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*"A highly readable, compelling analysis of America's current political crises."*

—Craig Barnes, award-winning author and member of Common Cause National Board

*"I highly recommend this very insightful book to everyone, especially young people who are dismayed with our politics."*

—David Cortez, Taos, New Mexico community organizer and filmmaker

## BREAKING BIG MONEY'S GRIP ON AMERICA

*Working Together to Revive Our Democracy*

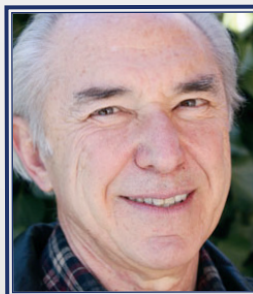
BRUCE BERLIN

This book is an urgent call to all Americans to focus on a critical issue: huge sums of money unjustly influencing US elections and public policy. Some people see the United States as a plutocracy run by and for the very rich. *Breaking Big Money's Grip on America* provides convincing evidence to support this view and explores how a nationwide Democracy Movement can overcome Big Money's control and convert our government into one that serves the needs of the American people. It also demonstrates why breaking Big Money's grip is critical to solving other crucial issues like gun violence and income inequality. Whether you are a conservative, moderate, liberal, or progressive, your participation is vital for fixing our broken political system.

*"A brilliant analysis of where we are and where we need to go. Read this book!"* —Thom Hartmann, author and talk radio show host

*"Berlin makes clear the only force capable of challenging Big Money's powerful hegemony is a diverse, nonpartisan, grassroots movement for democracy based on a politics of human dignity and equality."*

—Randy Kehler, former national coordinator  
Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign



**Bruce Berlin** has focused on social justice concerns for over 45 years. A retired attorney, he has worked on bipartisan approaches to such issues as U.S.-Soviet relations and the diversification of Los Alamos National Laboratory. A 1988 recipient of a Peace Fellowship from the U.S. Institute of Peace, Berlin lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



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**Announcing the Release of  
*Breaking Big Money's Grip on America:  
Working Together to Revive Our Democracy*  
by Bruce Berlin**

*Berlin starkly exposes Big Money's increasing control of our government and calls for a grassroots, nonpartisan, nationwide Democracy Movement to fix our broken political system and revive democracy in America.*

**(Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 26, 2015)** *Breaking Big Money's Grip on America* is a call to the American people to focus the nation's attention on a very critical issue: the United States is becoming a plutocracy run by and for the very wealthy. Part I of the book examines the country's broken political system caused by this emerging plutocracy. Part II explores how the American people can fix this broken system and create a truly representative democracy.

Berlin defines Big Money as the power of vast sums of money to influence the outcome of elections and the formation of public policy to favor special interests. Part I of the book begins by declaring that the great political challenge of our time is: *Can the American people eliminate Big Money's control over their government before the United States becomes a full-blown plutocracy?* While admitting this is a daunting task, Berlin explains that America's history provides numerous examples of people joining together and forming grassroots movements that have made very significant advancements against great odds.

Part I continues with an in-depth examination of how Big Money and corporate America control our government through huge campaign contributions and massive lobbying efforts. Berlin illustrates in great detail how this extreme influence results in incredible damage to our country as well as to millions of Americans. Consequently, he describes the means by which the oil industry's power over the government led to the Iraq War that resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of innocent lives and trillions of dollars. In another example, the author explains how Wall Street's grip on our government resulted in the Great Recession of 2008 and tremendous harm to a great many Americans. The section concludes by asserting that the United States is at a pivotal time in its history. Will the country succumb to the power of Big Money, or will the people rise up and reclaim their right to a self-governing democracy?

Part II of the book offers a step-by-step process for Americans to come together, break Big Money's grip, and build a political system that will work for everyone.

First, Berlin notes the various elements of grassroots actions that are currently available for the formation of a Democracy Movement. He then considers the obstacles to developing a mass movement and the methods for overcoming them. From there, Berlin offers a six-point program for fixing our political system. Moreover, he shows that the movement is already underway. Finally, the book warns that the American people cannot expect a new president, whether it's Trump, Bush, Clinton or Sanders, to save our democracy. Berlin concludes with: "we are the ones we've been waiting for." That is, only a broad-based, nonpartisan, grassroots movement consisting of Democrats, Republicans and Independent; conservatives, moderates and liberals, can break Big Money's grip and revive democracy in America.

