



TOUCHSTONES

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Democracy

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

There is a considerable difference between the ideal of democracy and its reality, especially in America, but in other countries as well. Of course, America is vaunted as the first democracy in the modern era, but this accolade requires that we ask, "What kind of democracy?" Ironically, the *Declaration of Independence*, which Americans tend to revere, involved more than a little misdirection in its assertion, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable



Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The word "men" was neither generic nor symbolic. Women were excluded from this ideal. Blacks were excluded from this ideal. Native Americans were also excluded, as were white men who did not own property. In the colonial period, the right to vote was often based on property qualifications and/or a religious test.

The U.S. Constitution did not originally define who was eligible to vote, allowing each state to determine who was eligible. It was not until 1856 that white men were allowed to vote regardless of property ownership, although requirements for paying a tax remained in five states, three in the South and two in the North.

Since the U.S. Civil War, the ongoing battle has been between those seeking to expand the franchise to vote and those

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Democracy & Building Beloved Community

In his 1940 novel, *You Can't Go Home Again* (published two years after his death), Thomas Wolfe wrote, "I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found.... I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come. I think the true discovery of our own democracy is still before us." The truth is that democracy is an ideal, as is beloved community, and neither is easy to achieve in any country. And, in fact, these two are interdependent. It is notable that all seven of our principles are a blueprint for achieving both, especially, "the inherent worth and dignity of every person."

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Witness for Justice

Tapestry of Faith

One day in Alabama, in 1968, as farmers worked..., a small airplane swooped into view. The farmers looked up ...as papers fluttered out of the plane ...and came swirling down ...around them. The papers were flyers about the upcoming elections—flyers with a picture of an eagle and the names of the candidates the pilot of the airplane liked the best.



That pilot was John L. Cashin, Jr. He hoped those farmers would vote for the candidates of the National Democratic Party, a political party he founded to help African Americans run in Alabama.... He wanted the farmers...to know that these candidates ...would use their positions ...to make life better and more fair for the farmers, their families, and all their neighbors.

John Cashin was ...a pilot, ...a dentist, ...a husband, and a father of three children. He ...ran for mayor in ... Huntsville, Alabama. He did not win. Later in his life, he ... [ran] for governor of the state of Alabama, ...[but] didn't win....

In those days in Alabama, African Americans had little chance of winning public office. Even though about one third of Alabama's people were Black, the Alabama state government had no elected officials who were African American. Very few Blacks ran for election. Very few Blacks could even vote in elections. They were kept away by ..."Jim Crow" laws—and by threats of violence by white people....

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Building Beloved Community

Dreams Made Real

(Continued from page 1) **Witness for Justice**

So, with so little chance to win, why did John Cashin run for mayor, and then for governor? Well, John was an activist who understood the power of public witness. And he had made a promise when he was 11 years old, to do whatever he could to get Blacks involved in the political process and to speak out against the injustices that kept them away. Every time John Cashin put his name on a ballot and his picture on election posters and flyers, he caught the dreams of other African Americans in Alabama. Campaign speeches gave him a chance to make some noise for justice, and speak out against laws that were not fair to African Americans.

When John Cashin formed the National Democratic Party, he chose as its symbol, an eagle—the well-known symbol of American freedom. With eagles ...all over their flyers..., the National Democratic Party made sure ...blacks who could not read could vote for ...candidates.... Soon, African Americans in Alabama were running for sheriff, city councils, and judgeships and the National Democratic Party helped many get elected.

Cashin did not have to witness alone. His family, his Unitarian Universalist congregation in Huntsville, Alabama, and many other UUs and friends joined him. They came to his rallies, made their own speeches to support him, and helped him raise money to run for elections. Like John, they believed that to witness against the wrongs committed against African Americans was an important way to show their faith.

Over time in Alabama, more African Americans voted. More African Americans ran for public office, and won. As more African Americans became part of the Democratic and Republican parties, John Cashin's National Democratic Party was less important for public witness, and it was dissolved.

John Cashin died in 2011. We ...are part of John Cashin's legacy. He witnessed for the justice and an America where everyone's vote is counted.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/signs/session15/288119.shtml>

Power & Pride

Dare for Democracy: Three Essential Steps

Frances Moore Lappé & Adam Eichen

We ...must act more boldly than ever. To save the democracy we thought we had, we must take democracy to where it's never been. Together we can create a vibrant, bipartisan, multicultural "movement of movements."

