy and restore the power of everyday citizens.” – Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben & Jerry’s,

- See more at: http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/nation-on-the-take-9781632861108/#sthash.xoUyEDTD.dpuf

(I first read about this book in Public Citizen News, the magazine of one of our nation’s foremost defenders of democracy—Public Citizen. –Dick)

THIRD PARTIES IN A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

During the past four decades, as I watched the Democratic Party turn into moderate Republicans and Republicans into Tea Party Libertarians, I vowed to stay in the Democrats to help hold on to its New Deal/Four Freedoms domestic values and vision for the future. (Together they were, and are now, the War Party.) Sometimes I voted for the Green Party candidate because its social values platform was nearest to the best of the Democratic Party and Republican platforms of the 1930s to 1970s (the EPA created by Nixon in 1974). In 2016 I voted for Democrat Bernie Sanders in the Primary. The Green Party has been and is today what the Democrats should be, particularly with Green opposition to US militarism and imperial conquests. The Green Party in both domestic and foreign policies is the best Party. But neither the Green Party, nor any third party, has ever been able to acquire enough votes to compete for the presidency. There are several explanations for this inability. Chiefly, the electoral system itself, reinforced by powerful closely related financial and political institutions, enfeebles Third Party aspirations. The reconstitution of this
system would enable a strong third party, led by someone like Bernie Sanders, to compete against the two major parties.

What follows are reforms of the US election system that might make it competitive against the two major Parties. Perhaps a coalition of present and past Third Party leaders could provide another framework for change. But these realities do not necessarily preclude any individual and single group not matter how small from starting to CHANGE THE SYSTEM. As I write a campaign is growing to persuade Bernie Sanders to run as a Third Party candidate, with Lincoln’s creation of the Republican Party against the Whigs as the hopeful model. --d

MAKING THIRD PARTIES POSSIBLE, Viable, COMPETITIVE

How to Enable Third Parties: MAKE ELECTIONS FAIRER and MORE OPEN TO 3RD PARTIES. HOW?

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Amplify Small Contributions with Significant Matching Funds.

*The Fair Elections Now Act (S. 1538) would* elevate the voices of everyday Americans by amplifying small contributions with limited matching funds.

**SHORTER CAMPAIGN PERIODS**

Only the main parties can fund these long campaigns

Long campaigns are not needed. By now Clinton and Trump are repeating us to death, and the newspapers are telling us every trivial detail of the campaign process, while laughing at us all the way to their banks.

Model: Britain allows only a few weeks.

*Canada Reminds Us That American Elections Are Much Longer : It's ...*

[www.npr.org/.../canadas-11-week-campaign-reminds-us-that-ameri...](www.npr.org/.../canadas-11-week-campaign-reminds-us-that-ameri...)

NPR  Oct 21, 2015 - How do so many other countries keep their campaigns so short while ... In France, the presidential campaign is generally only two-weeks long.

*How Presidential Campaigns Became Two-Year Marathons - The ...*


*The New York Times*

Apr 16, 2015 - Start of Britain’s “long campaign,” the period during which candidates are subject to spending limits. ... The Socialist party in France holds a primary ahead of the country’s 2012 presidential election. ... The comedian John Oliver doesn’t think the length of the American ...

*Time to Shorten the Presidential Campaign Season | RealClearPolitics*

[www.realclearpolitics.com/.../time_to_shorten_the_presi...](www.realclearpolitics.com/.../time_to_shorten_the_presi...)

RealClearPolitics

Aug 24, 2015 - up next: now reading: Time to Shorten the Presidential Campaign Season ... A shorter campaign season makes it easier for a wider variety

*Poll: Americans favor shorter presidential campaigns - USA Today*

[www.usatoday.com/...presidential-campaigns-shorter/250578...](www.usatoday.com/...presidential-campaigns-shorter/250578...)

USA Today

Jul 10, 2013 - Americans like the idea of shorter presidential campaigns and party primaries held across the country on one day, a new poll finds. Six in 10 ...
END GERRYMANDERING

This lawsuit could end partisan gerrymandering

Karen Hobert Flynn, Common Cause
CauseNet@commoncause.org via uark.onmicrosoft.com

I wanted to make sure you saw this message from yesterday. We've had a tremendous response, but still need your support. **Help us end partisan gerrymandering once and for all with a contribution today.**

Dear James,

*Common Cause v. Rucho* is the case that could end partisan gerrymandering.

