

Democracy: A World History. Temma Kaplan, Oxford: Oxford University, 2015.
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The history of democracy, at least in the United States, is usually understood in exceptional terms, pertaining exclusively to Western cultures and traditions of law. The typical narrative traces the same tired path: it began in the city-states of Greece, was further refined by the Roman Empire, and was incrementally expanded in Western societies throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, culminating in its penultimate expression with the American Revolution and the eventual penning of the Constitution. Temma Kaplan, however, rejects such exceptionalism and, in some cases, the contemporary definitions and limitations of democracy. Using a much broader, inclusive conception, *Democracy: A World History* expands not only the timeline of democracy's history, but also its geopolitical locales, manifestations, and purposes. Kaplan further argues that democracy, while an ideal that historical actors have waxed poetic about, is more a story with examples where protections of one group offered under its guise often comes at the expense of "others." Therefore, the history of democracy, as Kaplan shows, has been a continuous discussion in many places amongst many people in an attempt to realize its full potential to deliver political and human rights. The task of re-defining such a revered and coveted ideal is not an easy one, especially when taking into account the brevity that the study is only 128 pages. Kaplan, however, performs her task admirably, delivering a work that successfully broadens our understanding of democracy and allows even the most amateur of scholars easy access to a truly "world history" of the idea.

Typically, when one thinks of democracy, it is associated with systems of law and government; Kaplan argues that it is a "process through which people confer with each other to secure goods, shelter, land, water, and peace for their mutual benefit." Democracy, therefore,

extends not just to functions of government for the benefit of a nation but to interactions of any group of people acting in concert to affect positive change in their respective communities. With this definition, Kaplan persuasively argues that democratic action is inherent to human nature the world over. And she has ample, geographically-diverse examples on which to make her point. The Code of Hammurabi, established around 1792 before the Common Era (BCE), is shown to be more than just a system to mete out punishments; rather, it was also employed to organize local Mesopotamians in an effort to regulate the flooding Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Ditto Ancient Egypt, where, despite total authority residing in the Pharaohs, local delegations worked to control and distribute Nile flood waters to both large estates and small farms. Kaplan points to several other examples from other regions of the world. All share one commonality: the “prehistory of democracy...took place around life-and-death issues.

As time passed the practice of democracy on the local and regional scales become more complex and more inclusive. Kaplan, in rapid succession, clips through the more familiar concepts of democracy as it occurred in the Greek city-states, particularly in Athens. Here, in addition to distributing water, the Greeks implemented democratic laws and diffused power in an effort to reduce potential tyranny. A brief discussion of Roman law follows the decline of Greek city-states. This not only includes the writing and passage of codes and laws in Rome, it also elaborates on democratic principles inherent in the great religions that began before and after the fall of the Roman Empire. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and several others naturally spawned communitarian impulses that continued well after their infancies. The collapse of the Roman Empire dealt a heavy blow the expansion of democratic principles in the West, but it did not destroy the idea. Memories of written laws and rights continued until a time when they were rediscovered and re-employed to advance the interests of a community, locally or otherwise.

The West, as Kaplan demonstrates, was not the only locale in which democratic principles took root. From Chapter 2 through Chapter 8, she moves at a blistering pace to show the various manifestations of democracy at the local, regional, national, and international levels. The Sikhs in sixteen-century South Asia, for example, advocated democracy on the economic, the political, and the social levels. In this case, the process of urbanization, and the challenges inherent to it, pushed Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE), the founder of the Sikhs, to promote self-government, care for the less fortunate, and abandonment of the Hindu caste system. Half a world away, and some years later, Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church had unanticipated consequences. Protestant attempts to read and interpret scripture led some sects to abandon the use of ministers. This led to the notion that groups of equals were capable of reaching consensus on dogmatic matters, as well as on secular political matters. That realization did not bode well for maintaining political order.

As the narrative enters more contemporary time periods, the reader will undoubtedly recognize the more familiar conceptions of democracy. The ideas and events that undergird the American Revolution are explored at the local level with an extensive discussion of Bostonian activism. Here, the importance of print is highlighted, as political leaflets and pamphlets were distributed to the residents of Massachusetts. The overwhelming sentiment of the political presses was a trait common to many democratic movements that followed: "demand for inclusion in decision-making." The French Revolution and the Conspiracy of the Province of Minas Gerais, Brazil, to some degree, shared the same sentiments. But even as democratic principles were expanded in these regions, the fact remained that many people remained outside the realm of this newly received citizenship. Women, slaves, and non-land owners all continued to be excluded in the democratic process.

The remainder of Kaplan's study examines how these disenfranchised groups from around the world pushed for their rights as citizens both in their respective countries and as members of the human race, for there are some democratic tenets that extend beyond national borders. Women's suffrage in the United States began in 1840, but it extended to other locales around the world with Australia, New Zealand, and Finland hosting some of the earliest victory for the movement. In early-twentieth century Mexico, Emiliano Zapata led a land reform movement that advanced more democratic economic principles for peasant farmers. World War II led many to question what "democracy" meant in its aftermath. Movements on every continent led citizens, and those excluded from such rights, to clash over the meaning of democracy and who had a right to it. Nationalist movements in former colonies, the removal of Jim Crow in the American South, and the rise of a world-wide feminist movement blossomed in the wake of World War II's justifications. Each case study in the final three chapters reiterate Kaplan's point: democracy, while continually expanding, has yet to reach its full potential; and while there are those who continue to live under less-than democratic conditions will push to overthrow that system.

Kaplan's purpose in *Democracy: A World History* is to revise the narrative and definition of democracy. In a mere 128 pages, she achieves her objective. The historical narratives of each case study effectively convey the overarching argument at the heart of her study. The brevity and variety of the case studies, as well as the book itself, is one of its strengths. It gives sufficient background to each point in order persuasively demonstrates how and why democratic advocacy is taking place. It is therefore a valuable tool for teachers as a primer to the history of democracy. Its broad conceptualization of the idea will challenge students to see broader patterns in grassroots activity and push them to abandon any pretenses regarding Western

exceptionalism. Keeping with Kaplan's idea, the study is most assuredly a democratic history of the world.

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