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OF DEMOCRACY



DEMOCRACY'S
UNFULFILLED PROMISE:
RESPONSE TO PAUL CARTLEDGE,
DEMOCRACY: A LIFE

BY
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Democracy's Unfulfilled Promise

Response to Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*

Jennifer Tolbert Roberts

In this remarkable tour de force Professor Cartledge combines a knowledge of history that is both broad and deep with a passionate concern for the welfare of the human race. His magisterial study is most welcome at a time when democracy is under assault in many parts of the globe. Civil liberties and political rights around the world have fallen to their lowest point in over than a decade (Abramowitz 2018). According to a study undertaken by Freedom House, 71 countries suffered declines in civil and political liberties in 2017, marking the twelfth consecutive year of decline in global freedom (Freedom House 2018). Rightist, “populist” parties with no concern for equality or freedom are gaining strength in continental Europe. In Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, President of the National League for Democracy, has sat idly by in the face of the persecution and genocide of the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority. Appallingly, many of the 40.3 million souls who today live in slavery can be found in democratic countries; by far the largest

number of slaves – close to 20,000,000 – live in that purportedly democratic country, India.

Meanwhile, the perils of majoritarian tyranny have been made plain by the recent Brexit campaign in Britain, where in a scenario sensitively described by Prof. Cartledge xenophobic rabble-rousers appealed to the worst in voters to push through a disastrous decision by an insufficiently informed public – and by a minority of the electorate (Cartledge 2016, 316); the United States for its part is in the grip of a tyrannical minority, elected by a similarly small fraction of the citizenry, that has applied itself energetically to the task of eroding democracy whenever possible both at home and abroad.

The reasoning behind the situation in the United States, where I live, is instructive. It is not Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy that explains current circumstances. Rather, the much-revered Founding Fathers, recoiling from what they knew of Renaissance Florence and what they believed about classical Athens, methodically designed the government to squelch any democratic tendencies. Professor Cartledge aptly cites the words of James Madison, who was quick to distinguish the American republics from “the turbulent democracies of ancient Greece and modern Italy,” insisting in *Federalist 14* that

in all very numerous assemblies, of whatever characters composed, passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason. Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”
(Cartledge 2016, 294; Rossiter 1961, 342)

Alexander Hamilton for his part found it “impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the distractions with which they were continually agitated” (Rossiter 1961, 71). It was

John Adams, however, who was the most dedicated to demonstrating the evils of democracy both in general and in Athens, where, he complained, Solon had “put all power into hands the least capable of using it” (C. Adams 1850-56, 4. 479). The problems inherent in democracy, Adams argued, might be obviated by a representative government – but not too representative; for his commitment to government by property-holders was absolute, property being “surely a right of mankind as really as liberty.” Majority rule was unthinkable as it would occasion “the eight or nine millions who have no property...usurping over the rights of the one or two million who have.” No votes for *thetes* in Adams’ universe! “The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God...anarchy and tyranny commence” (C. Adams 1850-56, 6. 9). As Professor Cartledge points out, even the more egalitarian Thomas Jefferson, responsible for the appearance of the “inalienable rights” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence, conceived the last of these rights as “inseparable from the ownership of real property, which – contradictorily, one might have thought – did not exclude property in humans, in which the Virginian Jefferson himself generously indulged” (Cartledge 2016, 295).

And indeed property qualifications were written into law in the new nation across the Atlantic. As a rule, states limited the franchise to property-owning white males, well under 10% of the population. Notions of the primacy of property would play a significant role in the rise of Ronald Reagan and the entire conservative movement in the United States. Responding to genuine problems with skyrocketing property tax assessments in California, lobbyist Howard Jarvis took the ball of discontent and ran with it, arguing that “The most important thing in this country is not the school system, nor the police department, nor the fire department. The right to preserve, the right to have property in

this country, the right to have a home in this country, that's important." The result of his agitation was the passing first of California's 1978 Proposition 13 placing limits on the taxation of property, then tax cutting referenda in numerous other states, and overall a burgeoning anti-big government movement that still thrives in the U. S. today. (Haberman 2016; cited in Taylor 2019, 186).

The founders devised another curb on the masses in the form of a Senate, Madison (most likely) arguing in *Federalist 63* for a Senate to protect the populace when "stimulated by some irregular passion, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men," they "may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn"; what wretched suffering, the author asks, would not the Athenians have escaped "if their government had contained so provident a safeguard against the tyranny of their own passions?" (Rossiter 1961, 384)

Although proportional representation was written into the House of Representatives, the composition of that Senate was a sticking point, for the prospect of a similar proportionality awakened alarm in framers from the smaller states. The Virginia plan called for a bicameral legislature with each chamber represented proportionally to population. The New Jersey Plan, on the other hand, entailed legislature in a single chamber that would function on the basis of one vote per state, as had been the case with the Articles of Confederation. Neither plan was adopted; the current legislative system of the United States, with all states having equal representation in the Senate but each state enjoying proportional representation in the House of Representatives, is the product of what is known as the Connecticut Compromise.