On Friday we filed a lawsuit in North Carolina where state legislators created partisan gerrymandered congressional maps, unconstitutionally robbing hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians of their constitutional right to elect the candidate of their choice.

Voters should choose politicians; politicians should not choose voters. Letting politicians handpick their constituents bears no resemblance to a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

*Please help us fight this battle, and end partisan gerrymandering once and for all, with a generous tax-deductible contribution to the Common Cause Education Fund today.*

We're fighting unlawful partisan gerrymandering wherever we see it, but this case is the best chance to bring this issue to the U.S. Supreme Court at a time when a majority of justices seem willing to strike down partisan gerrymandering for good.

Republican legislators publicly and repeatedly stated that their goal was to gerrymander congressional districts in North Carolina to ensure an overwhelming Republican majority despite an equally split electorate.

In a transcript of a meeting to draw districts, one legislator proposed “that we draw the maps to give a partisan advantage to ten Republicans and three Democrats because I do not believe it’s possible to draw a map with 11 Republicans and two Democrats.”

This case — if it reaches the highest court in the land — could be what makes the U.S. Supreme Court decide that it is time to end gerrymandering nationally.

**But a lawsuit like this will be a long, hard battle. We’re digging in and committed to seeing it all the way through.**
Will you stand with us and provide the financial support an effort like this takes?

Common Cause opposes all forms of gerrymandering as an abuse of power, regardless of party or state. In Maryland, we’re working with Republicans to highlight the harm to democracy Democrats have done through their partisan gerrymandering. We'll continue to promote solutions — such as impartial commissions, the participation of nonpartisan agencies, unbiased and clear standards, and transparency requirements — that already work in several states.

But for now, we can't let North Carolina’s partisan gerrymander (one of the most blatant we've ever seen) stand.

Please support our effort to defeat this partisan gerrymandering in court. Your contribution will help fund the critical research, communications, and legal expertise we'll need to make this case a success.

Thanks for your support,

Karen Hobert Flynn
President

RANKED CHOICE/INSTANT RUNOFF

http://www.fairvote.org/rcv#how_rcv_works

Ranked choice voting (RCV) makes democracy more fair and functional. It works in a variety of contexts. It is a simple change that can have a big impact.

With ranked choice voting, voters can rank as many candidates as they want in order of choice. Candidates do best when they attract a strong core of first-choice support while also reaching out for second and even third choices. When used as an "instant runoff" to elect a single candidate like a mayor or a governor, RCV helps elect a candidate that better reflects the support of a majority of voters. When used as a form of fair representation voting to elect more than one candidate like a city council, state legislature or even Congress, RCV helps to more fairly represent the full spectrum of voters.

How RCV Works
Ranked choice voting (RCV) describes voting systems that allow voters to rank candidates in order of preference, and then uses those rankings to elect candidates able to combine strong first choice support with the ability to earn second and third choice support.

RCV is straightforward for voters: rank candidates in order of choice. Voters can rank as many candidates as they want, without fear that ranking others will hurt the chances of their favorite candidate. Exit polls and ballot analyses from ranked choice voting elections demonstrate that voters overwhelmingly understood how to rank candidates.

How the votes are counted depends on whether RCV is used to elect a single office, like a mayor or governor, or if it is used to elect more than one position at once, like for a city council or state legislature or for Congress in a multi-winner district.

**When Electing One Candidate to Office**

For a single office, like for a mayor or governor, RCV helps to elect a candidate more reflective of a majority of voters in a single election even when several viable candidates are in the race. It does this by counting the votes in rounds:

First, every vote counts for its first choice. If a candidate has more than half of the vote based on first-choices, that candidate wins. If no candidate has more than half of those votes, then the candidate with the fewest first choices is eliminated. The voters who selected the defeated candidate as a first choice will then have their votes added to the totals of their next choice. This process continues until a candidate has more than half of the active votes or only two candidates remain. The candidate with a majority among the active candidates is declared the winner. This video demonstrates the process:

Note that when used to elect a single office, ranked choice voting may be called instant runoff voting, because it allows a jurisdiction to have the benefits of runoff elections without the need for a second round of voting.

**When Electing More Than One Candidate in a Multi-Winner Election**

For a multi-winner election, like a city council elected at-large or a state legislature elected in a multi-winner district, RCV helps to elect candidates more reflective of the spectrum of voters.

