

The "Lie" of American Democracy

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Abstract: The United States claims itself as the "beacon" of democracy, but the chaos behind it shows that this "beacon" is actually a lie. The strange political term "Gerrymander" deeply exposes the hypocrisy of American democracy and also its chronic disease. In recent years, a popular American TV series *House of Cards* also depicts the American politics under the power game and reveals the hypocritical nature hidden behind the antagonistic American democracy—in the process of election and voting, public opinion was ignored, manipulated and controlled arbitrarily, and completely reduced to the "game of power" of politicians. In essence, "American democracy" is the opposite of democracy. This paper will introduce the phenomenon of "Gerrymander", analyzing the hypocrisy of American democratic politics from the confrontational American democracy and the whip of Republicans or Democratic embodied in the American TV series *House of Cards*.

1. Where is democracy, Gerrymander

Gerrymander is a term used in American politics to describe manipulating the outcome of the election in favor of republicans or democratic by partitioning unfair districts. That is to say, the way of dividing the U.S. electoral districts is designed specifically for the electoral benefit of one side, and its essence is actually to establish an unfair political advantage, thus failing to reflect the true public opinion. The term comes from Elbridge Gerry, the governor of Massachusetts in the early 19th century, who, in order to concentrate the opposition side's votes in a small number of districts, divided one into an irregular shape resembling a salamander so that his side's candidate would win by a large margin. Later, people combined his name with the end of the word "salamander" to coin this strange term in American politics, the phenomenon that became known as "Gerrymander".

However, this kind of incredible injustice, which ignores opinions of the masses, abuses power, is unexpectedly allowed by law. The Constitution and laws give state legislatures the right to divide districts, which gives the majority one in state legislatures more space to maneuver Gerrymander. Gerrymander has two main means of operation --"centralization" and "dispersal." Centralization means gathering as many opposition voters as possible and putting them into a small number of specific constituencies. It is perfectly safe to sacrifice these constituencies for others, in other words, to maximize the efficient use of one's own votes. "Dispersion" refers to the idea that in areas where opposition voters are concentrated, they are divided into different constituencies in the surrounding

areas, so as to reduce the density of the opposition vote, that is, to minimize the effective use of the opposition vote source.

Gerrymander is seen as a "malignant tumor" on the "body" of American democracy. The *New York Times* has pointed out that similar political shenanigans are going on in almost every state. This is a serious problem in carrying out of American democracy, because its "democracy" does not allow voters to choose lawmakers, but the unbridled and bullying of politicians. The continuous evolution of its form has aggravated the problem of American democracy. Both parties ignore, deviate from and willfully manipulate public opinion in order to maximize their own interests, and "American democracy" is further and further away from the real meaning of "democracy".

The strange image of "Gerrymander" epitomizes the chronic disease of American democracy. Through this political trick, we can also clearly see the deep antagonism and hypocrisy of American democracy. "Money politics" prevails, power checks and balances become 'veto politics', flawed rules undermine fairness and justice, and institutional failure leads to a crisis of trust... The Gerrymander of American democracy has led to its alienation, metamorphism, and deterioration."^[1]

Those politicians who talk about "democracy" or "human rights", and hold up the banner of "democracy", if they look back, they will find how far they have deviated from the public, the real public opinion has long since been left in the dust.

2. The analysis of American democracy from the American TV series *House of Cards*

House of Cards, an American TV series, has been a huge hit since its broadcast. It has been praised by both domestic and international audiences, and even former US President Barack Obama is a loyal fan of it. Frank, the protagonist of the TV, is clever, dare to think and act, and has achieved the triple jump of "whip -- vice president -- president", which is very incredible in the eyes of our ordinary people. There is a memorable line from the show: "The road to power is paved with hypocrisy and dead soldiers", it is the inner monologue of Frank. The two words "hypocrisy" and "dead soldiers" well expose the hypocrisy of American democracy and harm to the public. Although the TV series contains exaggeration and fiction due to the needs of the plot, literary and artistic works serve and reflect politics to a large extent. It reflects the political ecology of the United States to a large extent, allowing the audience to learn about the politics of the United States from a more intuitive perspective while enjoying it, thus further revealing the appearance of the "beacon of democracy" of the United States and discovering its "lies".

