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"We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." This quote, from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, seems to be highly applicable in today's political climate. The Occupy movement in particular has embraced this idea wholeheartedly; in fact, one could say it's their de facto motto. Political scientists Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, authors of the book *Winner-Take-All Politics*, take the Occupy theory a step further, purporting that not only does more money equal more influence, but that Washington itself has caused this to be the case through policies that favor the rich and destroy the poor. But is this really the case? Or is Justice Brandeis a cynic, the Occupy movement misguided, and Hacker and Pierson biased ivory-tower academics? The answer depends on one's definition of democracy.

If one defines "democracy" as simply a governmental system where every person has an equal vote, then Justice Brandeis is indeed a cynic. In this sense, it is possible to have both democracy and a concentration of wealth, as wealth does not have an effect on this definition of democracy. Having more money doesn't give more weight to a vote; my mom's vote counts just as much as Warren Buffet's. In this country, the illegality of buying votes is strongly enforced, so money cannot have an influence in that regard either. Wealth is simply not a factor in this view of democracy.

However, if one defines "democracy" as a system where citizens not only vote, but have an equal say in decision-making and policy creation, then the wealthy certainly have a nearly insurmountable advantage, and democracy is a figment of the imagination. While the actual election of representatives, senators, presidents, and other officials is democratic, what influences politicians is money - as Jesse M. Unruh said, "Money is the mother's milk of politics." Election and reelection are primary concerns of officials; therefore, they do what makes their wealthiest constituents happy as these will be a prime source of campaign funding. Additionally, wealthier special interest groups can afford better lobbyists and more of them, pushing the ideals of one group over the rest. In this view of democracy, then, wealth is not only a factor but a prime determinant of how much influence one has - thereby eliminating the equality inherent in the democratic ideal. Thus, democracy is incompatible with the concentration of wealth, proving Justice Brandeis sadly correct.

To regain real democracy in this most vocally democratic of nations, we must reduce the amount of influence money has in politics. We must allow the rest of society an equal voice to the wealthy, and we must consider all sides of each policy fairly, without simply giving in to money. While wealth is so ingrained into American politics that it is seemingly impossible to alter the present situation, an effort must be made for change. Only then can we truly call ourselves democratic, upholding our founders' legacy.