Ranked choice voting in multi-winner elections is an American form of proportional representation. This means candidates who receive a certain share of votes will be elected; this share of votes is called the threshold. A candidate who reaches the threshold is elected, and any excess votes over the threshold are then counted for the voters’ second choices. Then, after excess votes are counted, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The
voters who selected the defeated candidate as a first choice will then have their votes counted for their second choice. This process continues until all seats are filled. This video demonstrates the process:

For a more detailed explanation, including a table showing results from a hypothetical election, see our Multi-Winner RCV Example page.

For details on how this could work to transform the U.S. House of Representatives into a much more effective and representative body, see FairVote’s proposed Fair Representation Act.

Note that when used to elect a multiple candidates to office, ranked choice voting is a form of fair representation voting, and it may be called single transferable vote or STV.

RUN-OFF VOTING

If you want to have a viable 3rd party, the first order of business is to get states to have run-offs elections for any House or Senate seat for which there are more than two candidates and no candidate receives a majority on the first ballot. Then people like me, who are attracted to some 3rd party but who don’t want to “throw their vote away,” can vote for that 3rd party on the first round of voting with no fear that they are helping elect another candidate whom they don’t want. The Green Party knows all about this strategy, of course, and has supported it for years. The Dems and Reps are against it, of course. Peace – Art

REPAIR THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA).

TAKE ACTION: Repair the Voting Rights Act

By: Chris Carson
6/24/2016

June 25 marks the three-year anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision to gut key provisions of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). We’ve had three years of bad laws that make voting harder in states all across the country. But there is a solution. Tell Congress to repair and modernize the Voting Rights Act TODAY!

League Members to Lobby Congress on Voting Rights

By: Jessica Jones
Hundreds of League members from around the country will be lobbying their U.S. Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill to advocate for the Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA).


**DROP 15% HURDLE, Open Presidential Debates to Long-Shot Candidates**

Require the *Commission on Presidential Debates* to loosen the present requirements that limit the debates to the two major party candidates. Read the argument by the *Los Angeles Times* that the Commission should drop the 15 percent hurdle in 2016, which would open the debates to the Libertarian and Green candidates.


**END SUPER DELEGATES**

*Winship: Superdelegates Represent What's Wrong With Democratic ...*

talkingpointsmemo.com/.../superdelegates-represen...

Talking Points Memo

Apr 1, 2016 - Last week, our suggestion that Hillary Clinton call for the resignations of her pals Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Democratic National ...[Superdelegate Pros and Cons - What are superdelegates ...](people.howstuffworks.com/superdelegate2.htm)

What's the point of having superdelegates in the first place? Explained Willie Brown, former mayor of San Francisco, "You have superdelegates because …

(GOOGLE for many more)
If the American people don't like Democrats or the GOP – the ballot-box ... is simple: Third parties are very much present in our electoral system ...

The last time the US saw a truly multi-party election was 1860. There were six parties running presidential candidates and the electoral vote ...

The most successful of the third parties in any one election was the ...SparkNotes: Political Parties: Third Parties

And what are the prospects of a third party emerging, such as the Reform or Green Party, ... The American two-party system is the result of the way elections are ...
The electoral system in the United States works against a proliferation of political parties. This fact has not prevented minor parties or independents from run.

People also ask

What is a Third Party Candidate?

What are the three major types of third parties that have appeared in American political history?

What is the role of a third party?

What are some of the major barriers to the political success of a third party?

Why Third Parties Can't Win - Odyssey

theodysseyonline.com/appalachian-state/why-third-parties-cant.../185330

Oct 11, 2015 - U.S. Elections are Structured in a Way that Makes a Two-Party System Inevitable.

How a Third-Party Candidate Could Cause an Electoral Crisis

www.huffingtonpost.com/.../how-a-third-party-cand...

The Huffington Post

Mar 17, 2016 - In the presidential election Clinton wins a plurality but not a majority of the .... how they have rigged their election system, not on any third party.

Why Third Parties Can't Compete - Forbes

www.forbes.com/.../third-parties-fusion-voting-elections-opinions...

Forbes

May 14, 2010 - Unfortunately, the Constitution essentially makes third parties unviable. ... beginning to end, while our presidential election cycle never seems to end. ... in a parliamentary system, where third parties such as Germany's Free ...