Disagreement also marked the means of selecting a chief executive. Options considered were selection by Congress or a group thereof, chosen by lot; by the governors or legislatures of

the states; or direct election by the populace. The existing system, the Electoral College, entailed another compromise between the interests of larger and smaller states: each state would receive proportional representation – plus one Elector for each senator; in other words, proportional representation plus two. Beginning in 1872 it became the practice for all the Electors to cast their ballots for the candidate who carried their state; today only Maine and Nebraska depart from this rule. It is thus quite possible for a candidate to become President without winning the popular vote, as has been the case in five presidential elections.

Representation in the U. S. Senate, where Wyoming with its 2019 population of 573,720 has the same number of senators as California with its 39,776,830, is now grossly disproportional, granting mammoth powers to voters in the least populous states, and the Electoral College system has opened the door to ludicrous “victories” at the presidential level, as in the 2016 election when Hillary Clinton, though receiving some 2,864,974 more votes than Donald Trump, was “defeated.” The diminution of minority votes by gerrymandering and voter suppression is staggering. In the nearly 230 years since the first census was taken in 1790, no question regarding citizenship has ever been asked, but the government has recently sought to introduce one. Why? As I was composing this response, news broke of a sensational discovery on the hard drive of late expert cartographer and gerrymanderer extraordinaire Thomas Hofeller: a citizenship question, Hofeller argued, would be required to gather the data that would make possible a redistricting “advantageous to Republicans and non-Hispanic whites.” Hofeller’s “digital fingerprints” are plainly visible on the Justice Department’s attempt to add the question (Wines 2019; Stohr and Dolmetsch 2019).

Facilitated by the 2013 Supreme Court decision *Shelby County v. Holder*, moreover, which declared two provisions in the historic 1965 Voting Rights Act to be unconstitutional, impossible

standards for voting have significantly shrunk the number of citizens eligible to vote. In North Dakota, a new voter identification law has diminished the voting power of Native Americans; in Georgia and Wisconsin, thousands of African-Americans have found themselves disqualified. And of course the disfranchisement of felons even after release perfectly encapsulates the reverse engineering that has been deployed (the same reverse engineering that underfunded African-American schools and then posed literacy tests for voting): more African-Americans are arrested for the same crimes than whites, and people with felony convictions represent about 8% of the general population but some 33% of African-Americans (Flurry, 2017). Selective closing of polls has targeted African-Americans with surgical precision, and new voting requirements rationalized by the myth of voter fraud have, one might say, compounded the felony. In the 2004 presidential election, a blood-curdling flyer that purportedly originated from the “Milwaukee Black Voters League” was distributed in African-American sections of the city to spread misinformation:

SOME WARNINGS FOR ELECTION TIME

IF YOU’VE ALREADY VOTED IN ANY ELECTION THIS YEAR
YOU CAN’T VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

IF YOU [OR ANYBODY IN YOUR FAMILY] HAVE EVER BEEN
FOUND GUILTY OF ANYTHING, EVEN A TRAFFIC VIOLATION,
YOU CAN’T VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

... IF YOU VIOLATE ANY OF THESE LAWS YOU CAN GET TEN
YEARS IN PRISON AND YOUR CHILDREN WILL BE TAKEN
AWAY FROM YOU (Wang 2012).

And none of this takes into consideration way in which the interference of foreign powers in the election process has entailed a calculated exploitation of racial conflict. Masterminded by Vladimir Putin and implemented by his ally Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, owner of the Internet Research Agency based in St. Petersburg, the Russian campaign against American democracy specifically sought to exploit the racial tensions that have been the legacy of slavery. Of 81 Facebook pages created by the Internet Research Agency known to the Senate, 30 targeted African-American audiences; over time these pages racked up some 1.2 million followers (Shane and Frenkel 2018). The material put out by the Russians on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube was calculated to inflame justifiable rage about rates of poverty and incarceration among African-Americans, as well as police brutality directed towards them, in order to divert their focus from traditional political institutions (Swaine 2018). Highlighting racial injustice in America was, of course, nothing new for Russia. Predictably, the Soviet Press pounced on the violence in Little Rock, Arkansas following the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that struck down school segregation as unconstitutional, pointing out that people who “dream of nooses and dynamite...who throw rocks at defenseless Negro children – these gentlemen have the audacity to talk about ‘democracy’ and speak as supporters of freedom” (“This Must Be Said,” *Current Digest of the Russian Press* 1957, 25; Anderson 2018, 18). What was new in the 2016 election was the targets of the Russian efforts: not the world public but the African-American community in the United States.

