



Antidote to the Powell Memo

By George Polisner

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The wealthy patriarchy sought to undo the gains of the 1960's -Civil Rights, Women's Rights, Labor, Peace, environmental, and counterculture movements

The United States political system is at a crossroads. One path continues toward an entrenched system of minority rule bordering on fascism. The other path is a journey toward a well-educated, well-informed, and engaged society fully participating in democracy and how we spend our money at the federal, state, and local levels.

The following provides background and insight into addressing major flaws in the current political system, why those flaws exist, why they are becoming more profound and entrenched, and offers a long-term solution.

In the 1960's -Civil Rights, Women's Rights, Labor, Peace, environmental, and counterculture movements were gaining momentum in the United States. The wealthy patriarchy in America was becoming deeply concerned about an erosion of power and political control.

On August 23, 1971, in reaction to intersecting movements questioning an American system favoring minority rule, [Lewis Powell's Memorandum](#): "Attack on the American Free Enterprise System" was sent to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The memorandum described concerns that the "attacks" were joined by the academic community, the religious community, media, intellectuals, artists, scientists, and politicians. It also stated that in many of those communities, the movement was primarily driven by minorities.

Powell noted that the colleges and universities that are critical of the "American Free Enterprise" system were funded by tax revenues collected from the very American corporations and wealthy individuals under siege. He reminded the Chamber that the media companies, including broadcast television, were owned and controlled by corporations depending upon the American enterprise system to be economically viable.

The Problem - Oligarchy

When you examine the Powell memorandum, it should be painstakingly clear that although the Memo is written as a defense of the "Free Enterprise" system, Powell is addressing how to maintain a wealthy patriarchy's control of concentrated wealth and power in the hands of the few in America.

Much of what Powell described in his Memo has been fully funded and implemented over the last 50 years. Its successful implementation is the root cause of the rapid erosion of any form of representative democracy in America.

Ironically, while attacking the ability of workers to unite and collectively bargain, it effectively called for a union of corporations and the extremely wealthy to be represented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, while supporting intellectual freedom on college and university campuses, Powell called for the emergence of faculty supportive of right-wing perspectives.

Powell did not question why so many of the most educated in American society embraced liberal views.

The Memo is at the heart of why many voters today continue to elevate corrupt and/or incompetent candidates to local, state, and national office. This explains why many support candidates and elected members who vote against the interests of most Americans on a variety of critical issues. These unqualified members vote consistently against issues such as expanding and protecting voting rights, education, affordable healthcare, fair taxation, climate action, gun violence prevention, labor rights, human rights, campaign finance reform, strengthening social security, and anti-corruption measures.

The Memo Calls for Right-Wing "Scholars"

The memorandum called for:

- a pool of right-wing "scholars" and speakers
- the review and control of textbooks
- the providing of equal time on campus for right-wing ideas such as "trickle-down" economics
- the hiring of professors and instructors who are committed to right-wing ideology
- the funding of "think tanks" to produce official-looking reports which have led to a basis for climate change denial, the control of media messaging (think Fox "News", NewsMax, Sinclair Broadcasting, InfoWars, etc.)
- the development of local Chambers of Commerce to coordinate communications
- the constant monitoring (thus censorship) of television networks, radio, and print media
- the funding of lobbyists and growing political influence (the American Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC), countering the work of the ACLU
- taking control of the judicial system (Federalist Society)
- the expansion of deregulation and privatization

The work of Lewis Powell was largely implemented beginning with the Reagan Administration. Reagan's economic policies began multiple generations of wealth concentration, favored privatization, eroded education, attacked government as wasteful, compromised the affordability and accessibility of higher education, severely weakened unions, and eliminated the Fairness Doctrine.

The Powell call to fund propaganda-producing "think" tanks produced resources for organizations such as the American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity, The Federalist Society, Freedom Partners, Heritage, ALEC, and others. Instead of addressing a societal imperative, their process is to support a conclusion. For example, "Trickle Down Economics Benefits All," "Clean Coal is Clean Energy," or "Right to Work" benefits labor -are all examples

of propaganda masquerading as non-partisan analysis of important issues that are intended to misinform and manipulate voters.