Further Reading

Gaming the Vote: Why Elections Aren’t Fair (and What We Can Do About It) by William Poundstone. 2008.  Poundstone examines numerous complications of the US voting system.  Chapter on Instant Runoff, for example, encompasses pages 162-72; that is, only 10 pages in a book of 283pp. on why elections aren’t fair!

Blog: http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/


For research purposes, specific subjects can be located in the following alphabetized index, and searched on the blog using the search box. The search box is located in the upper left corner of the webpage.


Facebook: www.facebook.com/OMNIPeaceDept

Contents: Democracy Newsletter #3

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/01/democracy-newsletter-3.html

USA Today: Plutocracy and Security

US Not a Democracy but an Oligarchy: a Scientific Study

Money, the 1%
Money:  *Pay to Play* Video

Tim Wise, *How America’s Elite…Jeopardize the Future*

**Koch Brothers’ Money**

Josh Israel, Koch Brothers’ $122 Million

Blumenthal, Koch Brothers’ Empire

**Just Give Me Security**

Risen, *Pay Any Price*

Dick, Despite Trillions for Security We Have Insecurity in the Capitol Mercy Me:  The Microscope on one Lilliputian Arkansas Comedy

Cole, US Corruption, a Comprehensive 10-Point List

**Yearning and Struggling for Democracy**

The People’s Pledge

Kaye, Fight for Four Freedoms

David Swanson, *Daybreak*

Oliver Stone, *Untold History of the United States* Film and Book

Dave Johnson, “We the People”? We the Rich? And Government?

Moyers & Co. 2013 - 2015 Exposing the Plutocracy

New Organizations

  - Get Money Out
  - Represent Us

The over 60 items in these four newsletters provide an introduction to US democratic failures, achievements, and hopes, but see OMNI’s newsletters on US imperialism and militarism, capitalism, corporations, and more for further understanding of the problems of US “democracy.” --D

[The remaining half of Hedges’ review of Wolin, to help ensure its preservation. Alas for our historical memory and evidence, web sites are fading.  --D]  Political
campaigns rarely discuss substantive issues. They center on manufactured political personalities, empty rhetoric, sophisticated public relations, slick advertising, propaganda and the constant use of focus groups and opinion polls to loop back to voters what they want to hear. Money has effectively replaced the vote. Every current presidential candidate—including Bernie Sanders—understands, to use Wolin’s words, that “the subject of empire is taboo in electoral debates.” The citizen is irrelevant. He or she is nothing more than a spectator, allowed to vote and then forgotten once the carnival of elections ends and corporations and their lobbyists get back to the business of ruling.

“If the main purpose of elections is to serve up pliant legislators for lobbyists to shape, such a system deserves to be called ‘misrepresentative or clientry government,’ ” Wolin writes. “It is, at one and the same time, a powerful contributing factor to the depoliticization of the citizenry, as well as reason for characterizing the system as one of antidemocracy.”

The result, he writes, is that the public is “denied the use of state power.” Wolin deplores the trivialization of political discourse, a tactic used to leave the public fragmented, antagonistic and emotionally charged while leaving corporate power and empire unchallenged.

“Cultural wars might seem an indication of strong political involvements,” he writes. “Actually they are a substitute. The notoriety they receive from the media and from politicians eager to take firm stands on nonsubstantive issues serves to distract attention and contribute to a cant politics of the inconsequential.”

“The ruling groups can now operate on the assumption that they don’t need the traditional notion of something called a public in the broad sense of a coherent whole,” he said in our meeting. “They now have the tools to deal with the very disparities and differences that they have themselves helped to create. It’s a game in which you manage to undermine the cohesiveness that the public requires if they [the public] are to be politically effective. And at the same time, you create these different, distinct groups that inevitably find themselves in tension or at odds or in competition with other groups, so that it becomes more of a melee than it does become a way of fashioning majorities.”

In classical totalitarian regimes, such as those of Nazi fascism or Soviet communism, economics was subordinate to politics. But “under inverted totalitarianism the reverse is true,” Wolin writes. “Economics dominates politics—and with that domination comes different forms of ruthlessness.”
He continues: “The United States has become the showcase of how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed.”

