

FDL Movie Night: Heist: Who Stole the American Dream?

By: [Lisa Derrick](#) Monday April 2, 2012 5:00 pm

You know things are bad when Paul Craig Roberts, one of the founders of Reaganomics, says about deregulation and the current state of the economy:

It's gone too far.

With *Heist: Who Stole the American Dream*, directors Frances Causey and Donald Goldmacher trace the roots of today's current economic crisis back to a 1971 memorandum written by Lewis F. Powell Jr.— a Virginia lawyer and representative of the tobacco industry who later became an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. The Powell Memo, written for the Chamber of Commerce, lays out a very solid, point by point plan for corporations to loosen regulations and gain greater and greater control of the economy for their own benefit at the expense of the American people. Powell wrote:

The most disquieting voices joining the chorus of criticism came from perfectly respectable elements of society: from the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals, the arts and sciences, and from politicians.

In his memorandum, Powell advocated a “purge of liberal elements” from culture and society and “constant surveillance” of textbook and television content.

The Chamber of Commerce embraced the Powell Memo and set about to bring its suggestions into reality. Conspiracy? Well, in this case: **Yes.**

Powell advocated for corporations to control politicians through campaign donations and lobbying; and for corporate elements to own the media, thus controlling the public's access to information. Enter the conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation founded by Joseph Coors, the CATO Institute and the Competitive Business Institute, among others. The memo urged business to politically penalize those who oppose it. Today we see what the repeal of Glass-Steagall Act which kept commercial banks and investment banks separate, the Fairness Doctrine, NAFTA, and other deregulations have caused. Ronald Reagan's new bible for his Cabinet was *Mandate for America*, written by the Heritage Foundation (including misspellings in the text!) which laid further methods to improve conditions for corporations while screwing the middle and lower income classes. The decline of labor unions, the increased number of lobbyists, *Citizens United*, outsourcing of labor, credit swaps, mortgage default epidemic, recession—all of these aspects of our current economic and political crises can be traced back to Powell's memo.

So what can we do? *Heist* points out that there are two kinds of power in America: organized money and organized people. Grassroots democracy; public funding of elections as opposed to corporate finance in campaigns; green jobs, including manufacturing parts here in the US; put Glass-Steagall Act back into law; prohibit lobbyists, shop and invest locally, and support unions.

Heist is a non-partisan film, making clear that both Republicans and Democrats are responsible for the current slate of laws which encourage the corporate rape of America. The filmmakers lay the blame squarely at the feet of those who embraced and enacted Powell's memorandum; those who put their profit before the United States of America and the planet as a whole; and those who continue to destroy our unique and visionary society through greed and fear-mongering.