

## A True Democracy and Its Effect On America's Social, Educational, and Economic Institutions

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### **INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?**

The universal interpretation of a model democracy involves ideas that intend to promote equal voting rights for all, majority rule, and scrupulous elections. In fact, the very definition of a democracy is “a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.”<sup>1</sup> It should be implicit in this definition that such unified notions apply to all sectors of American society: educational, economical, political, and societal. Yet, judging from these factors, the U.S. has proven to be extremely deficient in the aspects of what a true democracy looks like and the benefits that ensue such governing. When examining America's overtly corrupt and capitalist economy, it is visible that the market is overwhelmed with private, self-aggrandizing businesses and owners. There is an utmost lack of collaboration, equity, and justice in the educational institutions and a similar situation in the workforce. This unremitting imbalance in American society can be answered with one simple call to action: democracy.

Over the years, democracy has demonstrated to be a critical tool in fostering societal equality, fairness, and stability - when executed correctly. Democracy has played a fruitful role in reducing poverty and social injustices involving economical, educational, and labor institutions. Modernization theories have argued that “structural decreases in poverty during the development process typically lead to broader socio-cultural and political transformations that increase the likelihood of the emergence of stable democracies,” and effectively vice versa.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, according to *American Journal of Political Science*, by Michael Ross, “many studies claim to show that democracies do a better job than nondemocracies of improving the welfare of the poor.”<sup>3</sup> The studies have shown to be consistent with current models of democracy across the world where income redistribution, equality in the workforce, and general funding of services are systematically and intrinsically ingrained into the government. So why, when America claims to be a democracy, do we fail to see significant signs of democracy in educational, economical, and the workplace sectors of our society?

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<sup>1</sup> [definition of democracy](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510347.2019.1575369>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122920?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122920?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

It has been historically acknowledged the dismantlement and failure of a government is generally due to poor governance. The leaders are unable to accommodate a functioning society wherein they are fruitless in generating public goods, maintaining public transparency, and, most importantly, facilitating citizen participation. However, it has also been historically noted that not all democracies have been productive and successful in said governing endeavors. Yet, when the extent to a true democracy is effectively executed and fulfilled in all private and public sectors of society, it has the potential to do much good. Good governance calls for “free and fair elections for vertical accountability...independent and effective judicial systems to enforce basic constitutional principles and rights... [and] comprehensive systems of horizontal accountability, including courts, parliamentary oversight, audit agencies, ombudsman and human rights commissions,” according to the Applied Knowledge Services.<sup>4</sup> If this is what a model government ought to look like, then the implementation of a sustainable democracy accurately reflects such sentiments. And according to Nayef Al-Rodhan, author *Sustainable History and the Dignity of Man: A Philosophy of History and Civilisational Triumph*, there are eight fundamental aspects of good governing and societal function, a few being: “participation, equity, and inclusiveness...accountability...free, independent, and responsible media... [and] transparency.”<sup>5</sup> Being that democratic function directly mirrors these foundational principles, it is only logical to impose them into the educational, economical, and labor sectors of American society.

When examining the social and economical benefits of implementing a direct democracy into all divisions of American society, it is clear that this is an urgent - yet, politically underrepresented - issue. Applying democratic ideals into America’s larger institutions will effectively contribute to the elimination of social injustices, poverty, and systemic inequities. According to The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black Americans account for 13% of the workforce, Asian Americans account for 6%, Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up 1% of the workforce, people of two or more races make up 2% of the workforce, and Hispanics account for 17% of the workforce, however they may be of any race. The other 78% of the American labor force are made up of White Americans.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of profession, without the heavy implementation of democracy in the American workforce, employees who belong to a minority will continue to be undermined socioeconomically. In 14 states and in the District of

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<sup>4</sup> <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/moving-on-up-out-of-poverty-what-does-democracy-have-to-do-with-it/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_governance)

<sup>6</sup> Center for Learning in Action, Williams. “What Is Workplace Democracy?” Center for Learning in Action, <https://learning-in-action.williams.edu/breaking-the-mold/what-is-workplace-democracy/>

Columbia, African American unemployment rates exceed white unemployment rates by a ratio of 2.0-to-1 or higher. This gap may be seemingly insignificant, but it amplified the flaws of the lack of a democratic workforce. Even if a field of labor is led by its employees, because of an imbalance in workers' race and economic situation, the company's leaders will not consider consumers who belong to minority groups and/or are people of color. A direct root of creating a democratic workplace is finding the balance of racial backgrounds in employees, or lack thereof. Once a racially balanced employee force has been constructed, there are a plethora of benefits when creating a democratic workforce.