The corporate state, Wolin told me, is “legitimated by elections it controls.” To extinguish democracy, it rewrites and distorts laws and legislation that once protected democracy. Basic rights are, in essence, revoked by judicial and legislative fiat. Courts and legislative bodies, in the service of corporate power, reinterpret laws to strip them of their original meaning in order to strengthen corporate control and abolish corporate oversight.

He writes: “Why negate a constitution, as the Nazis did, if it is possible simultaneously to exploit porosity and legitimate power by means of judicial interpretations that declare huge campaign contributions to be protected speech under the First Amendment, or that treat heavily financed and organized lobbying by large corporations as a simple application of the people’s right to petition their government?”

Our system of inverted totalitarianism will avoid harsh and violent measures of control “as long as ... dissent remains ineffectual,” he told me. “The government does not need to stamp out dissent. The uniformity of imposed public opinion through the corporate media does a very effective job.”

And the elites, especially the intellectual class, have been bought off. “Through a combination of governmental contracts, corporate and foundation funds, joint projects involving university and corporate researchers, and wealthy individual donors, universities (especially so-called research universities), intellectuals, scholars, and researchers have been seamlessly integrated into the system,” Wolin writes. “No books burned, no refugee Einsteins.”

But, he warns, should the population—steadily stripped of its most basic rights, including the right to privacy, and increasingly impoverished and bereft of hope—become restive, inverted totalitarianism will become as brutal and violent as past totalitarian states. “The war on terrorism, with its accompanying emphasis upon ‘homeland security,’ presumes that state power, now inflated by doctrines of preemptive war and released from treaty obligations and the potential constraints of international judicial bodies, can turn inwards,” he writes, “confident that in its domestic pursuit of terrorists the powers it claimed, like the powers projected abroad, would be measured, not by ordinary constitutional standards, but by the shadowy and ubiquitous character of terrorism as officially defined.”

The indiscriminate police violence in poor communities of color is an example of the ability of the corporate state to “legally” harass and kill citizens with impunity. The
cruder forms of control—from militarized police to wholesale surveillance, as well as police serving as judge, jury and executioner, now a reality for the underclass—will become a reality for all of us should we begin to resist the continued funneling of power and wealth upward. We are tolerated as citizens, Wolin warns, only as long as we participate in the illusion of a participatory democracy. The moment we rebel and refuse to take part in the illusion, the face of inverted totalitarianism will look like the face of past systems of totalitarianism.

“The significance of the African-American prison population is political,” he writes. “What is notable about the African-American population generally is that it is highly sophisticated politically and by far the one group that throughout the twentieth century kept alive a spirit of resistance and rebelliousness. In that context, criminal justice is as much a strategy of political neutralization as it is a channel of instinctive racism.”

In his writings, Wolin expresses consternation for a population severed from print and the nuanced world of ideas. He sees cinema, like television, as “tyrannical” because of its ability to “block out, eliminate whatever might introduce qualification, ambiguity, or dialogue.” He rails against what he calls a “monochromatic media” with corporate-approved pundits used to identify “the problem and its parameters, creating a box that dissenters struggle vainly to elude. The critic who insists on changing the context is dismissed as irrelevant, extremist, ‘the Left’—or ignored altogether.”

The constant dissemination of illusions permits myth rather than reality to dominate the decisions of the power elites. And when myth dominates, disaster descends upon the empire, as 14 years of futile war in the Middle East and our failure to react to climate change illustrate. Wolin writes:

When myth begins to govern decision-makers in a world where ambiguity and stubborn facts abound, the result is a disconnect between the actors and the reality. They convince themselves that the forces of darkness possess weapons of mass destruction and nuclear capabilities: that their own nation is privileged by a god who inspired the Founding Fathers and the writing of the nation’s constitution; and that a class structure of great and stubborn inequalities does not exist. A grim but joyous few see portents of a world that is living out “the last days.”

Wolin was a bombardier and a navigator on a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber in the South Pacific in World War II. He flew 51 combat missions. The planes had crews of up to 10. From Guadalcanal, he advanced with American forces as they captured islands in the Pacific. During the campaign the military high command decided to direct the B-24 bombers—which were huge and difficult to fly in addition to having little
maneuverability—against Japanese ships, a tactic that saw tremendous losses of planes and American lives. The use of the B-24, nicknamed “the flying boxcar” and “the flying coffin,” to attack warships bristling with antiaircraft guns exposed for Wolin the callousness of military commanders who blithely sacrificed their air crews and war machines in schemes that offered little chance of success.