Control of Information - Media and Education

Media consolidation and profitability is another arena cited in the Powell memo that has gravely weakened democracy regarding the control of the distribution of information. In 1983 90% of American media was owned by 50 companies. In 2011 90% of media was controlled by six companies.

When the Powell memo was written, the average cost of tuition to attend public universities in the United States for four years was less than \$2,000. In 2022 it is nearly \$44,000. A society that is serious about any meaningful form of democracy would not create such a significant economic obstacle to ensure its citizens are well-educated and prepared to succeed in a highly competitive and challenging world.

Any form of democracy including a democratic republic requires a well-educated, well-informed, and civically engaged society. Lewis Powell knew this over 50 years ago. His memorandum dealt directly with education and information. When you erode education and constrain the flow of news information, you can indirectly affect engagement. For example, you can weaken voting rights. A populace where a substantial percentage does not understand voter suppression initiatives are less likely to engage in defense of voting rights.

You can weaken how information is derived and distributed. If a large part of the population believes that on January 6, 2021, a group of tourists engaged in political discourse in the nation's capital, they will not engage in defense of a system that was violently attacked.

Powell, Reagan, and today's GOP know that if you erode the education system and control information while concentrating wealth, you severely weaken the middle class in the United States. The middle class has long been the true economic engine in America. While working people may fantasize about maintaining several homes, a private jet, and skiing in the Alps, most hard-working people simply want to improve or maintain their quality of life. They generally want greater opportunity for their children and future generations.

Decent wages and benefits, a world-class public education system, affordable higher education, healthcare, social security, and affordable homes were and are the American family dream. Couple the American dream with justice, equity, and opportunity for all -and you elevate the American Dream to the promises inherent in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and most legal precedent up until the current, heavily corrupted United States Supreme Court.

Loss of Democracy

The Lewis Powell Memo and the system he defined have driven the United States toward authoritarianism and far off of the rails of democracy, justice, and equity. With repeated attacks upon the role of government ("I want a government so small I can drown it in a bathtub."), the consolidation of social and broadcast media to a handful of companies (such as Murdoch's Fox, Zuckerberg's Facebook or Meta, and the emergence of Musk's offer for Twitter), the stacking of the Supreme Court and the judicial system with unqualified, extremist judges, the exacerbation of wealth inequality through taxation policies favoring the wealthiest citizens, the weakening of unions, the rapid erosion and attacks upon public education (to the point where we are legislating what facts can be taught in overcrowded schools by overworked and severely underpaid teachers), the unaffordability of higher education, disenfranchising and suppressing voters, the

gerrymandering of Congressional districts to preserve minority rule, and the proliferation of propaganda masquerading as scientific reports supporting law and policy that is harmful to the average citizen. Add extreme weather patterns and catastrophic conditions, an economy that is continuing to grow and benefit the extremely wealthy while creating uncertainty and anxiety for most people, provide unabated access to assault weapons, and you have a society on the precipice of collapse.

It has been 51 years since Powell published his memorandum. To date, there has been no development of a progressive ecosystem providing a countervailing alternative in the United States. While there is cyclical talk about the importance of local elections and school boards, progressive media, and academic intellectual freedom, there has not been a comprehensive approach to planning the critical elements of the ecosystem, and funding has been inconsistent, narrow, and generally issue focused.

Even the Democratic party largely abandoned running candidates in rural areas, creating a vacuum and facilitating the rise of unqualified, or worse -election-denying extremist GOP candidates. Now even Sarah Palin has returned to the political scene, joining others who have no business in Federal, State, or Local leadership positions. Thankfully, the progressive ecosystem has not been completely abandoned -there are many great organizations and dedicated individuals working to address specific areas and issues.

Nevertheless, without a comprehensive, well-resourced system, in each election cycle important progressive/liberal candidates face longer odds due to the erosion of education, the consolidation of media, extreme wealth concentration, and ineffective messaging.

