Democracy Essay, Research Paper

Democracy

I. Meaning of Democracy

II. Summary of Places and Dates

III. Features of Democracy

IV. Types of Democracy

V. Early Democracy

A. Athens

B. Rome

VI. Middle Ages and England

VII. The Renaissance

A. United States of America

B. France

VIII. Modern Times

IX. Important People

Demos Kratia, or democracy, as it is used today, means the people rule.

A democracy is a form of government is run by the people of that country through

elections and representation. A democracy is really a form of a republic known as a

democratic republic. A republic is a government where officials, elected by a small

group of people, make the important decisions.

Democracy has been around for almost 2500 years since Athens, Greece

became the first democracy. The Romans also experimented with democracy,

however it was more a republic, and not a democracy. Around 1200 England laid

the groundwork to become a republic. Later, in the 1700 s, United States of

America, became a democracy.

There are many features of democracy. Most of these features are the same,

but individual countries use varations of the main ideas. The main feature of

democracy, which determines a true democracy, is free, competitive elections.

Sometimes however, women or minorities don t have the right to vote. Some of

these other features, such as checks on power, help to limit the strength of any one

person or party. Other features like free elections, and majority/ minority rule, help

to make elections fair, since the judgment of many people is generally better then

the judgment of a few people. Political parties keep one government, or idea of

government form holding all power. These features let the people to govern

themselves without the country being torn apart.

There are two true types of democracies, direct democracies, and

representative democracies. In a direct democracy all the people meet to discuss

problems and creat laws. A direct decision consults all the people for the

decisions.. Since that is unpractical in todays world, a new form of democracy, the

representative democracy has arisen. This form of democracy has elected

representatives making most of the day to day decisions, while the main groups of

citizens consulted for only the most important decisions.

One of the earliest known democracies was in Athens, a city-state in

southern, ancient Greece. Around 620BC, Athens became the first true democracy.

In Athens the ruler Draco tried to make many reforms in the city state. Draco

organized laws by putting them in a written code, letting everyone know what the

laws were and how they applied to everyone. He also gave the people the right to a

trial. The next ruler Solon, the next Athenian ruler also helped Athens become a

democracy. He also wrote many reforms into the laws and gave all citizens the

right to vote, an important step in the origins of democracy. Some of his reforms

created problems for other people, who wanted to become citizens. In 500BC,

Athens looked like a modern democracy. The main lawmaking body was known as

the assembly, and all free male citizens could be in the assembly. The assembly met

about forty times a year to discuss and vote on the issues. The council of 500,

which was made of volunteers from all ten districts, helped sort out the assembly s

business. An even smaller council, a counsel of fifty men, made the daily decisions

of the city-state. The largest problem of Athens democracy were that only a few of

the people could become citizens, therefore limiting the power to a small group.

This problem caused many slaves, and other non-landowners to be disappointed.

Athens, no matter what the problems, was the first true democracy.

Rome, around 500 BC, became a republic. A republic is not a democracy,

but is very similar to a democracy. In this republic, the elected officials only

represented a small fraction of the people. Some of the ideas Rome used, mainly

the practice of elected officials helped to shape the ideas of a representative

democracy.

In Rome, the wealthy people, the patricians, had much more power then the

poorer people, the plebeians. Despite the fact that the plebeians had very little

power, the fact that they had any power at all was a step foreword for democracy.

As a part of Romes government, there was a senate and two assemblies. The

senate, made up of senators, proposed laws and ratified treaties. The Assembly of

Centuries directed military members, and the Assembly of Tribes represented all of

the people. In theory the assembly would be made up of both plebeians and

patricians. However it was proved that the patricians were very adept at controlling

the plebeians and thus held all the power at the assemblies. Despite the fact that the

Roman people had overthrown the king, they still felt the need for supreme

leadership. Because they felt they needed a powerful leader they decided to

appoint consuls, a pair of officials who carried out Romes laws. The consuls ruled

for one year, commanded their own army, and had the power to veto any of the

other consuls decisions. Another thing the Romans did was make it so a dictator

could rule for a six-month period of time so quick decisions could be made in a

crisis. The dictator, although he could make decisions, he could not change the

base laws for the country.