“It was terrible,” he said of the orders to bomb ships. “We received awful losses from that, because these big, lumbering aircraft, particularly flying low trying to hit the Japanese navy—and we lost countless people in it, countless.”

“We had quite a few psychological casualties ... men, boys, who just couldn’t take it anymore,” he said, “just couldn’t stand the strain of getting up at 5 in the morning and proceeding to get into these aircraft and go and getting shot at for a while and coming back to rest for another day.”

Wolin saw the militarists and the corporatists, who formed an unholy coalition to orchestrate the rise of a global American empire after the war, as the forces that extinguished American democracy. He called inverted totalitarianism “the true face of Superpower.” These war profiteers and militarists, advocating the doctrine of total war during the Cold War, bled the country of resources. They also worked in tandem to dismantle popular institutions and organizations such as labor unions to politically disempower and impoverish workers. They “normalized” war. And Wolin warns that, as in all empires, they eventually will be “eviscerated by their own expansionism.” There will never be a return to democracy, he cautions, until the unchecked power of the militarists and corporatists is dramatically curtailed. A war state cannot be a democratic state.

Wolin writes:

National defense was declared inseparable from a strong economy. The fixation upon mobilization and rearmament inspired the gradual disappearance from the national political agenda of the regulation and control of corporations. The defender of the free world needed the power of the globalizing, expanding corporation, not an economy hampered by “trust busting.” Moreover, since the enemy was rabidly anticapitalist, every measure that strengthened capitalism was a blow against the enemy. Once the battle lines between communism and the “free society” were drawn, the economy became untouchable for purposes other than “strengthening” capitalism. The ultimate merger would be between capitalism and democracy. Once the identity and security of democracy were successfully identified with the Cold War and with the methods for waging it, the stage was set for the intimidation of most politics left or right.
The result is a nation dedicated almost exclusively to waging war.

“When a constitutionally limited government utilizes weapons of horrendous destructive power, subsidizes their development, and becomes the world’s largest arms dealer,” Wolin writes, “the Constitution is conscripted to serve as power’s apprentice rather than its conscience.”

He goes on:

That the patriotic citizen unswervingly supports the military and its huge budget means that conservatives have succeeded in persuading the public that the military is distinct from government. Thus the most substantial element of state power is removed from public debate. Similarly in his/her new status as imperial citizen the believer remains contemptuous of bureaucracy yet does not hesitate to obey the directives issued by the Department of Homeland Security, the largest and most intrusive governmental department in the history of the nation. Identification with militarism and patriotism, along with the images of American might projected by the media, serves to make the individual citizen feel stronger, thereby compensating for the feelings of weakness visited by the economy upon an overworked, exhausted, and insecure labor force. For its antipolitics inverted totalitarianism requires believers, patriots, and nonunion “guest workers.”

Sheldon Wolin was often considered an outcast among contemporary political theorists whose concentration on quantitative analysis and behavioralism led them to eschew the examination of broad political theory and ideas. Wolin insisted that philosophy, even that written by the ancient Greeks, was not a dead relic but a vital tool to examine and challenge the assumptions and ideologies of contemporary systems of power and political thought. Political theory, he argued, was “primarily a civic and secondarily an academic activity.” It had a role “not just as an historical discipline that dealt with the critical examination of idea systems,” he told me, but as a force “in helping to fashion public policies and governmental directions, and above all civic education, in a way that would further ... the goals of a more democratic, more egalitarian, more educated society.” His 1969 essay “Political Theory as a Vocation” argued for this imperative and chastised fellow academics who focused their work on data collection and academic minutiae. He writes, with his usual lucidity and literary flourishes, in that essay:

In a fundamental sense, our world has become as perhaps no previous world has, the product of design, the product of theories about human structures deliberately created rather than historically articulated. But in another sense, the embodiment of theory in
the world has resulted in a world impervious to theory. The giant, routinized structures
defy fundamental alteration and, at the same time, display an unchallengeable
legitimacy, for the rational, scientific, and technological principles on which they are
based seem in perfect accord with an age committed to science, rationalism and
technology. Above all, it is a world which appears to have rendered epic theory
superfluous. Theory, as Hegel had foreseen, must take the form of “explanation.” Truly,
it seems to be the age when Minerva’s owl has taken flight.