(1) Antagonism of American democracy

The plot of *House of Cards* is full of drama. Although the plot is fictional and contains a lot of performance components, it also presents the contemporary political ecology of the United States to the audience to a certain extent. Through the changes in the relationship between the characters and the development of the story plot, it reveals the real face of the democratic politics of the United States. The darkness of its democracy has led to all kinds of corruption and phenomena. The legal and political system has become a facade, the parties fought, the politicians fought, but it was the people who paid the ultimate price. In the United States, the two parties were tit for tat not only on social welfare, economic development and legislation, but also on quarantine policies that affected people's lives when the COVID-19 pandemic was raging. In January 2021, the Capitol Hill riot shocked the world and exposed the extreme division and disorder of American politics to the global vision. This event was an important reflection of the antagonism and hypocrisy of American democracy, and it should have been an opportunity for the two parties in the United States to reflect on their pain, but they did not self-reflect and still ignored it. The following will specifically start from the American TV series *House of Cards* to analyze how the antagonism and hypocrisy lead to the "lie" of American democracy.

House of Cards portrays several political figures, each of whom has his own agenda for political gain: In the first season, Frank secretly arranged someone to smash the window of his house without telling his wife and regardless of the safety and mental state of his family, just to plant evidence against Marty, the leader of the labor union, in order to deal with the demonstration of the education union, which can be seen that his means are vicious and indifferent. In order to achieve his own political interests, Frank secretly helps Pete, a drug addict, through various schemes and improper means to help him run for the governor of Pennsylvania. And in order to become vice president, Frank enticed the then Vice president Matthews to run for the governor, and play off the relationship between the president and Vice president... There are so many of them, the cunning and the calculation are so shocking that it feels incredible, like a brainstorm, and before you know it, the political battle is over. Named but a few examples, this is true of Frank, as it is of the other majority leaders.

In *House of Cards*, we can clearly see the antagonism of American democracy, or there is no democracy at all -- that is, the formality, as well as the partisan profit-seeking and the serious damage to the political ecology.

The parliamentary system of American politics seems to embody and reflect public opinion, but in fact it actually manipulates and ignores public opinion. Those politicians and business groups are the main body of American democracy, and the right to speak is in their hands, rather than ordinary people. That is to say, the main body of American democracy is not "the public" at all. In the campaign, these people claim that they want to benefit the people and serve the interests of them, but in fact, they are full of rhetoric. They only make profits for themselves by obtaining political status and benefits, but also serve the interest groups behind them. The chronic disease of American democracy can be largely attributed to the characteristics of the nature of capitalism: the power of the political rights in capitalist countries always serves to maximize the interests of capital, which is its essential attribute, so it cannot be changed no matter who comes to power.

It is also told that in the *House of Cards*, Walker promised Frank the job of secretary of state if Frank helped him win the presidential election. When Frank successfully helped Walker win the presidential election, Walker did not keep the promise. So Frank pulls out all the stops, pursuing his revenge plan while satisfying his own ever-expanding appetite for power in the process. From this point, we can see that in the minds of these politicians, there is only endless conspiracy, and their desire for power will not be satisfied, but only constant confrontation and revenge to satisfy their own selfish desire for power. The so-called "public opinion" and "democracy" have been completely formalized.

Antagonism is the main reason why American democracy is not "democratic". The parties are constantly fighting for their own interests, thus ignoring and sacrificing the interests of the people. The gap between Republicans and Democrats is still growing. These politicians prefer confrontation, they won't compromise. Therefore, the "veto politics" of opposition for opposition has actually become a normal part of American democratic politics. Hostility between the two parties accumulates deeper and deeper, while common ideas and policies are constantly compressed, thus the governance of the country becomes more difficult. The United States will eventually be dragged into a deep national tear, a loss of credibility and a failure of governance will also be caused by the antagonism and hypocrisy of its politics.