The slavery of which racial tension in the United States is the legacy played a large role in the shaping of the Electoral College (as well as the House of Representatives). Historians have been prone to believe the support of slavery was in fact the purpose of the College’s creation. Regardless of intent, disproportionate voting

power ended up in southern hands, for in the face of southern distress about determining proportionality in terms of free people only, the framers enshrined into law the infamous Three-Fifths Compromise that counted each slave as three fifths of a human being. We may comfortably dismiss any notion that the slaveholders--among whom I have many ancestors--voted in the interests both of themselves and their human “real estate.” By the early nineteenth century, with the evident success of the American experiment, the notion of democracy no longer occasioned as much alarm. Thomas Jefferson felt comfortable proclaiming himself a democrat. The Democratic Party was probably founded around 1828 by supporters of President Andrew Jackson. *Democracy* came in time to be a “virtue word,” and everybody who lacked the opportunity to rule alone or as part of a secure oligarchy seemed to want some.

Professor Cartledge has done a superb job here of laying out the differences between the illiberal democracies of Greece and the liberal democracies of the modern world. In his 2009 *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice (Key Themes in Ancient History)* (Cartledge, 2009), he has also zeroed in expertly on the thinking responsible for one of the most dramatic instances of democratic illiberality, the execution of Socrates. One thing ancient and modern democracies share, however, is their dependence on exclusionary principles. Just as capitalism flourishes on the backs of millions of workers who take home only a smidgen of what corporate executives do, so democracy is shored up by the presence of out-groups. These groups – women, people of color – have played a role in the evolution of democracy in the modern world quite similar to that played by women and slaves in the ancient.

I do not refer here to the logistical support services provided by wives and various blue- and pink-collar workers that enable men to function as captains of industry and government, important as this is, but rather to the psychological support rendered to the

entire edifice by the knowledge that the perquisites of the system are not universally shared. It has been argued that the Athenian economy was dependent on slavery. I'm not sure. But what the democracy did depend on was the existence of out-groups against which the body of voters and office-holders could define itself, and that enabled the aristocracy to accept the diminution of its power since, after all, its members still belonged to the elite, newly defined as an elite of male citizens. A voter, furthermore, was to a considerable degree defined by what he was not. He was not a woman. He was not a slave. He was not a foreigner. He was a full-fledged member of a club surrounded by a majority that was denied access to the clubhouse: women, slaves, non-Athenians.

After the Persian Wars, moreover, the binary opposition Greek/non-Greek became immensely important in the Hellenic consciousness (Hall, 1989). In his tragedy about the Battle of Salamis in 480, *The Persians*, the Athenian playwright Aeschylus made a point of having Xerxes' mother remind the chorus that even should the expedition against Greece fail, Xerxes will continue in power as before, for he is not accountable to the state for his actions: he is not *hyp euthynos polei* (213). The choice of language underlines the supreme unAthenianness of the phenomenon, for at Athens all outgoing officials were subject to exit hearings known as *euthynai*. Within thirty days of laying down their offices, all Athenian office-holders were required to submit their records for audit, and any citizen who wished was invited to lodge a grievance. Only when this scrutiny and any prosecutions arising from it had been completed was it legal for a man to set out on a journey, transfer his property to another, or make a votive offering to a god. The contrast with Xerxes' absolute power could not be more conspicuous.

Some of the contrasts Aeschylus takes pains to draw in the play oppose Persians to all Greeks, not merely Athenians. Who, Xerxes' mother asks the chorus of Persian elders, is master over these

Greeks? “They are the slaves or subjects of no man,” comes the reply (242). The exchange is calculated to underline the contrast between the Greeks, who are free, and the residents of Persia, all regarded as slaves of the king. The playwright underlines the Persians’ luxury, softness, and downright effeminacy. Variants of the adjective *habros* – soft, luxurious, delicate – pop up frequently in the play in one form or another. Xerxes and the Persian elders who make up the chorus are described as wearing *peploi*, a characteristic female garment associated with women and non-Greeks – particularly non-Greeks who are being assimilated to women. The highly emotional wailing in which Xerxes indulges after his defeat would have been considered distinctly demeaning to a man in Greece, where mourning was women’s work. Xerxes himself was accused by his fellow Persians of *anandria*, cowardice and (literally) unmanliness (755).

