

Woodruff

Are Americans Ready for Democracy?

What Does It Mean to be "Ready"?

- To be ready, American culture needs to
 - be willing to invite everyone to join in the government
 - respect the rules of law to prevent a tyranny of the majority or wealthy
 - accept changes that come from the people
 - pay the price of educating its citizens

Two-Party System as a Barrier to Democracy

- Woodruff thinks that America's two-party system is tyrannical
 - It moves power from one group to another without consideration of minority views which do not easily reside within one or the other dominant party
 - Wealth and the power of money also keeps the two-party system alive and preserves entrenched power structures and interests

Readiness for Democracy and the Seven Ideas

1. Freedom from Tyranny (and from being a tyrant)
2. Harmony
3. Rule of Law
4. Natural Equality
5. Citizen Wisdom
6. Reasoning Without Knowledge
7. Education

1. Freedom from Tyranny – I

- Freedom from tyranny requires that political leaders are accountable for their actions
- U.S. chief executives are not accountable
 - Executive privilege limits accountability
 - Long-term appointments keep chief executives in power after they have lost the people's trust
 - Chief executives do not have to address the concerns of the opposition (in contrast to a parliamentary system)

1. Freedom from Tyranny – II

- Tyrannical political parties
 - Winner-take-all political system tends to silence minority views
 - Although the U.S. claims to be a representational democracy, the two-party system silences the views of those who do not have enough votes to produce a winning candidate
 - In a two-party system, whoever is not associated with the majority ruling party will not feel as if their views are represented

1. Freedom from Tyranny – III

- Proportional Representation: district elects a number of representatives in proportion to the number of voters supporting each party
 - This produces a multi-party government
 - Power resides in coalitions among several parties
 - Single parties do not maintain power for long

2. Harmony

- "Democracy, when it really works, engages majority and minority elements in a cooperative enterprise." (218)
 - Disharmony occurs when one or another party refuses to cooperate or make concessions
 - Disharmony also occurs through insubstantial political advertisements which are intended to paint misleading caricatures of one's opponent
 - Disharmony may arise from the nature of a two-party system and the geographical dividing of the country into "reds" and "blues"

3. Rule of Law

- Observing the rule of law is essential to a democracy
- Governments or political leaders which do not observe the rule of law are tyrannical
 - They put themselves above the law and in conflict with those who they rule
- Imperial governments do not apply the same rules to those they rule and are seen as tyrants
 - Imperial governments place themselves above the rule of law
 - "Empire leads to exposure, exposure to fear, and fear to defensive moves that sacrifice democratic principles." (222)

4. Natural Equality

- In a democracy, all citizens are politically equal
- In the U.S., wealth creates political inequality
- "Can the U.S. reduce the political advantages of wealth?"
 - Culturally, wealth buys better education, better neighborhoods, better health, and better access
 - Politically, wealth buys access to political leaders and the ability to influence election outcomes
- Why assume the wealthy have gained the right to disproportionately influence politics and culture?

5. Citizen Wisdom

- Citizen wisdom requires an educated populace
- Good political decisions also require an educated electorate
- Woodruff recommends changing tax policy by having a randomly chosen cross section of citizens whose job is to come up with a new, fair tax code
 - Woodruff's suggestion sounds like a Rawlsian veil-of-ignorance project

6. Reasoning Without Knowledge

- In order to reason well when faced with uncertainty, there must be serious and open debate
 - Debate allows multiple views to be considered
 - Debate must be transparent in the most sensitive issues, including war
- Woodruff thinks a proportional representational democracy will increase debate
 - With multiple political parties, discussion would prevail instead of character assassination

7. Education

- Education is more than job training
- Education essential for a democracy includes educating people to be citizens
 - An educated citizen is prepared to critically evaluate what politicians say
 - An educated citizen has knowledge about government, economics, science, and other relevant subjects
 - An educated citizen knows how other societies function in order to better understand one's own
 - An educated citizen does not live in fear but with courage in the face of the unknown and frontiers of human endeavors
 - An educated citizen has an appreciation of cultures and views other than one's own

Are We Ready For Democracy?

- "Are we ready to keep the great dream alive, the dream of government of the people, by the people, and for the people?" (232)