This Democracy Movement ...to protect and further our democratic institutions ...must be a movement that turns disillusionment and fear into the courage and resolve needed to tackle the deep, systemic roots of the crisis we now face. ...Success in the Democracy Movement ...requires addressing three aspects of American society....

1. *Rejecting brutal capitalism*

A magical market ... succeeds ...by reducing everything possible to dollar exchange among consumers.

...Transforming brutal capitalism, with its multiple assaults on human dignity ..., requires democracy to be accountable ...to ...citizens ...based on three values ...: fairness, the protection of the nature of democracy, and the dignity of all.

2. *Revaluing the role of government and reinstating government service as an honorable calling*

A strong democracy requires reversing ...[the] long and fierce anti-democracy movement ...coordinated since the infamous 1971 Lewis Powell memo, a detailed playbook for delegitimizing government....

A take-no-prisoners approach to politics [was] captured in 1999 by David Horowitz's *The Art of Political War* ...[where] compromise is treason and obstructionism is virtue.

3. *Reclaiming citizens' power and pride*

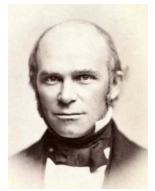
Too many...have failed to grasp the strength of this anti-democracy movement and to fight its assault ...for example, [on] the war on voting rights [since] passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/12/14/dare-democracy-three-essential-steps>

Intended for All

Democracy Defined

In his speech, *The American Idea*, at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in Boston on May 29, 1850, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker offered this definition of democracy: "There is what I



call the American idea. I so name it, because it seems to me to lie at the basis of all our truly original, distinctive, and American institutions. It is itself a complex idea, composed of three subordinate and more simple ideas, namely: The idea that all men have unalienable rights; that in respect thereof, all men are created equal; and that government is to be established and sustained for the purpose of giving every man an opportunity for the enjoyment and development of all these unalienable rights. This idea demands, as the proximate organization thereof, a democracy, that is, a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people; of course, a government after the principles of eternal justice, the unchanging law of God; for shortness' sake, I will call it the idea of Freedom."

William Henry Herndon, who admired Parker, was aware of the speech. Herndon was a law partner with Abraham Lincoln. He apparently shared Parker's speech with Lincoln. In his *Gettysburg Address* delivered on November 19, 1863, Lincoln declared: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and *that government of the people, by the people, for the people*, shall not perish from the earth."

This noble sentiment continues to be more aspiration than reality. Ezra Klein, founder of *Vox*, cites studies that suggests that "the people" do not get what they want in terms of legislation unless it is also supported by the wealthy, by special interest groups, and by lobbyists. Further, gridlock and partisanship have effectively brought a stop to any meaningful legislation despite the dramatic problems that the world faces.

Source: Touchstones

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others."

Winston Churchill

Day 2: "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

Day 3: "Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner." James Bovard

Day 4: "Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is absolutely essential to it." Howard Zinn

Day 5: "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." Franklin D. Roosevelt

Day 6: "Democracy is not freedom. ... Freedom comes from the recognition of certain rights which may not be taken, not even by a 99% vote." Marvin Simkin

Day 7: "People shouldn't be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people." Alan Moore

Day 8: "Democracy is not just the right to vote, it is the right to live in dignity." Naomi Klein

Day 9: "Every election is determined by the people who show up." Larry Sabato

Day 10: "Democracy and freedom are more than just ideals to be valued—they may be essential to survival." Noam Chomsky

Day 11: "We proclaim our devotion to democracy, but we sadly practice the very

opposite of the democratic creed." Martin Luther King Jr.

Day 12: "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide." John Adams

Day 13: "Oh mighty Ship of State! / To the Shores of Need / past the Reefs of Greed / through the Squalls of Hate. / Sail on, sail on / Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.!" Leonard Cohen

Day 14: "I swear to the Lord, / I still can't see, / Why Democracy means, / Everybody but me." Langston Hughes

Day 15: "And when I speak, I don't speak as a Democrat. Or a Republican. Nor an American. I speak as a victim of America's so-called democracy." Malcolm X

Day 16: "Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve." Bernard Shaw

Day 17: "In a society governed passively by free markets and free

elections, organized greed always defeats disorganized democracy." Matt Taibbi

Day 18: "When widely followed public figures feel free to say anything, without any fact-checking, it becomes impossible for a democracy to think intelligently about big issues." Thomas Friedman

Day 19: "A great democracy has got to be progressive or it will soon cease to be great or a democracy." Theodore Roosevelt



Day 20: "The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment."