In the middle ages Christianity tought people that they not only were

citizens of the earth, but they were also members of Gods kingdom. Since people

were tought that they were citizens of both, nobody could be expected to be totally

loyal to their country and be totally loyal to their religion. During the middle ages,

in most of Europe, people lived under a feudal system. Under feudalism, people

pledged their skils and loyalty to other people in exchange for land, food, and

protection. Another idea feudalism supported was that individuals had certain

rights and privileges. During the middle ages, the Magna Carta was signed by

King John in England. This document has become a very important symbol of

human freedom and liberty. It was used to support demands for trials with juries, it

protected people from unlawful arrests, and it made the policy of no taxation

without representation. During the next several hundred years, English democracy

evolved slowly. In 1628 Parliament passed the Petition of Right, this petition told

King Charles I to stop collecting taxes without the consent of Parliament. This

petition let Parliament meet at regular intervals. When King Charles refused to

agree to this petition a civil war broke out fought between the Puritans, led by

Oliver Cromwell, and the followers of the king. When the followers of the king

were defeated, King Charles I was beheaded. The Revolution of 1688 established

the supremacy of Parliament and John Locke, a philosopher of the revolution

stated the power should belong to the people. In 1689 Parliament passed the Bill of

Rights, which assured people many basic civil rights. He also stated that the

government was there for protecting the peoples liberties, property, and lives. In

1689 Parliament passed the Bill of Rights, which assured people many basic civil

rights.

In the Renaissance, the first modern democracies emerged. One of the main

reasons democracies emerged was because the Renaissance tought independence

and individual thought. This new way of thinking helped to influence political

thinking and to speed the growth of democracy. The growth and evolution of

democracy was caused by the demands of greater freedom from many different

people.

As a result of the new individual ideas people began to think differently in

many ways. One of the areas where there were many problems was religion. In

some countries, there was only one religion allowed by law. Despite these laws

many people wanted to be able to freely practice their own religion. A result of this

want was that many people left England to colonize newly discovered countries. A

group of these people came to America and founded new colonies. One group of

these people, the Pilgrims singed the Mayflower Compact, which stated that all

people were to obey just and equal laws. In 1775 the America revolution began

between the colonists in America, and British over unfair taxes and unfair

representation. In 1776 the Declaration of Independence was drafted, and singed.

This Declaration stated that the colonies of Britain were their own country, the

United States of America with their own laws, government, and taxes. The

founding fathers of the United States of America didn t trust the Athenian form of

democracy, direct democracy, because they feared giving the people too much

power. Instead they divided the power between the federal government, and the

state government. They then divided the power between the legislative, executive,

and judicial branches. Also, they made it so the president, who had power similar

to the Roman consuls, would be elected by an electoral college, instead of by a

direct vote. In the long term almost all adult citizens have been given the right to

vote.

The French Revolution, which was spurred on by thinkers like

Montesquieu, Roseau, and Voltaire because their writings, some which were

banned, told people of the freedoms they should have. This revolution, although

it didn t make France a democracy, did limit the power of the French King, and it

also promoted the ideas of liberty and equality.

Today many types of governments claim to be democratic. Communism

governments are known as peoples democracies. Tese are not considered true

democracies by many people, because they limit he rights of many people. The

reason many people don t consider these governments true democracies is because

they limit freedom of expression, and competitive elections.

There have been many important people in the development of democracy.

Draco, Solon, and Cleisthes were all important contributors to democracy. These

Athenian rulers laid the groundwork for our modern democracies. King John, who

signed the Magna Carta and changed turned England into a republic opened the

door to many individual freedoms. John Locke, Montisquieu, Roseau, Voltaire,

Ben Franklin, and Thomas Paine who helped to shape democracy through their

writings, their teachings, and their ideas. Thomas Jefferson who drafted the

Declaration of Independence helped to lay the groundwork for the United States of

America, which is considered the benchmark of democracy. All these people,

and many others, made very important contributions to the evolution of

democracy.

Democracy

Andy Carroll

July 8th, 1996

7th Grade

Alexander J. Groth Democracy The World Book Encyclopedia.

Volume 5, 126-130p. Chicago: World Book, Inc, 1990

Jeffrey M. Ikler, Nancy Rogers, and others. The Pageant of World History.

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; Prentince Hall, 1994