

America the Modern Day Athens

"We do not copy our Ancestors, but are an example to them. It is true we are called a Democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not in the few. " This is the foundation for which democracy is ruled. Without this democracy does not exist. In this essay there will be comparisons of Athenian democracy and our modern day democracy

Greece, in ancient times, was not a united land. There existed many little provinces of control, called city-states. Two examples of the more powerful and lasting city-states were Sparta and Athens. Sparta, whose people lived an austere and militaristic form of life, based its government on the needs of the army which things centered around this.

Athens, another powerful city-state, developed a more balanced life for its citizens. Central to this development was the rise of democracy. Called the "cradle of democracy," Athens developed a direct democracy. Those citizens that were eligible could speak at forums and vote on issues. These people were known as the Council of 500; they were chosen annually. To be elected they had to be at least 25 years of age and a citizen. They directly had a voice. This is why Athens is an example of a direct democracy. A point should be made here that Athens, for all its noble ideas about men being able to govern themselves, excluded most of the people that lived within its cities walls. Women, for example had no say in government. They were subjected to running the homes, raising children, and tending to the needs of their husbands. Slavery, which existed in Athens, also caused a blot on the noble experiment of democracy. Slaves had no vote, no participation in government, and no recourse from a cruel master.

Athenian government relied upon direct democracy to raise taxes, make laws, and gather armed forces when necessary.

The American experiment in democracy differs significantly from the Athenian form of government. America utilizes a representative form of democracy. Because of the huge population, when compared to Athens, a direct democracy is impractical. Americans vote for representatives to the Legislative and Executive branches of government. It is hoped by the citizen that the representatives that are elected protect their constituents interests.

There are, however, some dark spots on our form of government. Like the Athenians, America did not grant slaves the right to vote. It took a Civil War that nearly destroyed our nation before slavery was abolished and that portion of the population could have a say in our government. Additionally, women, who like Athens had no say in elections, were very lately in our history given voting power after a long struggle. The "Suffragettes" finally achieved their goal in the early nineteenth century by winning the right to vote.

Democracy, a noble idea, is based in the belief that people can govern themselves without a monarchy or ruling class. People can choose, and by that power of choice, decide the direction and quality of their lives. Athenian democracy, destroyed before it had time to flourish, planted this notion in mankind. American democracy extended their ideas and has since kept on refining the notion that all men are created equal and should have a voice in their destiny.