In 2016 nearly 63 million voted for a corrupt, racist, failed businessman and reality show host. While this was close to 3 million votes less than those cast for his opponent, Hillary Clinton, the electoral college preserved minority rule in the United States.

In 2016 many voters thought an outsider to the political system might be able to accomplish more for the American people by not being constrained by the system's conventions and traditions. It should have been painstakingly obvious within weeks of Trump's inauguration that elevating him as a political outsider to the system would be the equivalent of choosing someone who's never piloted an airplane to fly your passenger jet because wouldn't that make the flight far more entertaining.

As if that was not a manifestation of a republic in disarray, knowing of his incompetence, deep patterns of corruption, and cruelty, 74 million people thought he deserved another four years (thankfully, 81 million Biden/Harris voters had not lost their minds, and the electoral college failed its purpose of protecting the white male patriarchy. Representatives in Congress, as well as State and Local elected members, include seditious co-conspirators, election deniers, and inept and/or corrupt individuals such as Mitch McConnell, Kevin McCarthy, Marsha Blackburn, Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz, Joe Manchin, Lauren Boebert, Ron Johnson, Krysten Sinema, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Louie Gohmert, and many others. This serves as additional evidence of a weakened crumbling republic.

We must support candidates and incumbents in the short term; however, we must not neglect to fund and build a long-term effective media infrastructure. If we are to remain a democratic republic, we must chart the course for our future together. And we must agree to make the investments necessary to transform our societal aspirations into a tangible future.

How can we save democracy and shift the United States to a system embracing justice, equity, democracy, and human rights?

A Potential Solution - Democracy

If you agree that a democracy requires a well-educated, well-informed, and engaged society, a recommended approach, acting on behalf of all people against the risks of minority control and the U.S. descent into authoritarianism, think of a new type of union organization funded through small subscriptions, "Netflix for Democracy" if you will. A small recurring subscription payment establishes funding for staffing and resources necessary for systemic analysis and action.

If a significant percentage of society were to commit to providing, for example, \$12 per month to a "new voters union" based on the following mission and charter, we could build a formidable ecosystem, accountable to our members and society, the mapping of an ecosystem that is based upon new and existing organizations:

1. The union must rely upon small monthly fees from every member. It must not accept large payments or donations from any source. Establish a financial governance structure to allocate and report on funding.
2. The first phase of the union will be to recruit and hire trusted organizational and thought leadership (subject matter experts) to form ethical governance and articulate an overarching strategy, communications, and resource development. (Public policy, economics, climate, equity, justice, rights organizations). Draft leaders from all political parties such as Lawrence Lessig, Liz Cheney, and others who represent fact/evidence-based perspectives.
3. Create a subsidiary or identify partnering organizations to offset the Federalist Society -rate judges on qualifications, competence, and experience. Provide information when a qualified candidate is politically blocked from the nomination and confirmation process.
4. Create a subsidiary or partner to counter ALEC for people's law, policy, and research.
5. Hire subject matter experts in technology, constitutional law, climate, energy, ethics, economics, immigration, voting, human rights, education, media/journalism, transportation, commerce, healthcare, housing, and public health.
6. Develop media platforms and partners who will lead content creation and the development of social and conventional distribution platforms. Create and acquire content providing civic and issue-based education.
7. Provide grants for organizational subsidiaries or partners based upon efficacy/impact.
8. Encourage community/kitchen table meetings to discuss common values and understand local issues and challenges. Prioritize common issues for candidates committing to a voters' union platform.
9. Provide campaign resources for candidates who commit to the platform in State, Local, and National elections.
10. Strengthen civic participation through technology supporting virtual townhalls, validated constituent/elected member interaction, and provisioning a model framework for participatory budgeting.

The primary focus should be on the elements required for a thriving democracy: Education, information, and engagement. The secondary focus will be across all societal imperatives such as climate, healthcare, justice, infrastructure, and more -as secondary issues, if unabated, will have a decaying impact upon democracy.

