

## Resources on Democracy

***“Democracy”*** by Langston Hughes

Democracy will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand  
On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
Let things take their course.  
Tomorrow is another day.  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.

I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

-Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, 1861

The continued vitality of our Constitution and the survival of each freedom it protects depend upon the right to vote and the vibrant democracy it affords us. In short, the right to vote underlies each of our other rights.

- Amy Klobuchar

In the Soviet Union, capitalism triumphed over communism. In this country, capitalism triumphed over democracy.

- Fran Lebowitz

A functioning, robust democracy requires a healthy educated, participatory followership, and an educated, morally grounded leadership.

- Chinua Achebe

***"I Hear America Singing"*** by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the  
steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission  
or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or  
washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.

- Louis D. Brandeis

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.

- James Bovard

If you get so unequal that people believe they don't have a chance, that the field isn't level for them and their children, that puts democracy at risk.

- Hillary Clinton

Democracy no longer means what it was meant to. It has been taken back into the workshop. Each of its institutions has been hollowed out, and it has been returned to us as a vehicle for the free market, of the corporations. For the corporations, by the corporations.

- Arundhati Roy

I don't understand why it has to be either - or - either socialism or democracy. Why can't we combine things to get the best of each system?

- Tim Allen

***“Democracy (2)”*** by Sarah Holbrook

Not a flagpole, pointing heavenward  
with shining surety.  
Not  
any one set of colors  
jerked cleanly up and down.  
Not golden crusted apple pie.  
Not  
a grey pin-striped uniform.  
Not  
anybody's mom.  
No.  
If there is a metaphor  
for democracy  
it is a mud wrestling match,  
grit in the eyes  
feet a flying—  
your ear in my teeth.  
And the future?  
The future belongs to the muckers  
still willing to get their hands  
dirty,  
who roll up their sleeves  
to show their colors.

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

- James Baldwin

Democracy is a device that insures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.

- George Bernard Shaw

It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.

- Winston Churchill

If there was one decision I would overrule, it would be 'Citizens United.' I think the notion that we have all the democracy that money can buy strays so far from what our democracy is supposed to be.

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Democracy is not a spectator sport.

- Marion Wright Edelman

***“Let America Be America Again”*** by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed— Let it be that great strong land of  
love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this “homeland of the free.”)

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart, I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek— And finding only the same old stupid plan

Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope, Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need! Of work the men! Of take the pay!

Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean— Hungry yet today despite the dream. Beaten  
yet today—O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true, That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned That's made America the land it has  
become.

O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home—  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today? The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay? For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our pay— Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.  
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME— Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives, We must take back our land  
again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath— America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death, the rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies, We, the people, must redeem

The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—  
All, all the stretch of these great green states— And make America again!

There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of 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

Our representative democracy is not working because the Congress that is supposed to represent the voters does not respond to their needs. I believe the chief reason for this is that it is ruled by a small group of old men.

- Shirley Chisholm

***“Ordinary Human Arms”*** by Marianne Larsen, a Danish poet, entitled

We put our arms around each other  
a pair of ordinary tax-paying human arms  
not to rest them  
but to harden them  
a pair of ordinary concrete-accustomed  
and marketed human arms  
a pair of ordinarily needing  
a pair of ordinarily hugging  
human arms  
we put them around each other  
they are heath-insured and ordinarily dressed  
a pair of ordinary love-interpreting  
human arms  
how strong they are  
sovereign, independent—  
no matter where  
no matter what the hour  
no matter what the season  
suddenly and for all time

human arms  
without speculation  
we put them around each other  
as if to show that their powerlessness  
doesn't exist

***"The Low Road"*** by Marge Piercy

What can they do  
to you? Whatever they want.  
They can set you up, they can  
bust you, they can break  
your fingers, they can  
burn your brain with electricity,  
blur you with drugs till you  
can't walk, can't remember, they can  
take your child, wall up  
your lover. They can do anything  
you can't stop them  
from doing. How can you stop  
them? Alone, you can fight,  
you can refuse, you can  
take what revenge you can  
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting  
back to back can cut through  
a mob, a snake-dancing file  
can break a cordon, an army  
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other  
sane, can give support, conviction,  
love, massage, hope, sex.  
Three people are a delegation,  
a committee, a wedge. With four  
you can play bridge and start  
an organization. With six  
you can rent a whole house,  
eat pie for dinner with no  
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.  
A dozen make a demonstration.  
A hundred fill a hall.  
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;  
ten thousand, power and your own paper;  
a hundred thousand, your own media;  
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,  
it starts when you care

to act, it starts when you do  
it again after they said no,  
it starts when you say *We*  
and know who you mean, and each  
day you mean one more.

Beauty is not meant to be kept to ourselves. We must take the beauty of our beloved community out into the world to share it with others who so badly need deep and soulful nourishment. We must take it to the polls as we exercise our role as citizens advocating for a return to civility and politics of human rights and human dignity. We must take it into the sanctuaries of nature as we celebrate and revel in the brief but bountiful blossoming of summer.

-Rev. Lissa Anne Gundlach