Wolin’s 1960 masterpiece “Politics and Vision,” subtitled “Continuity and Innovation in
Western Political Thought,” drew on a vast array of political theorists and philosophers
including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, John Calvin, Martin
Luther, Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Max Weber, John Dewey and
Hannah Arendt to reflect back to us our political and cultural reality. His task, he stated
at the end of the book, was, “in the era of Superpower,” to “nurture the civic
consciousness of the society.” The imperative to amplify and protect democratic
traditions from the contemporary forces that sought to destroy them permeated all of
his work, including his books “Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory” and
“Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life.”

Wolin’s magnificence as a scholar was matched by his magnificence as a human
being. He stood with students at UC Berkeley, where he taught, to support the Free
Speech Movement and wrote passionately in its defense. Many of these essays were
published in “The Berkeley Rebellion and Beyond: Essays on Politics and Education in
the Technological Society.” Later, as a professor at Princeton University, he was one of
a handful of faculty members who joined students to call for divestment of investments
in apartheid South Africa. He once accompanied students to present the case to
Princeton alumni. “I’ve never been jeered quite so roundly,” he said. “Some of them
called me [a] 50-year-old ... sophomore and that kind of thing.”

Radical Change. In its pages he and other writers called out the con game of
neoliberalism, the danger of empire, the rise of unchecked corporate power and the
erosion of democratic institutions and ideals. The journal swiftly made him a pariah
within the politics department at Princeton.

“I remember once when I was up editing that journal, I left a copy of it on the table in
the faculty room hoping that somebody would read it and comment,” he said. “I never
heard a word. And during all the time I was there and doing Democracy, I never had
one colleague come up to me and either say something positive or even negative
about it. Just absolute silence.”
Max Weber, whom Wolin called “the greatest of all sociologists,” argues in his essay “Politics as a Vocation” that those who dedicate their lives to striving for justice in the modern political arena are like the classical heroes who can never overcome what the ancient Greeks called *fortuna*. These heroes, Wolin writes in “Politics and Vision,” rise up nevertheless “to heights of moral passion and grandeur, harried by a deep sense of responsibility.” Yet, Wolin goes on, “at bottom, [the contemporary hero] is a figure as futile and pathetic as his classical counterpart. The fate of the classical hero was that he could never overcome contingency or *fortuna*; the special irony of the modern hero is that he struggles in a world where contingency has been routed by bureaucratized procedures and nothing remains for the hero to contend against. Weber’s political leader is rendered superfluous by the very bureaucratic world that Weber discovered: even charisma has been bureaucratized. We are left with the ambiguity of the political man fired by deep passion—‘to be passionate, *ira et studium*, is … the element of the political leader’—but facing the impersonal world of bureaucracy which lives by the passionless principle that Weber frequently cited, *sine ira et studio*, ‘without scorn or bias.’ 

Wolin writes that even when faced with certain defeat, all of us are called to the “awful responsibility” of the fight for justice, equality and liberty.

“You don’t win,” Wolin said at the end of our talk. “Or you win rarely. And if you win, it’s often for a very short time. That’s why politics is a vocation for Weber. It’s not an occasional undertaking that we assume every two years or every four years when there’s an election. It’s a constant occupation and preoccupation. And the problem, as Weber saw it, was to understand it not as a partisan kind of education in the politicians or political party sense, but as in the broad understanding of what political life should be and what is required to make it sustainable. He’s calling for a certain kind of understanding that’s very different from what we think about when we associate political understanding with how do you vote or what party do you support or what cause do you support. Weber’s asking us to step back and say what kind of political order, and the values associated with it that it promotes, are we willing to really give a lot for, including sacrifice.”

Wolin embodied the qualities Weber ascribes to the hero. He struggled against forces he knew he could not vanquish. He never wavered in the fight as an intellectual and, more important, in the fight as a citizen. He was one of the first to explain to us the transformation of our capitalist democracy into a new species of totalitarianism. He warned us of the consequences of unbridled empire or superpower. He called on us to rise up and resist. His “Democracy Incorporated” was ignored by every major
newspaper and journal in the country. This did not surprise him. He knew his power. So did his enemies. All his fears for the nation have come to pass. A corporate monstrosity rules us. If we held up a scorecard we would have to say Wolin lost, but we would also have to acknowledge the integrity, brilliance, courage and nobility of his life.

END DEMOCRACY NEWSLETTER #4

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