Robert Hutchins

Day 21: "The minute you hear 'freedom' and 'democracy', watch out... because in a truly free nation, no one has to tell you you're free." Jacque Fresco

Day 22: "The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all." John F. Kennedy

Day 23: "A society without democracy is a society of slaves and fools." Zaman Ali

Day 24: "Democracy is the best revenge." Benazir Bhutto

Day 25: "LIBERTY! FREEDOM! DEMOCRACY! True anyhow no matter how many Liars use those words." Langston Hughes

Day 26: "We cannot play ostrich. Democracy just cannot flourish amid fear. Liberty cannot bloom amid hate. Justice cannot take root amid rage." Thurgood Marshall

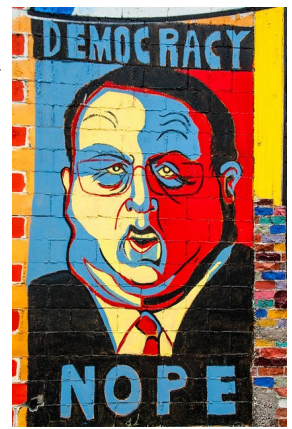
Day 27: "...they say if you don't vote, you get the government you deserve, and if you do, you never get the results you expected." E.A. Bucchianeri

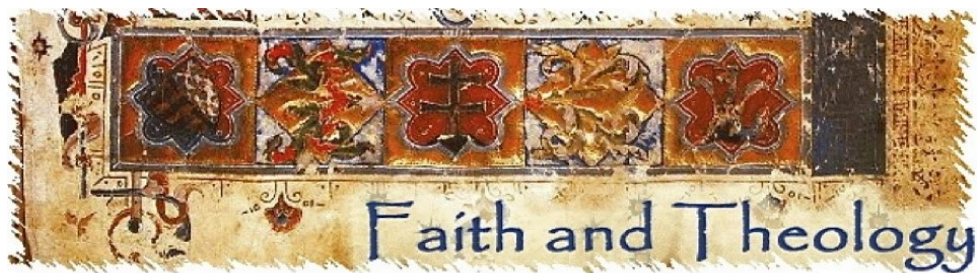
Day 28: "Through money, democracy becomes its own destroyer, after money has destroyed intellect." Oswald Spengler

Day 29: "I lived in countries that had no democracy... so I don't find myself in the same luxury as you do. You grew up in freedom, and you can spit on freedom because you don't know what it is not to have freedom." Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Day 30: "Activism begins with you, Democracy begins with you, get out there, get active! Tag, you're it" Thom Hartmann

Day 31: "We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both." Louis D. Brandeis





Whither Democracy

Democracy has a long history within our religious tradition extending back to the Puritans, out of which Unitarianism arose.

Conrad Wright, an American religious historian and scholar of American Unitarianism wrote, "Since the church was a community of the Saints, all of them equal in spiritual standing, the result has all the appearance of a little democracy, and congregationalism has often been eulogized as one of the sources of liberal democratic theory and institutions. This is, at best, only a partial truth. The forms of democracy were surely present; but the rule of the elders in the life of the church was authoritarian rather than democratic, as the *Cambridge Platform* of 1648 itself suggests. Samuel Stone, teacher of the church in Hartford, stated it epigrammatically: 'A speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent democracy.' Yet if it is anachronistic to represent the Puritans as incipient democrats, it may be said that they adopted institutional forms into which later generations could breathe a democratic spirit." It is in this sense that some historians have referred to the Puritans as supporting a proto-democracy.

The religious and political organization in colonial Massachusetts blended the religious theocracy of the Puritan church with a civil democracy of the parish (aka town). In the settlement of Massachusetts, each community formed around a village green and a meeting house. Because access to community worship was essential, town boundaries were usually limited to six square miles and a settlement was not granted the rights of a town until they had settled 50 to 60 families. Initially, there was one church representing the Standing Order of the Puritans. It was usually designated as "first parish church," which was based in the meeting house. The minister, who was called by a vote of eligible voters in

the town/parish, was the pastor of a sect of Christian believers (i.e., Puritans) responsible for preaching, administering the sacraments, and disciplining errant members. The minister's second role was that of a "public Protestant teacher of piety, religion, and morality" tasked with teaching those precepts that made civilized living possible within the town. This second role was the justification for the tax support of public worship. This arrangement continued until religion was dis-established in Massachusetts in 1833. As Conrad Wright observed, this church-parish symbiosis did not exist outside of New England