*"A brilliant analysis of where we are and where we need to go. Read this book!"*

—Thom Hartmann, author and talk radio show host

A retired, public sector attorney, Bruce Berlin has devoted himself to social justice concerns for over forty-five years. He has worked on issues from the improvement of conditions for county jail inmates to the diversification of Los Alamos National Laboratory to the advancement of U.S.-Soviet relations. Berlin is the founder and former executive director of The Trinity Forum for International Security and Conflict Resolution, a nonprofit organization that developed broad-based, bipartisan approaches to a variety of national policy issues from security in the nuclear age to economic development and diversification. Berlin was awarded a Jennings Randolph Peace Fellowship from the United States Institute of Peace in 1988 to produce a dialogue exploring paths to a Nicaraguan peace agreement between representatives of the warring factions and US ambassadors to Central America. A co-founder and state coordinator of the New Mexico Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, he directed a lobbying effort resulting in the state legislature's passage of a resolution supporting a US-Soviet nuclear weapons freeze. Berlin graduated from Cornell University with a major in government and the New York University School of Law. A father and Buddhist meditator, he lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This is his first book.

*Breaking Big Money's Grip on America* by Bruce Berlin

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**Praise for**  
***Breaking Big Money's Grip on America:***  
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"A brilliant analysis of where we are and where we need to go. Read this book!"

—Thom Hartmann  
Author and talk radio show host

"This book persuasively argues that the dominance of Big Money not only corrupts government itself but also blocks effective action on virtually every major issue Americans care about. As Bruce Berlin makes clear, and our history confirms, the only force capable of challenging Big Money's corrupt and powerful hegemony is a diverse, nonpartisan, grassroots movement for democracy based on a politics of human dignity and equality. Such a movement is needed now more than ever. Fortunately, Berlin lays out a credible roadmap showing how we can create it. I hope it's read by millions."

—Randy Kehler  
Former national coordinator, Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign

"In this highly readable, compelling analysis of America's current political crises, Bruce Berlin calls for a second American revolution to be carried out by the organization of a massive Democracy Movement. He advocates taking on the corruptions of self government visited upon us by almost unlimited corporate campaign contributions, billions of corporate dollars spent lobbying Congress and the states, and dilution of the rule of law in our courts, all of which must be contested if democracy is to survive."

—Craig Barnes  
Award-winning author and member of Common Cause National Board

"I highly recommend this very insightful book about what is wrong with our political system and how to fix it. Everyone, especially young people who are dismayed with our politics, needs to read it. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat, or Independent, Berlin's proposals can work for all of us."

—David Cortez  
Community organizer and filmmaker, Taos, New Mexico

"In this small but profoundly important book, Bruce Berlin tells us everything we need to know to incite inspired and organized rebellion against Big Money's hijacking of our democracy. In example after example, he shows how corporate America is choosing how we will live. If you don't read another book this year, read this one. Berlin reveals the stark reality that the United States is, by and large, a government of, by, and for corporations."

—Gail Carr Feldman, PhD  
Psychologist and author

"Berlin is issuing a compelling clarion call to all who are fed up with Big Money."

—Charlotte Levinson  
President, The Levinson Foundation

"The crippling influence of money in our political system has undermined the solid science and soulful connections that have long been pressing for fundamental changes in our relationship with all of life. This book is a much-needed clarion call that we must take to heart."

—Jim Cummings  
Executive director, Acoustic Ecology Institute

"Big corporate money greatly inflates what we pay for medical care and prescription drugs. That's why profits are the only vital signs in our fragmented healthcare system. Berlin's book breaks it all down to the personal level, where your life and mine are manipulated by Big Money. He astutely illustrates why the grassroots level offers us the best chance to break Big Money's grip."