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### **DEMOCRACY BENEFITS THE WORKPLACE**

Instilling democratic values at the core of every workplace across the United States will create a direct line from employer to employee. This chain of accessibility will allow for more members of minority groups to have the ability to work in positions which otherwise would've been deemed not feasible. An idea as minimal as allowing employees to vote on issues in the workplace rather than simply having those at the top decide upon the matter creates a positive work environment where the average employee's concerns can be heard. This leads to a chain of democratic ideas in the workplace including friendly debate and participatory decision-making systems. By having employees be so heavily involved with finalizing important decisions, it is guaranteed that the surrounding neighborhoods and even nation-wide consumers will benefit. When it comes to democratically deciding on issues which will directly affect the community, the employees are obviously going to have their community's best interest at heart, resulting in an influx of new families in neighborhoods which would be previously labeled as 'undesirable.' It is important to note that this is different from gentrification. As through this democratic system, minority families and potentially 'bottom-tier' economic citizens would have the ability to find new places of residence. Regardless of how positively influential implementing democracy in the workplace can be, many social justice issues cannot be solved merely through democratic labor practices. Inner city housing projects and the violence which surrounds them, adequate and responsible childcare services, and access to a highly challenging education are all issues which cannot be solved through a democratic workforce, but can be rooted into one.

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### **INCORPORATING DEMOCRACY INTO EDUCATION**

The purpose of education in a democratic society is to induce the values of collaboration, community and justice into the hearts of our students. These values are essential to improving a functioning democracy in any country. According to Dana Bennis, democratic education will implement the idea that every student is born unique and that our thinking process varies from

person to person. It is crucial that such a system will allow students to engage with the world around them to become positive, contributing members of society. Studies show that educational environments alluring young students as active participants in their own learning are linked with higher student attendance and achievement. Positive learning environments can lower a teacher turnover by 25%; teacher turnover results in increased costs in funding and poor student achievements. (Learning Liffott). With this notion in mind, democratic education would expand the learning process for all students and make them aware of the real world. Students educated in conventional schools for the majority of their lives represent one of the biggest challenges in democratic education and that is being stuck in the cycle of following predetermined lessons and material (Caine, 2008).<sup>6</sup> Since soliciting student voice and choice in the classroom lies so far outside the educational norm in our society, democratic education practices may be met, initially, by considerable student resistance. In this cycle the problem is that students are used to being told what to do, how to do it, and why they should. Everything has been laid out for them, leaving little to no room for creativity or their own thinking (Heim, 2016).<sup>7</sup> It's almost as if the system wants to create puppets that must follow every order and movement they decide. The curriculum trains students to be docile and follow the course without objections.

Our schools should emphasize commitment to a democratic system in which every citizen is honored in a respectful and just community that values and “encourages a critical approach in the intellectual search for truth and meaning in each individual’s life” (Purpel 1989).<sup>8</sup> Democratic education provides a more meaningful learning experience and this is something many schools lack. Schools fall short when it comes to valuing a diverse curriculum and critical-thinking skills. One way to implement democracy into our education, is to institute more freedom-based practices within our educational system. If people have the choice and freedom to study what interests them, then they become more deeply engaged in, and thus less alienated from, their learning. A case study by Powell shows us that 68% of students who are learning about topics that interest them, result in higher grades and are more attentive to the subject.<sup>9</sup> Whereas only 41% of students who learn the basic subjects given in their curriculum result in higher grades. More engagement leads to better retention and better critical reflection and analysis. It also allows students to conceptualize the material and apply it to reality!

While it may take time to adjust to democratic education and there will be resistance from the students and staff, I strongly believe that once democratic education is practiced, the results will be extraordinary. Throughout the U.S history, Americans have swivelled between

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<sup>6</sup> Caine, R. N. et al (2008). *12 Brain/Mind learning principles in action: Developing executive functions of the human brain*. California: Corwin Press.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Heim, “Education Secretary says civics education should encourage activism,” Washington Post, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Purpel, D. (1989). *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*. New York: Bergin and Garvey

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whether the focus of public education should be to create skilled workers for the economy, or to educate young people for responsible citizenship. Democratic education can prevent social injustices and inequality in the schools. If we ever hope to have schools that are engaging and truly embody democracy, then the classes within them must provide opportunities for students to experience freedom, choice in what is studied, and justice for all.