Education

There must be a consistent and significant investment to address the education system in the United States for this and future generations. If we aspire toward democracy, a well-educated society is a prerequisite. It is also the key to preparing future generations to compete in a challenging, highly competitive, and volatile world.

We will provide analysis and consideration of better pay and benefits for teachers, smaller class sizes, year-round schools, affordable/free community colleges, and public universities.

Finally, teaching facts, evidence, science, and history must be protected from the political ebb and flow over time. Real history does not change based upon a legislative majority at any given time.

Media

We must address information: the funding of independent journalism/media, non-partisan fact/evidence/science-based research, and reporting. Consideration of the removal of broadcast licenses from media leveraging public licenses granted surreptitiously (ie.- The Learning Channel/TLC with programmatic content such as Sister Wives, Dr. Pimple Popper, 90 Day Fianceé -and replace with meaningful content providing education about civic, political, and economic engagement). The removal of the term 'News' from any broadcast station that provides misinformation and dangerous propaganda to its viewers/readers/listeners.

We must address and fund social media platforms. Such platforms thrive on conflict and controversy. They are now used to distribute and amplify dangerous lies and propaganda used to influence elections in the United States and around the world. For example, the Mueller investigation reported that there were 3,814 Twitter accounts controlled by Russian State actors (via the Internet Research Agency, or "IRA"), who had engaged over 1.4 million Twitter subscribers and managed to organize rallies in support of a major U.S. Presidential campaign.

As Mark Zuckerberg controls Facebook (with Instagram and Whats App) and the notable privacy issues related to Cambridge Analytica, with Elon Musk on the precipice of controlling Twitter, right-wing supporter Larry Ellison and Oracle controlling TikTok, - the concern over subscriber data privacy and the propagation of misinformation and causing the amplification of propaganda through a partisan "echo chamber" - there must be people-owned alternatives to massive commercial social media platforms.

Increased Political Engagement

Engagement: Since the Reagan era, CEO/executive pay ratios have increased from 20 times the average worker wages to 324 times the average wage in 2021. Wealth concentration has been exacerbated through massive tax cuts for the wealthy (masquerading as tax cuts for all), minimizing capital gains taxes, corporate taxes, estate taxes, and income taxes -all often sold as "trickle-down" economics. Other policies that support business deregulation, privatization, and the weakening labor unions are also intended to concentrate wealth (and thus power).

The so-called "[Citizens United](#)" Supreme Court ruling dramatically weakened the power of an average citizen by elevating money to the equivalent of free speech. As a result, people are working harder to tread economic and political water. This leads to generational economic despair,

uncertainty, and anxiety about the future. This has a significant impact on the perpetuation of minority control - not only is society having to overcome a massive wealth advantage (particularly since the [Supreme Court](#) elevated money to speech), but a fearful and less educated populace is much easier to manipulate and control. And as society is driven to work longer hours, they are far less likely to engage in addressing a political system in rapid decay.

Therefore, a longer-term objective should be to address [wealth inequality](#), reduce what is considered a "full-time" workweek, and restore the American middle class. A more equitable expression of power leads to more people being engaged in the process instead of thinking inspired by massive inequality such as "what good can I do?" or "what difference will my vote make?". A more equitable system in which a well-educated, well-informed, and engaged society is evolving toward a participatory democracy and participatory budgeting will truly be a beacon for the rest of the world to see and follow.

A Half Century Assault on Democracy

Initial optimism in political organizations to address the concentration of wealth and power has faded. Each organization has simply become a mechanism to collect donations and grow email and text message distribution lists and digital petition signatures. While understandingly important in each election cycle, the lack of vision, when viewed historically over multiple generations is astounding.

We must understand we are fighting to overcome a half-century of an assault by the wealthy few and their political skills and it will likely take determination and multiple generations of effort to realign the United States with a moral arc of a universe that must bend toward justice for all.

It is well past time to fund long-term infrastructure benefiting all people as opposed to the extremely wealthy minority now in almost complete control of the United States.