—Al Norman  
Executive Director, Massachusetts Home Care Association

"For many years I have watched Big Money over-influencing our representative democracy. Bruce Berlin's six-point plan is right on target, giving us a way forward and a path back to sanity."

—Richard Schmeltzer, CPA  
Retired Partner, Philadelphia region CPA firm

"With insight and riveting clarity, Bruce Berlin examines how today's Big Money-powered plutocracy has grown in this country and then counters with a doable plan for the American people to build a bridge back to a democracy."

—Eric von Starck  
Small business owner



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## **WHY I WROTE *BREAKING BIG MONEY'S GRIP ON AMERICA***

**BY BRUCE BERLIN**

I wrote this book to focus the nation's attention on a very critical issue that Americans need to understand: the United States is on the brink of becoming a plutocracy run by and for the very rich. Our political system is broken, and we must fix it before we lose our representative democracy. Both as a nation and as individual Americans, we are in grave danger due to Big Money's increasing control of our government.

### **Three Examples of the Tremendous Harm Big Money's Grip Causes**

Here are just three recent examples of how Big Money's control over our government has caused tremendous harm to our nation as well as to a great many Americans.

#### **1. The Iraq War**

When George W. Bush became president in 2001 the giant oil corporations led by oilman-turned-vice president Dick Cheney manipulated the country into believing that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that posed an international security threat. While Ambassador Joe Wilson tried to alert us to the truth, Cheney's Chief of Staff "Scooter" Libby lied and was later found guilty of perjury and obstruction of justice. Big oil's extreme influence over our government resulted in the United States initiating the Iraq War to gain access to Iraq's huge oil and gas reserves. In doing big oil's bidding, our country spent close to \$2 trillion of our tax dollars; sacrificed thousands of American lives as well as hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian lives; and effectively bred more support for militant extremists.



## **2. The Great Recession of 2008**

During the Great Recession of 2008, while our government bailed out the big banks that had been primarily responsible for the economic crash, it did not aid the millions of Americans who had lost their homes or jobs. Despite the fraudulent and unethical business practices that had caused such devastating hardship, the Obama administration never prosecuted any of the Wall Street executives who had been largely responsible for it. Since Democrats and Republicans alike receive huge campaign contributions from Wall Street, no one in Washington wanted to risk damaging those relations. Now Wall Street is aggressively lobbying for less government regulation with some success, which can only lead to another financial disaster.

## **3. The Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement**

Ordinary Americans have been given no voice in the new Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement. Most Congressional Republicans and some Democrats, including President Obama, support it, as does corporate America. Advocates claim the TPP will increase American exports, protect intellectual property rights, and level the playing field between American companies and their foreign competitors. While hundreds of corporate advisers helped craft the TPP, the general public has been shut out of the process and unable to evaluate it because Obama classified the negotiations and document. Though members of Congress were allowed to read it, they were forbidden to talk about it with their constituents. Once again, corporate America is calling the shots in Washington.

When the TPP is finally made public, citizens may have only a brief period in which to convince Congress to reject it. Significantly, Congress cannot amend it since the “fast track” legislation it passed several months ago means that they can only vote the TPP up or down. Most congressional Democrats, led by Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, as well as environmental organizations and labor unions, argue that the TPP increases income inequality, reduces American jobs, jacks up the cost of medicines, rolls back Wall Street reforms, and empowers corporations to attack environmental and health safeguards. And Hillary Clinton has finally decided she opposes it, even though as secretary of state she called it the gold standard of trade agreements.

Perhaps the most troubling problem with the TPP is that the agreement does not include China, and thereby sets up a power struggle between the United States and China over influence in the Far East. Instead of working with China for the common good, our corporate-controlled government has pushed China aside and forced it to set up a competing organization. Isolating a country and its people, whether it's our neighbor Cuba or China, cannot lead to a positive outcome. We need to work together with those with whom we may disagree. If we continue down this path of isolating China, we could end up in armed conflict some day, which would be catastrophic for both countries.

