

1.3: The Basic Concepts of Democracy

What do you consider to be the
basic rights of a person?

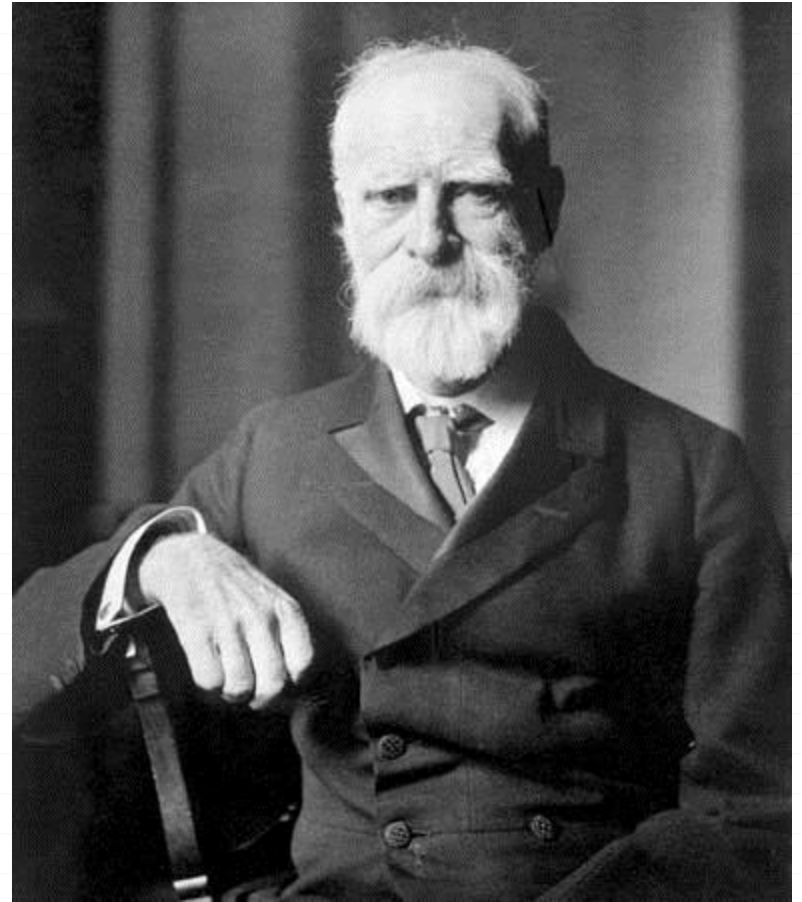
“No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

-Sir Winston Churchill



*“No government demands
so much from the citizen as
Democracy, and none gives
so much back.”*

-James Bryce



American democracy is based on
the following five concepts:

1. Worth of the Individual

- o Each person is important.
- o Sometimes people must sacrifice for the greater good.
 - o paying taxes
 - o registering for the draft
- o Sacrificing for the greater good shows the worth of other individuals.



2. Equality of All Persons

- o “[A]ll men are created equal.”
- o Not equality of condition, rather:
 - o equality of opportunity
 - o equality before the law
- o We’re still working on this one...



3. Majority Rule, Minority Rights

- o Majority is not always right, but usually their decisions will be more, rather than less, satisfactory.
- o Solutions to problems can always be improved.
- o Majority must still listen to minority.
 - o hear its argument and objections
 - o bear its criticisms
 - o welcome its suggestions



4. Necessity of Compromise

- Compromise is blending and adjusting competing views and interests.
- This ensures that all individual's opinions and views are regarded.



5. Individual Freedom

- Freedom is not absolute.
- Must strike a balance between freedom of the individual and the rights of society as a whole.
- “The right to swing my fist ends when the other man’s nose begins.” ~ Oliver Wendell Holmes



"...[I]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



“Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?”

-Abraham Lincoln



A few more things about
Democracy...

Democracy and the Free Enterprise System

- o The **free enterprise system** is an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods; investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control; and determined in a free market.
- o Decisions in a free enterprise system are determined by the **law of supply and demand**.
- o An economy in which private enterprise exists in combination with a considerable amount of government regulation and promotion is called a **mixed economy**.

Democracy and the Internet

- Democracy demands that the people be widely informed about their government.
- Theoretically, the Internet makes knowledgeable participation in democratic process easier than ever before.
- However, all data on the World Wide Web is not necessarily true, and the long-term effects of the Internet on democracy has yet to be determined.

Section 3 Review

- 1. All of the following are basic notions found in the American concept of democracy EXCEPT**
 - (a) a recognition of of the fundamental worth and dignity of every person.
 - (b) a respect for the equality of all persons.
 - (c) the rule of government by a single individual.
 - (d) an acceptance of the necessity of compromise.

- 2. In a free enterprise system, the means of capital are owned**
 - (a) by private and corporate entities.
 - (b) by government agencies.
 - (c) by only the agricultural sector.
 - (d) equally by the collective citizenry.

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