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## THE UPSIDES OF A CAPITALIST ECONOMY

In a capitalistic economy, a Laissez - faire system allows private transactions between individuals to be exempt from intervention of the government. Essentially creating a free market wherein the worth of any commodity is dictated by the rules of supply and demand rather than a government approved standard. This system is responsible for the creation of private corporations that are to meet the needs of the consumer based on supply and demand. The plethora of large corporations that contribute greatly to the economy are responsible for the creation and management of the various commodities required by the public. Whether it be a technological advancement or rather essential resources such as oil and water, products of the living world. Regarding a public involvement in the development of the aforementioned corporate entities, there are many individuals involved in the success of the business. Firstly, there are those who are employed and are in service of the corporation, this includes a plethora of positions and workers that are all directly involved in the success of the business. There also exists the consumerbase, those that indulge in the product of the corporation and are a direct representation of the success of the company. Last and possibly the individuals that are held in the highest of regards in the current economic landscape are those that invest millions of their own dollars in the future of the corporations. These individuals contribute the most in the shortest time to the success of the company. The importance of these individuals can be reflected in the ways that they influence the corporations, more specifically in the decisions it makes regarding its future and the allocation of its assets.

In recent years, due to the importance of these shareholders to the corporations, corporations have allocated a large majority of their earnings to the shareholders, many reporting up to 93% of these earnings to the shareholder.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, 83% of the shareholder population is made up of the top 10% of the richest households in the United States. The relationship between the corporations and these rich individuals perpetuates a power system wherein power is directly tied to an individual's worth in assets and this power is juggled between the corporation and the individuals with greater asset values. It can be described as a pseudo symbiotic relationship where it is understood that both parties use their power measured

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<sup>10</sup> "Accountable Capitalism Act - Elizabeth Warren." [www.warren.senate.gov](http://www.warren.senate.gov)

in their asset value to make the other more powerful and gain more power as a result. In a country rooted in the values of democracy where those in places of power are elected by the people and for the people, in the economic world, it seems that the interests of the majority, represented by the workers and the consumerbase are not dealt with in a similar manner. Both the workers and consumer base are necessary for the success of the company, while shareholders are not necessarily as vital. It is because of the subservience perpetuated by the dynamics between the rich and the poor that the majority is at the moment quite powerless against the heads of the corporation and the shareholders. Considering that those employed to the business are the ones that are more directly involved in bringing about the changes concerning the company's future, it would make sense that a larger portion of a company's earnings would be distributed more evenly proportional to the work and contributions that they make for the company. It is true that contributions made by the shareholders provide a company with a plethora of resources that contribute to its growth, but when considering the power dynamics in the company and how both funds and power should be distributed amongst the parties involved, there should be a greater amount of resources contributed to the worker and the consumer.

A proposal to fix such inequality amongst the shareholders, workers and consumers can be taken through what is known as the public investment fund. This initiative seeks to balance the power that individuals in society have over these businesses by making the money invested in them come from every citizen so that money contributions cannot be held in higher regard to the company and the aforementioned benefits cannot be awarded to the private investor. The money itself can be collected via a national flat rate capital assets tax wherein each person contributes essentially the same amount, each region, in this case most likely each state or city would receive their per capita share of the national investment fund. This money can then be reinvested into the economy based on local and regional interests as well as the overall performance of each business.<sup>11</sup> This ensures that everyone has a fair input in the development of the economy and are able to make democratically selected choices about the allocation of the money and consequently the future of the various businesses. Additionally a system like this where performance of a business can determine the funding that it receives, which can be used to enrich the employees provides an incentive for workers to work harder so that greater funding can be secured. A move towards a democratic economy wherein the voices of every citizen regardless of their income or social standing is heard can have positive effects both on the large and small scale corporations that make up the economy as well as the lives of the average citizen.

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## **CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY IS WORTH IT!**

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<sup>11</sup> David Schweikart, "Economic Democracy" *thenextsystem.org* 1 March 2016

As one can see, a democratic environment encourages a more compelling society as it aids in the development of a comprehensive and constructive education, serves as a meaningful intellectual component of reality, and helps shape our global perspectives as citizens of this world. Let's face it, we live in a world that revolves around economic and capitalist progress, fueled by financial competition. Such a toxic mindset has seemingly pushed aside the morality of our practices, making way for unjust consumerist methodologies or human operations. All of these mass corporations then directly or indirectly perpetuate social injustices in most national socioeconomic areas. But democratic institutions have objectively established their success in fostering a comfortable setting for humans to flourish, both in the workplace, educationally, and economically. This political outlook has thoroughly addressed ethical obligations to manifest racial, social, and systematic inclusivity, along with carefully establishing a more equal setting overall. Democracy in every aspect of life has proven that such an implementation can heighten human creativity, understanding, and materialize the elimination of social injustices. In conclusion, there's no doubt that social injustice is a major problem all across the country, however if the government collectively learns to adapt democratic ideals and establish democracy all throughout, then the results will be highly effective, given the statistics presented and the critical information previously analyzed. Not only will it help us advance as a civilization, but as a whole ideology will promote a vast movement for social change, humanity, and equality.

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