The town slowly became a vibrant democratic institution. Initially, town meetings were limited to the investors who founded the town. Eligibility for participation in the town meeting slowly expanded to include members of the parish church, and large property owners. Still it was limited to white men who were landowners. Women did not participate in town meetings and were excluded from decision making in the church. In isolated cases, a widow who owned land could vote in a town meeting. If a single woman owned property, its control went to her husband when she married, and she lost all rights related to owning property. Eventually, the requirement tying land ownership to vot-

ing ended, but voting was still limited to white men.

Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America*, interviewed Rev. William Ellery Channing on October 2, 1831. In his notes he quoted Channing as saying, "... I believe every man in a position to understand religious truths, and I don't believe every man able to understand political questions. ...I cannot believe that civil society is made to be guided directly by the always comparatively ignorant masses...." Channing's disdain for the masses was typical of his class.

The following references to democracy are from David Robinson in his book, *The Unitarians and Universalists*.

- ◆ Universalist Benjamin Rush, who signed the *Declaration of Independence*, was "passionate about Revolutionary politics and saw in the American Revolution a promise of a new age of democracy..., ordained by God, to be centered in the American republic."
- ◆ "A pronouncement of this developing social vision can be found in the 1917 *Declaration of Social Principles and Social Program*, written by [Rev. Clarence] Skinner and adopted by the Universalist General Convention. ...Its call was for the establishment of a democracy, 'not only [as] an inherent right, but also a divinely imposed duty.' A long list of ...social recommendations included a call for 'democratization of industry and land,' equal rights for women, guarantees of free speech, prohibition, "some form of social insurance," and work toward a world federation."
- ◆ "In 1939, [Frederic May] Eliot, [president of the American Unitarian Association], looked forward to 'the uniting of our two denominations into *The United Liberal Church of America*' and argued that 'if liberal religion is to play a real part in working out the destiny of democracy in America, it is imperative that our efforts be concentrated....'"
- ◆ In 1920, Unitarian minister Curtis Reese addressed the *Harvard Summer School of Theology*. It was one of the earliest and most controversial

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Addressing Corruption of our Democracy

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

Humanist pronouncements. In it he said, "The coming order is a world order." As David Robinson observes, "In the order that he envisioned, democracy would be the operative principle. For Reese this meant not only a political democracy in the sense in which we usually understand it but a spiritual democracy as well."

- ◆ On the eve of merger with the Universalists, the American Unitarian Association (AUA) took stock of itself through the work of six commissions. Their report, *The Free Church in a Changing World*, was published in 1963. They articulated "a form or 'style' of liberalism, which they summarized 'under four categories: (1) 'this-worldly concerns,' (2) 'strong ethical responsibility,' (3) 'deep commitment to democracy,' and (4) a belief that true community is religiously based.'"

A commitment to democracy was expressed institutionally by the AUA in 1944 when the Board adopted a statement developed by *Unitarian Advance*, which had been formed and led by the Rev. A. Powell Davies. This statement of working principles outlined the following foundations of Unitarianism: "individual freedom of belief, discipleship to advancing truth, the democratic process in human relations, universal brotherhood undivided by nation, race or creed, and allegiance to a united world community."

At the time of merger to create the Unitarian Universalist Association the principles included the following: "the use of the democratic method in human relations," which was a slight variation of what Powell had proposed. This was expanded to become our fifth principle in 1985: "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." (The principle was translated into these words for children: "We believe that all persons should have a vote about the things that concern them.")

Expressions of concern for democracy have been articulated by different General Assemblies per the following Actions of

Immediate Witness (AIW), Statements of Conscience, and Responsive Resolutions that were adopted.

- ◆ 2000 AIW: *Campaign Finance Reform*
- ◆ 2004 *Statement of Conscience: Civil Liberties*
- ◆ 2007 Responsive Resolution: *Voting Rights for Communities of Color*
- ◆ 2009 AIW: *Advocate Pending Legislation toward Clean, Honest and Fair Elections*
- ◆ 2011 AIW: *Overtake Citizens United; Support Free Speech for People*
- ◆ 2013 AIW: *Amend the Constitution: Corporations Are Not Persons; Money Is Not Speech*

Perhaps the most notable decision occurred when delegates at 2016 General Assembly in Columbus, OH, selected *The Corruption of Our Democracy* to be the 2016-2019 Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI). (This had been considered in 2010 and 2014 for CSAI proposals on *Revitalizing Democracy*.) The draft of the *Statement of Conscience* includes the following.