### **Break Big Money's Grip on America To Fix Our Broken Political System**

These examples demonstrate the necessity for breaking Big Money's grip on our government before we suffer another national disaster. Moreover, until we break Big Money's grip on our government it will continue to block our efforts to solve other crucial issues, like affordable healthcare, climate change, gun violence, homeland security, immigration reform, Social Security, and income inequality. My ardent hope is to inspire Americans of all political persuasions to work together so we can fix our broken political system and revive democracy in America.





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## Q&As

### ***Breaking Big Money's Grip on America: Working Together to Revive Our Democracy*** **By Bruce Berlin**

#### ***1. In your opinion, what is the Great American political challenge and how can the "average Joe or Jane" stand up to it?***

The challenge is this: Can the American people come together, aggressively confront Big Money's dominance of our government and put the control of the government in the hands of the people, where it belongs in a democracy. And, can we do it before it's too late. That is, before our government becomes a full-blown plutocracy run by and for the benefit of the very rich. Time is running out. A good argument can be made that the United States is already a full-blown plutocracy.

As for standing up to the challenge, first, the average Joe and Jane need to understand the negative impact Big Money has on their lives as well as on our country. Second, they need to actively get involved locally in a democracy movement organization working to eliminate Big Money's grip on America. And, third, they need to spread the word, and get their friends and neighbors involved in this effort.

#### ***2. How did you become interested in this subject?***

I've always been interested in government and politics. I majored in government at Cornell University in the 1960s. Then, I was protesting against the Vietnam War. In law school in NYC, my focus continued to be on public interest issues and law. In the 1970s, I lived in western Massachusetts, worked for Western Mass Legal Services, and helped start a grassroots party, the Community Union. In the 1980s in Santa Fe, I formed a non-profit organization, The Trinity Forum, which brought together politicians, government officials,

community organizers and academicians of different political views to find common ground and develop broad-based solutions to regional and national issues.

More recently, I've witnessed how Big Money has manipulated our government to serve its agenda to the detriment of most Americans. For example, there is credible evidence that the big oil companies led by oilman-turned-Vice-President Dick Cheney manipulated the government to initiate the Iraq War so they could gain control of Iraq's huge oil and gas reserves. Today, we see it with the gun lobby, the oil industry, the healthcare and insurance business, and the Wall Street bankers, among others. Wherever you turn, Big Money is making the rules for all of us by, in effect, bribing our political representatives.

As I note in my book, it really hit home for me personally in 2008, during the Great Recession, when I lost all the equity in a rental property that I was using as my daughter's college fund. Our government bailed out the big banks that were mostly responsible for the crash, but it didn't help me or the millions of other Americans who lost their homes or jobs. As a student of American history, I know that a grassroots movement of millions of Americans from across the political spectrum has the power to change our broken political system.

### ***3. What are the main points of your book?***

A. Our political system is broken due mainly to the tremendous influence of money in politics. Political officials are bought or strongly persuaded by extremely wealthy donors, big corporations and labor unions. Consequently, the needs and desires of average Americans are not represented by our senators and congressional representatives.

B. Politicians will not fix the system unless *we the people* force them to. (Please read the FDR story about his meeting with labor leaders in my book.)

C. American history demonstrates that mass movements have been responsible for real change in this country. We need to form a Democracy Movement to revive democracy in our country.

D. In my book, I outline a six-point plan to change our political system in order to level the playing field:

1. Establish mandatory public financing of all congressional and presidential elections.
2. Enact a constitutional amendment to reverse the Supreme Court's *Buckley*

*v. Valeo, Citizens United, and McCutcheon v. FEC* decisions which fund that money is speech, corporations are people, and restrictions on campaign contributions violate the freedom of speech.

3. Reform and strictly regulate lobbying so that all Americans have equal access to their elected officials regardless of their income, corporate position, or labor affiliation.
4. Eliminate the gerrymandering of congressional districts so that each state's delegation to the House of Representatives is proportionate to the votes each party receives in that state's elections for Congress.
5. Enact a constitutional amendment to eliminate the Electoral College so that every citizen's vote for president carries the same weight and the president is elected solely on the basis of the national popular vote.
6. Establish a national Bill of Voters' Rights guaranteeing all citizens of the United States an equal opportunity to vote and eliminating restrictive voter ID requirements and other efforts obstructing people's right to vote.

