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In a perfect world, there would be no link between democracy and money. In a perfect world, it would not matter how much money someone has. Whether the poorest of the poor or the richest of the rich, each person's influence, each person's vote, would count equally. . . in a perfect world. Sadly, a perfect world is not our reality. In the real world, money and democracy are, unfortunately, connected. The pattern, the world over, tends to be that the more money one has, the more influence on democracy one has. To counterbalance this, it takes more "everyday" people to contribute in other ways. It also requires elected representatives to really represent their constituents.

Coincidentally, I just came across this subject in a book. Not a book I was reading on the subject, but, of all things, a fluffy romance novel. The story takes place in the "Old West," right around the time Colorado became a state. The hero of the story is the owner of a very large and very prosperous ranch, which he wanted to make into an empire. To do so, he was going to use his considerable fortune to influence politics, which would, I guess, somehow make his ranch into that empire. This was just a detail that the author used as an obstacle in the hero's and heroine's path to true love and happily ever after. I did not give it much thought at the time. It made sense and did not strike me as out of the ordinary. It was not until I sat down to start writing this essay that I really thought about what his intentions were. The fact that I did not think it was strange that the hero was going to use his fortune to influence politics for his own gain says something very disappointing: people using their money to influence democracy is not at all out of the ordinary, but something we accept as a "given."

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis' words are very powerful. People with wealth tend to have more influence than those who don't. Just because this is an accepted fact, it doesn't mean that it is right or good. It shouldn't be an accepted fact. The only way for it not to be an "accepted fact" is for the current and future generations of citizens to make a choice to make a change. If everyone, regardless of wealth, steps up and makes the effort to contribute to society, to have a voice in society, these contributions can provide an influence that may counterbalance the influence of wealth concentrated in the hands of a few.

For democracy to be truly effective and for it to be an "actual" democracy, it's important for more people to remember, and believe, that this requires input from and true representation of all citizens; not just a few. We are each responsible for reminding others that the premise of democracy is equality of influence regardless of gender, color, background, or tax bracket.