"Democratic government should include:

- ◆ universal voting rights with high voter participation rates;
- ◆ free, fair, competitive, and frequent elections;
- ◆ beyond voting, widely used and meaningful channels of political participation open to all;
- ◆ access to accurate information and diverse media;
- ◆ policies and processes accountable to the voters, not to special interests;
- ◆ basic individual liberties that include freedom of speech, press, and religion;
- ◆ leaders who reflect the racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and class diversity of the population;
- ◆ an independent judiciary and adherence to the rule of law;
- ◆ policies implemented by those duly authorized; and
- ◆ freedom from influence of foreign or external powers or corporate corruption."

In the battle to protect and expand democracy lies the future of humanity.

Source: Touchstones

Flawed Democracy

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

seeking to restrict it. While the 15th amendment (1870) extended the franchise to black men, *Jim Crow* laws in the South passed between 1889 and 1910 introduced literacy tests and poll taxes to deny blacks, poor whites, Native Americans, and newly naturalized citizens the right to vote. They also disqualified convicted felons from voting. The primary objective of these laws was to suppress Black voter registration and turnout, and they were spectacularly successful. While the 19th amendment (1920) extended the vote to women, it did not offer protections to non-white women.

While Unitarians and Universalists were active in the movements to extend suffrage to black men and women, there were pockets of friction between these two goals. As an example, famous suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton was opposed to the 15th amendment saying, "We educated, virtuous white women are more worthy of the vote."

The U.S. Supreme court upheld poll taxes in both 1937 (*Breedlove v. Suttles*) and in 1951 (*Butler v. Thompson*). It was not until the 24th Amendment was ratified in 1964 that the use of poll taxes in federal elections was abolished. To appease state rights' advocates, it did not apply to state or local elections. The Supreme Court, however, ruled in 1966 (*Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*) that poll taxes in all state and local elections were prohibited under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

While the U.S. Congress passed Civil Rights Acts in 1957, 1960, and 1964, none were strong enough to prevent voting discrimination at the local level. Finally, with the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965, a direct response to "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama, literacy tests were outlawed and jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination could not change voting practices or procedures without "preclearance" from either the U.S. Attorney General or the District Court for Washington, D.C.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court

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The Decline of Democracy

(Continued from page 5) **Introduction**

guttured the Voting Acts Right in 2013 (*Shelby County v. Holder*). Prior to that, Section 5 of the act required federal review of new voting rules in 15 states, most of them in the South. The result has been a dramatic and largely successful increase in voter suppression in communities of color up to and through the 2018 mid-term elections.

An earlier attack by the court on democracy was decided in 2010 (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*) when corporations were made citizens, acknowledging that political spending is protected speech under the First Amendment. This means that the government may not keep corporations or unions from spending money to support or denounce individual candidates in elections. Then,



the court in 2014 (*McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*) overruled the 2002 *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, which established two sets of limits to campaign contributions in a two-year-period. Most notably, in the presidential election in 2000, a divided Supreme Court ruled 7-2 (*Bush v. Gore*) that the state of Florida's court-ordered manual recount of vote ballots was unconstitutional, despite the fact that Gore had won the popular vote nationally. Many legal scholars have determined that the decision was politically motivated, especially given that the Supreme Court reversed the Florida Supreme Court's order calling for a recount.

These are all examples of what Harvard University Professor Mark Tushnet calls "constitutional hardball" in which court decisions appear to be within the bounds of existing constitutional doctrine and practice (e.g., originalism), but they trample conventional understandings of

how the law is supposed to work. Increases in the number of conservative judges and justices will embolden judicial hardball.

In this, American democracy is being undermined by the wealthy, special interests, lobbying, and key decisions by the courts, most notably the U.S. Supreme Court. Since the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, conservatives have undermined democracy through the practice of identity politics that favors wealthy, white men by passing laws that suppress the vote of minorities.