E. Even though the American people are the underdog in this effort, history shows that underdogs can overcome great odds and win **more than 60% of the time**.

F. It is up to 'we, the people' to reverse our country's fast track to becoming a plutocracy, which many would argue, it already is, and revive our democracy.

#### ***4. Why should the average American care? How can readers get involved and make a difference?***

Because, as Sen. Elizabeth Warren notes, the system is rigged and the average American is being cheated out of his or her fair share of the wealth in this country. CEOs in big corporations make 200 to 700x what the average worker makes. But, without those workers, the company couldn't make the goods and services that provide the profits that pay the CEO's exorbitant salary. Everyone who works and contributes should make a living wage.

On top of that, corporations use some of the money that consumers pay for products to lobby Congress for tax breaks they don't need or regulations/laws that are against the interests of most Americans.

Examples:

1. U.S. government is forbidden by law to negotiate lower drug prices for Medicare. Those laws were written by Big PhRMA's lobbyists.
2. Gun lobby prevents universal background checks.
3. Oil industry prevents greater pollution controls and renewable energy policies.

***5. Do you really believe a movement such as you describe in your book can have an impact? Why?***

Yes, because the history of mass movements in our country proves it: women's suffrage, labor, civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, Gay and Lesbian Rights. They all overcame great odds and made a big difference.

***6. Several groups have been working on the issues you discuss in your book, what makes your call for a movement more important than what's already happening?***

What's happening currently is too fragmented. There are so many groups and too many issues competing for the same money from donors and the same people to support them. There is power in numbers. We need to come together. Moreover, people need to realize that as long as Big Money is calling the shots in Washington and in our state capitols, they have little or no chance of getting their issue — be it climate change, homeland security, immigration, income inequality, etc. — resolved to their satisfaction. That is why the basic political system needs to be fixed first.

***7. How does your book play into the 2016 elections? What do you think will happen after the 2016 elections regarding the issues you raise?***

The key is local, grassroots organizing. In my book, I recommend cities and towns across the country organize DOCs (Democracy Organizing Committees) made up of people from across the political spectrum. DOCs would include business people, civic and social organizations, professionals, union people, students, all of whom want to break Big Money's grip on our government, so that average Americans have an equal voice in elections and the legislative process.

These local groups need to educate their fellow citizens and recruit and support candidates who will make political equality their top issue. This won't happen over night. Therefore, while some progress can happen in the 2016 elections, people will have to continue organizing DOCs after the election and recruiting candidates for the 2018 election.

We need to make this a priority issue, if not the issue, across the country in 2016, 2018 and 2020.

***8. Isn't this really a partisan issue? The Republicans seem to get a lot of support from Big Money. Why would they support the ideas in your book?***

No, in my opinion it's not a partisan issue. Democrats get a lot of support from Big Money as well. Five of Obama's top campaign donors were Wall Street firms. Polls show that 75% of Americans, not the Democratic and Republican parties, want to substantially reduce the influence of money in politics. People know this is bad for them. They just feel helpless to do anything about it.

As I point out in my book, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans did anything to reign in Wall Street banks after the Great Recession, even though the banks were largely responsible for the financial collapse, because both parties wanted to continue collecting big contributions from those banks.

***9. What caused politics to go the way of Big Money?***

It has always been this way. The very wealthy have always been trying to control the country, buy politicians and legislation. The 'robber barons' in the late 1800s is a good example. It has just gotten worse in the last 35 – 40 years as big corporations have grown more powerful and the Supreme Court has also given them more power. It all comes down to greed and power. America has always been a 'me' country, rather than a 'we' country. We have this pioneer or self-made millionaire spirit. We glorify the likes of Warren Buffett or the Waltons of Wal-Mart fame.

***10. If so many millennials aren't even registered to vote and show only disenchantment (or outright disgust) with the current system, how does your book show them that they can get past feelings of despair? After all, promises have been made for centuries with nothing to show. Why should anyone believe things could be any different now?***

As I mentioned earlier, American history has shown that when people come together in mass grassroots movements, they can make real change in the country: Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights movement for example. Also, the fact that political outsiders are, as of this writing, leading in both the Republican and Democratic races for president indicates that people are tired of this system and want real change. Trump and Sanders are getting the biggest crowds.

