

DEMOCRACY

Property Over People > Mary Zepernick, Coordinator POCLAD (Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy)

It does seem a contradiction to ask the very legal system and political system, that gave away the store to corporations, to fix it. And I'm not sure that's exactly what POCLAD is doing. What we're saying is that we the people are to be the sovereign authority. And that means we need at every point and at every level of government to challenge public officials to do their job. To do our will as we also try to find better mechanisms, more democratic processes.

So in the United States for instance what passes for legal and political systems today is very undemocratic and always has been. And what we're coming to believe, and have for some while now, is that this nation was never designed to be a democracy. And that's a very different thing from trying to recover something lost.

So if one acknowledges that the constitution was essentially set up by propertied white men to protect their property. And that the great majority of people in the United States had to struggle and continue to for full inclusion, full person hood. And then you can understand the primacy, the primary importance of property and it's protection over people.

Slave Master To Corporate Manager > Richard Grossman, Founder POCLAD (Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy)

Corporations are governing entities. They make the rules and that is contrary to the theory of governance in the United States. That is contrary to ideals of the Declaration of Independence and to all the work that people in every generation have done in order to try to wrest power from the few and distribute it among the many. And, none of those issues are raised. We can see it in the US when the nominations to the United States Supreme Court, you know, which sometimes is a big deal, usually not but sometimes is a big deal, and the nominee has to appear before congressional senate committees and all that.

Nobody, nobody in the history at least throughout the entire 20th century that I've looked at, no congress person has ever raised the issue of the ability of corporations to wield the constitution, that corporations should have freedom of speech and freedom of association and the other bill of rights powers that were written into the constitution. Nobody's asked, "Well, how do you feel about capital and property... an institution of capital and property wielding the rights of persons?" And therefore, when the General Motors Corporation speaks it drowns out the rights of people.

When people go to work for any corporation, as soon as you cross over on to corporate property you have no constitutional rights in the United States. You have no freedom of speech. You have no due process. You have no equal protection. Again, if you violate something – lets say some folks within a corporation, they want to start putting some signs on the walls or they want to start having meetings – well, the corporate leaders, they'll call the Sheriff and it is the state that will come and remove these people and say "you are violating the law."

And, it's not much different from the slave master. They wrote the laws of the southern states saying what the conditions were and making it a crime for anybody to teach a slave to read, certainly making it a capital offense to help a slave escape. They got it written in the constitution that all bonded workers, whether white or black slaves, if they ran away to a non-slave state the law of the land, the Sheriff, the police, the army had to seize this person and send him or her back to her owner.

So, frankly, I think we've sort of evolved in the United States from a slave master society to a corporate manager society and a lot of strong parallels (it's not as horrendous on many levels, it's not as obvious) but I think the slave master society, the southern slavocracy ruled the United States up to the civil war. And, subsequent to the civil war it's men of property through the corporations that have ruled the United States,

And that history is very important to tell us how we got into this mess and also to help suggest ways of undoing it so we go beyond lessening the harms one at a time, which I said is really important to do. We got to deal with those harms cause usually they're about killing people and denying rights and all of that. The thread that is running through all these single issues, what they all have in common is that the law of the land is not neutral even, praise be it would be neutral – I'd accept that for a while. It's not neutral. The law of the land enables men of property enables these institutions of capital, these institutions of property to deny the rights of the many. And, that's not called democracy in my book.

I Don't Believe In Democracy > Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize-winning Economist

Let's be clear, I don't believe in democracy in one sense. You don't believe in democracy. Nobody believes in democracy. You will find it hard to find anybody who will say that if, that is democracy interpreted as majority rule. You will find it hard to find anybody who will say that at 55% of the people believe the other 45% of the people should be shot. That's an appropriate exercise of democracy.

What I believe is not a democracy but an individual freedom in a society in which individuals cooperate with one another. And in which there is an absence of coercion and violence. Now it turns out that democracy in the sense of majority voting is an effective means for achieving agreement on some things. On things

which are not very important. Really important things we require much more than a simple majority. We require something as close to unanimity as we can get. That's why we have a constitution as well as legislated law.