The intelligence unit of the *Economist Magazine* compiled its first *Democracy Index* in 2006. The five factors that were assessed were (1) Electoral process and pluralism, (2) Functioning of government, (3) Political participation, (4) Political culture, and (5) Civil Liberties. Each of these five categories is evaluated using an average of 12 indicators. In 2006, the U.S. was listed in 17th place and judged to be a "full democracy" along with 27 other countries. In 2018, the U.S. fell to 25th place and dropped to the category of a "flawed democracy." While American democracy scored higher on Electoral process and pluralism and Political participation, it scored lower on Functioning of government, Political culture, and Civil liberties. By comparison, Canada was ranked 9th in 2006. By 2018, it had moved up to 6th place.

.....While we may think that the decline in democracy and democratic values is recent, some suggest that the decline began in 2005. In one poll taken in 2005, a majority of Americans said that the U.S. should play a role in promoting democracy throughout the world. By 2007, only 37% thought the U.S. should play this role. The *Freedom in the World* 2019 report listed the following as reasons why democracy in the United States is being undermined: assailing the rule of law, demonizing the press, self-dealing and conflicts of interest, attacking the legitimacy of elections, and undermining American ideals abroad. There are consequences to this. As an example, in one recent study, only about 30% of Americans born in the 1980s

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Family Matters

6 Ways to Teach Kids about Democracy & Citizenship

Rebekah Gienapp

1. *Take your child with you when you vote, and talk about why you've chosen to vote for particular candidates*

It's a great opportunity to talk to your child about how ordinary people get to choose the leaders of our democracy.

2. *Write a letter to an elected official as a family*

Writing a letter is one very concrete example of how citizens not only get to elect our leaders. We also have a right and responsibility to push them to act for the good of our communities once they're in the office.

3. *Talk about how protest is patriotic*
When there are news stories about protest, do you talk to your children about them? Loving one's country means speaking up when we disagree with its actions.

4. *Encourage children to ask questions and to speak up when they don't agree*

As parents and teachers, one of the best ways to model democratic dialogue is to encourage children to respectfully question adults—including us!

5. *Talk about times when your country has lived up to its ideals, and times when it has not*

Consider how confusing it is for a child to hear only positive stories about their country and its leaders, and then learn about topics like slavery years later.

6. *Read and discuss children's books about voting, democracy, and citizenship*
When reading books about people facing injustice, point out the ways that oppressed people in the story are fighting back for their rights.

Source: <https://www.thebarefootmommy.com/2018/09/democracy-kids/>

Family Activity: Voting

While all of the above are family activities, consider discussing and voting on decisions about some things to do as a family.

Survey Says

Facts, Trust, and Democracy

The Pew Research Center has been conducting a study for more than a year called *Facts, Trust, and Democracy* to better understand current views of the U.S. political system and American democracy.

The study offers profound insight into attitudes about facts and trust (think fake news) and democracy. The study notes

- ◆ “In general terms, most Americans think U.S. democracy is working at least somewhat well. Yet a 61% majority says ‘significant changes’ are needed in the fundamental ‘design and structure’ of American government to make it work in current times. When asked to compare the U.S. political system with those of other developed nations, fewer than half rate it ‘above average’ or ‘best in the world.’”
- ◆ “Overall, 42% of Americans say they think about politics as a struggle between right and wrong, while a majority (57%) doesn’t think of politics in that way.”
- ◆ “Just over half of Americans see the major issues facing the country today as complicated: 54% say that most big issues don’t have clear solutions, while 44% say the solutions are clear.”

Per the following, the first number is Democratic/Lean Democratic and the second is Republican/Lean Republican. The response to the statement is that it describes the United States very/somewhat well.

Wide partisan gap in views of some aspects of political system, criticism from both parties on others

- ◆ Everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed (37%/74%)
- ◆ Rights and freedoms of all people are respected (38%/60%)
- ◆ Views of those not in the majority on issues are respected (34%/49%)
- ◆ Military leadership does not publicly support a party (69%/83%)
- ◆ Govt. policies reflect views of most Americans (30%/43%)

- ◆ People are free to peacefully protest (68%/80%)
- ◆ Govt. is open and transparent (27%/35%)
- ◆ There is a balance of power between govt. branches (53%/59%)
- ◆ Tone of political debate is respectful (23%/27%)
- ◆ Campaign contributions do not lead to greater political influence (25%/28%)
- ◆ Elected officials face serious consequences for misconduct (30%/29%)
- ◆ People agree on basic facts even if they disagree on politics (35%/32%)
- ◆ Republicans and Democrats work together on issues (20%/17%)
- ◆ Judges are not influenced by political parties (46%/38%)
- ◆ News organizations don’t favor a party (38%/18%)
- ◆ News organizations are independent of government (53%/31%)