People coming together also provides support for the individuals in the movement. The civil rights, labor, and gay and lesbian rights movements are good examples where the shared spirit and deeply held beliefs those people had in their causes gave them strength to keep on fighting for what they knew in their hearts was right. People need to understand that change takes time. It took the women's suffrage movement 70 years to get the vote.

It can be frustrating and despairing, but it's not hopeless. Look at the South Africans eliminating apartheid; the break up of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany. If the people of those countries can make such huge changes in their governments, so can we.

***11. Who are some of the politicians who best reflect your ideas currently?***

The best examples on the Democratic side are Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Bernie Sanders (D-VT).

On the Republican side Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) has called for stemming the flow of unregulated money in politics. And, then there's Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who co-sponsored the McCain-Feingold legislation on campaign finance reform. Also, former Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) is also working on campaign finance reform.



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## **Bruce Berlin – Biographical Information**

A public sector attorney and social change activist, Bruce Berlin has devoted himself to social justice issues for over forty-five years.

### **Education, Training and Early Career**

Berlin earned his AB in government from Cornell University and his JD from New York University. Following graduation from law school in 1970, he began his legal career assisting low-income clients at the Legal Aid Society in Trenton, New Jersey. A few years later he moved to Massachusetts and continued his poverty law practice with Western Massachusetts Legal Services. Before settling in Massachusetts, Berlin traveled abroad for a year, including studying Buddhism and practicing meditation under Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at Kopan, a Tibetan monastery in Nepal. Some years later he became a student of Zen meditation under Joshu Sasaki Roshi. Berlin is currently certified in Negotiation and Mediation by the National Center for Collaborative Planning and Community Services and in Economic Development by the New Mexico Community Economic Development Leadership Institute.

### **Public Policy, Government Service and Conflict Resolution Experience**

Berlin is the founder and former executive director of The Trinity Forum for International Security and Conflict Resolution, a nonprofit organization that brought together policymakers from a wide spectrum of political perspectives, professors of government and politics, NGO organizers, and concerned citizens to develop broad-based, bipartisan approaches to a variety of policy issues from national security in the nuclear age to economic development and



diversification. While directing The Trinity Forum, Berlin was awarded a Jennings Randolph Peace Fellowship from the United States Institute of Peace in 1988. As a Peace Fellow, he studied the Nicaraguan conflict and produced a dialogue at the Armand Hammer United World College, which brought together high-level representatives of the Sandinista government and the Contras resistance movement, as well as US ambassadors to Central America, to explore paths to a Nicaraguan peace agreement.

During his career, Berlin has been involved in a number of local, state, and national political campaigns. In 1976, he helped direct a grassroots campaign for sheriff in Franklin County, Massachusetts. In the early 1980s, as a cofounder and state coordinator of the New Mexico Nuclear Freeze Campaign, he directed a successful statewide effort to lobby the New Mexico legislature for the passage of a resolution in support of a US-Soviet freeze on the development and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Prior to his retirement in the fall of 2012, Berlin spent eight years as a senior attorney with the New Mexico Public Education Department, where he brought disciplinary charges against educators for violations of the department's Code of Ethics.

Formerly married, Berlin has a daughter, Gioia, who is studying in Asia at the Global Studies Program of Long Island University. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where, since 1981, he has worked on reviving democracy in America, promoting peace in the Middle East, and diversifying Los Alamos National Laboratory, among other issues. This is his first book.



