

SELECTED QUOTES ON DEMOCRACY

2018 Symposium on Democracy



“In politics as in philosophy, my tenets are few and simple. The leading one of which, and indeed that which embraces most others, is to be honest and just ourselves and to exact it from others, meddling as little as possible in their affairs where our own are not involved. If this maxim was generally adopted, wars would cease and our swords would soon be converted into reap hooks and our harvests be more peaceful, abundant, and happy.”

— [George Washington](#)

“It is an axiom in my mind, that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that too of the people with a certain degree of instruction. This it is the business of the State to effect, and on a general plan.”

— [Thomas Jefferson](#)

“The ballot is stronger than the bullet.”

— [Abraham Lincoln](#)

“Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'”

— [Isaac Asimov](#)

"Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness. Soldiers, in the name of democracy, let us all unite!"

— [Charlie Chaplin](#)

“As democracy is perfected, the office of president represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.”

— [H.L. Mencken](#)



The great enemy of freedom is the alignment of political power with wealth. This alignment destroys the commonwealth - that is, the natural wealth of localities and the local economies of household, neighborhood, and community - and so destroys democracy, of which the commonwealth is the foundation and practical means."

— [Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays*](#)

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts, and beer."

— [Abraham Lincoln](#)

"A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user."

— [Theodore Roosevelt](#)

"Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

— [Winston S. Churchill](#)

"The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerated the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself. That in its essence is fascism: ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power."

— [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#)

"We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people."

— [John F. Kennedy](#)



“Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.”

— [George Bernard Shaw](#)

“Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true, in fact, and nowhere appears in history.”

— John Adams

“The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.”

— [Alexis de Tocqueville](#)

“To view the opposition as dangerous is to misunderstand the basic concepts of democracy. To oppress the opposition is to assault the very foundation of democracy.”

— [Aung San Suu Kyi](#)

“A great democracy has got to be progressive or it will soon cease to be great or a democracy.”

— [Theodore Roosevelt](#)

“Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”

— [Reinhold Niebuhr](#)

“As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy.”

— [Abraham Lincoln](#)

I believe Gandhi is the only person who knew about real democracy — not democracy as the right to go and buy what you want, but democracy as the



responsibility to be accountable to everyone around you.

Democracy begins with freedom from hunger, freedom from unemployment, freedom from fear, and freedom from hatred. To me, those are the real freedoms on the basis of which good human societies are based.”

– [Vandana Shiva](#)

“Democracy arose from men's thinking that if they are equal in any respect, they are equal absolutely.”

– [Aristotle](#)

“Democracy is the best revenge.”

– [Benazir Bhutto](#)

“Honest and earnest criticism from those whose interests are most nearly touched,- criticism of writers by readers, of government by those governed, of leaders by those led, - this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society.”

– [W.E.B. Du Bois](#)

“You don't spread democracy with a barrel of a gun.”

– [Helen Thomas](#)

“Constitutional democracy, you see, is no romantic notion. It's our defense against ourselves, the one foe who might defeat us.”

– [Bill Moyers](#)

“When a library is open, no matter its size or shape, democracy is open, too.”

– [Bill Moyers](#)

“We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

– [Thomas Jefferson](#)