Republicans and Democrats agree on many aspects of good citizenship

- ◆ Vote in elections (75%/76%)
- ◆ Pay all the taxes you owe (70%/72%)
- ◆ Always follow the law (61%/79%)
- ◆ Serve on jury duty if called (61%/64%)

- ◆ Respect the opinions of those with whom you disagree (63%/59%)
- ◆ Participate in the U.S. census every decade (62%/60%)
- ◆ Volunteer to help others (52%/51%)
- ◆ Know the pledge of Allegiance (34%/71%)
- ◆ Follow what happens in govt. and politics (50%/50%)
- ◆ Protest if you think govt. actions are wrong (52%/35%)
- ◆ Display the American flag (25%/50%)

Republicans, Democrats have starkly different perceptions of voting by eligible and ineligible voters

- ◆ No eligible voters denied vote (56%/80%)
- ◆ No ineligible voters permitted to vote (76%/42%)
- ◆ High turnout in presidential elections (52%/73%)
- ◆ Elections free from tampering (52%/62%)
- ◆ Congressional districts fairly drawn (39%/63%)
- ◆ High turnout in local elections (36%/48%)
- ◆ Voters are knowledgeable (38%/40%)

Other findings include the following:

- ◆ Constitution should be amended so the candidate who receives the most nationwide votes wins (75%/32%)
- ◆ Ordinary Americans would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials (45%/43%) In 2015, the agreement among Republicans was 62%.
- ◆ The U.S. Supreme Court should make its rulings based on what the Constitution “means in current times” (30%/78%)

The report, which consists of ten sections, is well worth reading and can be accessed at <https://www.people-press.org/2018/04/26/the-public-the-political-system-and-american-democracy/>. As you read the responses, where are you on the percentage scale?

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Democracy

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of *Explorations* and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: Vigorous debate is essential to democracy, and fireworks are certainly a part of our revolutionary tradition. So as we gather..., let there be a free and unhampered exchange of ideas, questions and opinions. Democracy is not supposed to be tame or tidy or tepid.

But as we speak, and as we listen, let us also remember this honorable legacy we're privileged to uphold and carry on, a heritage that goes back to the founders of our nation and the founders of our Unitarian Universalist faith. Let us be worthy of the standards of tolerance, reason and civility they embodied and envisioned.

Gary Kowalski

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: The Greek root of the word *politics* does not mean 'of the government' but 'of the citizen.' We need a new political gestalt...: an expansion of the political arena to more accurately reflect not only what we do, but who we are and are becoming. Politics should include more than just changes in government; it should include changes in *us*. We are what [our country] is.

Marianne Williamson

Living the Questions:

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Is democracy important as a system of government? Why or why not?
2. What are the strengths and the flaws in our democratic system?
3. How can our democracy be strengthened? What actions can individuals take?
4. What is the appeal of authoritarianism? Are we in danger of slipping into this? Why or why not?
5. What are the duties of being a citizen? How are these reflected in your life?
6. How can civility, bipartisanship, and effectiveness be restored to politics?
7. What roles can our congregations play in strengthening democracy?
8. Why do people believe that their vote does not count? How can this attitude be changed?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice:

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words:

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Save Democracy

(Continued from page 6) **Introduction**

thought that it was "essential" to live in a democracy. That compared to 75% of Americans born in the 1930s. Democracy seems to be far more vulnerable than we imagined, especially in the face of a growing preference for nationalism and authoritarianism.

Consider this list of 14 early signs of Fascism that is posted in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

1. Powerful and continuing nationalism
2. Disdain for human rights
3. Identification of enemies as a unifying cause
4. Supremacy of the military
5. Rampant sexism
6. Controlled mass media
7. Obsession with national security
8. Religion and government intertwined
9. Corporate power protected
10. Labor power suppressed
11. Disdain for intellectuals & the arts
12. Obsession with crime & punishment
13. Rampant cronyism & corruption
14. Fraudulent elections

Given all of this, concern for democracy is well founded and should encourage us to work to protect, strengthen, and

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