How American democracy can get out of this dilemma, the Chinese People's Daily pointed out: "The 'veto politics' of opposition for the sake of opposition is not only a political reflection of the social tear, but in turn further intensifies the social tear, thus forming a self-driven vicious circle within the system of 'opposition to democracy'. The real threat to American democracy is its domestic politics. Only by facing up to this reality and taking concrete actions to alleviate its democratic deficit, can the United States get out of its democratic predicament."^[2]

(2) Whip of Republicans or Democratic

With the popularity of the American TV series *House of Cards*, the identity of "whip" has once again attracted the attention and research of many people. The whip system originated in Britain and was later extended to other western countries. The whips have three main functions: to manage parliamentary business, to communicate opinions, and to persuade members. Frank, the protagonist of the TV series, is the whip of the Democratic, the majority one in the US Congress. He used all the means and intrigues to crack down on his political enemies and obstructionists, and at the same time cleared out the dissenters in his side, so as to control the cabinet from the whole. He seems to hold a whip, according to his own plan layout, controlling the develop direction of one side, this is a clear "whip" role.

In the first season of *House of Cards*, when passing an important bill, there was a union leader who opposed it no matter how much persuasion, so Frank deliberately verbally challenged the leader, until he lost his temper and punched Frank. In the United States, assaulting a member of Congress is serious, so the union leader had no choice but to give in. Therefore, it can be seen that Frank, as the whip, not only has the strategy, means and courage, but also can get the effect he wants only by his tricks of speech and insight of grasping others' psychology. It can be seen that the role of "whip" is not qualified by ordinary people. It is his control over these members, politicians, and political direction that enables him to push through not only the reform of the education bill, but also other important policies like welfare policy, and achieve the desired results. Even Obama could not resist applauding these achievements.

There is also a scene in the TV series: Frank canvassed the Democratic members one by one, "counting heads" and record on the blackboard, such a scene in the American democracy is actually a real existence. One scholar pointed out, "before voting, whips need to find out how many members are reluctant to vote according to his interest groups' will. This is important because if a bill fails to pass, the leaders can prevent it from being voted down outright by blocking it from coming to a vote, thereby preserving the chance for a bill to pass again when the time is right. To vote without knowing what is going on is likely to face a huge legislative defeat."^[3]

It can also be seen that the importance of the whip in the process of realizing the interests of the group. Through the efforts of the whip, they can better help the group which they are serve for to seek political interests and fight against others.

In reality, however, the whip's power is exaggerated in *House of Cards*, which imagines it more like in the 1950s and 1960s. In the current American politics, the role of the whip seems to be less obvious. Especially over time, as the political ideas and aspirations of the two parties in the United States have become more polarized, there are few political flip-floater on either side of the aisle, members on both sides have long put the interests of their own group squarely ahead of right and justice. So there is little need for whips to "whip" members of their own group and use threats to achieve unity of purpose. However, the degradation of the whip's function reflects the deep division of American politics and antagonism of American democracy. Even on a vote as momentous as the health care bill, no member of either side voted against his group, which is an obvious sign of the depth of the political and ideological divide.

From the important role of the whip in partisanship, as well as the performance and behavior of the protagonist Frank in *House of Cards*, the antagonism of American democracy can be seen more clearly. The existence of the whip is an important part of the antagonistic democracy in the United States. It is precisely because of the whip that we can more clearly see the willful manipulation and trampling of the public opinion of the American people, and the damage caused to the public and society by the confrontation between parties. Thus, it is enough to show the hypocrisy of American democracy. American "democracy" is not "democracy", it is a complete "lie".

3. Conclusion

By analyzing the phenomenon of "Gerrymander", the antagonism and the whip of American democracy in *House of Cards*, we can come to the conclusion that America is not the "beacon" of democracy, the American democracy actually deviates from the real democracy, it is a hypocritical lie. The fundamental attribute of American democracy and its deep structure essentially determine that its operation is hypocritical, which is the reason why it is "undemocratic".

There's a famous line from Frank in *House of Cards*: "Politics requires sacrifice, but at the expense of others". The sacrifice may be those who truly want to fight for the interests of the people, may be the sacrifice of the journalists who want to expose the dark truth... Of course, the ultimate sacrifice will be the American people under the hypocritical American democracy. It's like the title of *House of Cards* -- the word "cards" is like the cards that politicians play in the "game of power"; And the "house" of cards-- American democracy, also must be illusory, a touch immediately fall.

As has been mentioned previously, American politics is characterized by an inescapable capitalist nature -- the political power of capitalist countries always serves to maximize the interests of the capital, which is its essential nature and cannot be changed no matter who comes to power. This will certainly lead to the accumulation of contradictions in the capitalist system, so the "lie" of American democracy has become inevitable.

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