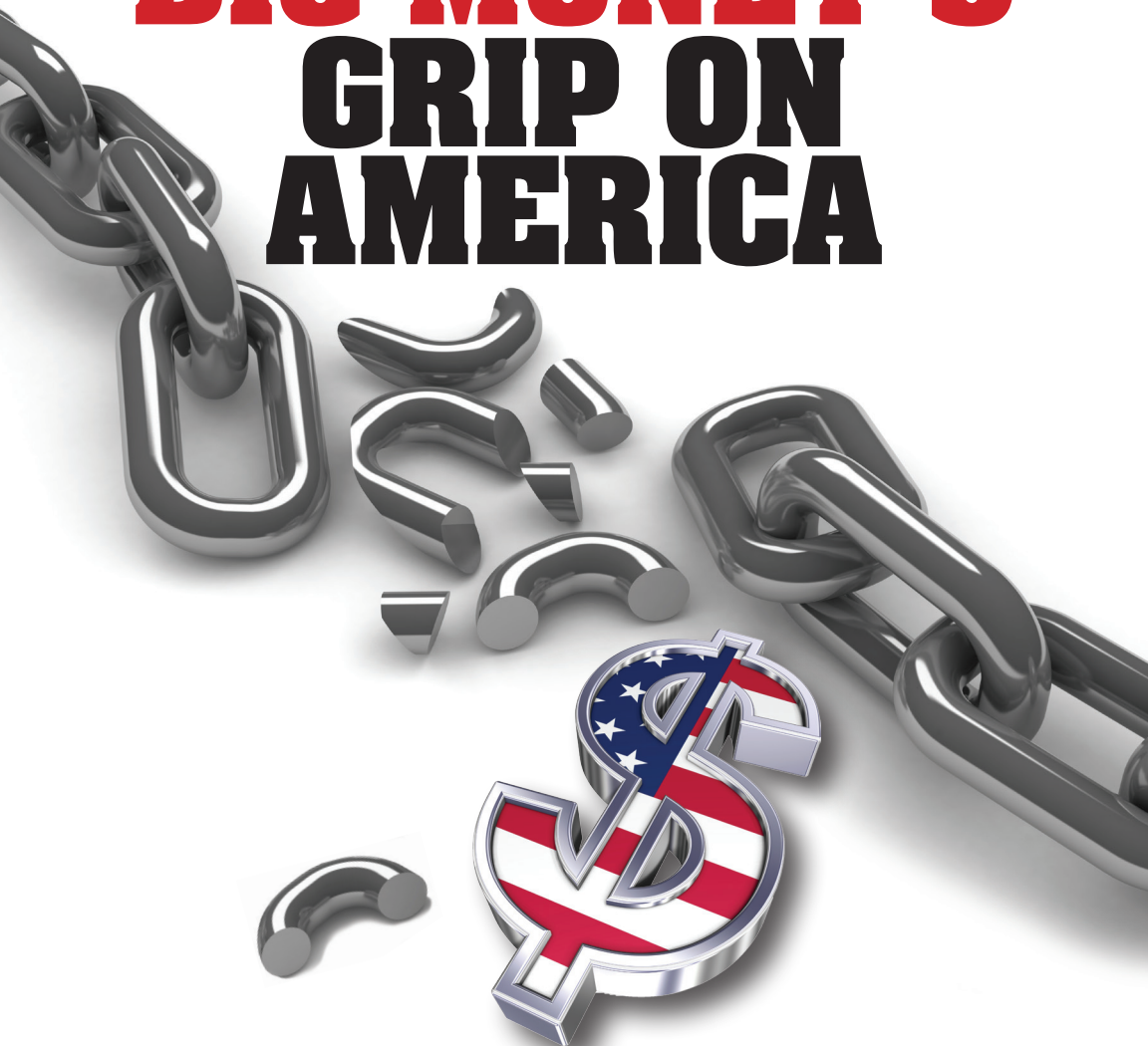
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## Synopsis of Breaking Big Money's Grip on America

*Breaking Big Money's Grip on America* is a wake-up call to the American people that examines the broken political system in the United States caused for the most part by the dominance of big money and corporate America. The book explores how a mass movement involving an alliance of citizens from across the political spectrum can work to transform our government into one that truly serves the people and, consequently, save the United States from becoming a plutocracy, a government run by and for the benefit of the very wealthy.

*Brilliant... Read this book!*  
—THOM HARTMANN

# **BREAKING BIG MONEY'S GRIP ON AMERICA**



**WORKING TOGETHER  
TO REVIVE OUR DEMOCRACY**

**B R U C E   B E R L I N**