Despite his enormous interest in and respect for the various peoples of the known world, the historian Herodotus did much to entrench in the Greek mind the notion of a binary opposition between Greeks and Persians or *barbaroi*, as the Greeks called them: people whose speech sounded to them like bar, bar, bar. In his *Histories* Herodotus deploys an imaginative recreation of a conversation between two Greeks and the “barbarian” commander Hydarnes to highlight the opposition of Greek freedom to Persian enslavement. Advised to defect to Persia on the promise of a fine reward from Xerxes, the Spartans reply:

Your advice to us, Hydarnes, is one-sided; half of it is based on knowledge, but the other half on ignorance. You know very well what it is to be a slave, but having never tasted freedom, you do not know whether it is sweet or not. Believe me, if you should get a taste of it, you would advise us to fight for it not with spears but with axes (7. 135. 3).

The mention of Sparta may seem incongruous where democracy is under discussion, but in fact it is very apt. For as Plato's relative Critias was said to have observed, nowhere was a free man more free or a slave more enslaved than in Sparta. Though hardly democratic with its two royal houses, its five ephors (overseers, largely of the kings), and its *gerousia* (Council of Elders), Sparta certainly echoed democracies in its division of the populace into purportedly equal citizens and state slaves, the helots, who engaged in food production so that Spartan men could devote themselves to military preparation on a full time basis. The story that the legendary lawgiver Lycurgus had once upon a time divided the land into nine thousand equal plots and allotted one to each Spartan male undergirded the myth that all citizens were economically equal. Though in fact some allotments were more fertile than others, an aggressive ideology of equality discouraged richer Spartans from doing anything to call attention to their situation; ostentation was practically unheard of, and wealth was far more likely to be concealed than paraded. The brutality of helotage was extreme; every year the ephors declared war on the helots so that they could be murdered without their killers incurring civil or religious liability. But the notion of dividing the populace into insiders and outsiders echoed the ideology of democracies: the presence of slaves served not only to highlight the privileges of the citizenry but to unify the citizen body.

An analogous situation prevailed in the new American nation and has persisted, though it has morphed into a different form, to this day. In 1832, Thomas Dew, president of the College of William and Mary, maintained that it was precisely in the slaveholding states of antiquity that "the spirit of liberty glowed with most intensity" and attributed the same dynamic to slavery in the southern states, where, he suggested, "The menial and low offices being all performed by blacks, there is at once taken away the greatest cause of distinction and separation of the ranks of

society.... Color alone is here the badge of distinction, the true mark of aristocracy, and all who are white are equal in spite of the variety of occupation” (Dew 1832). Jefferson Davis, future president of the Confederacy, summed up the southern slaveholders’ conviction that only slavery made equality possible when he wrote that “White men have an equality resulting from a presence of a lower caste, which cannot exist were white men to fill the position here occupied by the servile race” (Coates 2017, 67).

Orlando Patterson in his 1991 book *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* underlined the parallel with Athens: it was to slavery, he wrote, that the Athenians owed their ability to see themselves as united in a shared enterprise, as “kinsmen, kith and kin against a world of unfree barbarians” (Patterson 1991, 99). Admirable – indeed, amazing – as it was in contrast to the oligarchy it superseded and the oligarchies that persisted elsewhere in Greece concurrently, the Athenian democracy was conceived in exclusion, as I argued 25 years ago in the book on which Professor Cartledge has been kind enough to lavish praise in his first chapter (Cartledge 2016, 33-34). The exclusion entailed a wide variety of out-groups that were often assimilated to one another: women, slaves, non-Greeks, animals, children, although of course some children would grow up to be group members. Aeschylus in the *Persians* identified slavishness and femaleness as the defining characteristics of “barbarians.” I mention animals not because their inclusion in the voting body is on the table anywhere but because Greeks often grouped them with women, slaves, and barbarians. Despite his inclusion of women in the government of the ideal state sketched out in *The Republic*, Plato’s dialogues frequently class women with slaves, children and animals. A chaotic government like democracy, he depicts Socrates as saying, is like a fancy cloak embroidered with many different colors – the sort of thing that would appeal to women and children (*Republic* 557c). Slaves in a

democracy, Socrates complains, are just as free as their owners, and an alarming freedom and equality characterizes the relation of the sexes. Even the animals are freer in a democracy: donkeys and horses saunter down the road at will, bumping into anyone who declines to yield to them. Slaves, women, animals all behave with license under democracy (563b-c; Roberts 1995). In Plato's *Timaeus* we read that men who have lived their lives badly can expect to be reincarnated as women. If they still persist in wickedness, they will next return as animals (*Timaeus* 42b-c). Aristotle presented a somewhat different construct in the *Politics* when he identified three forms of rule: free over slave, male over female, adult over child (1260a).

In his 1993 article on Greek slavery, Professor Cartledge has written at length and in depth about the centrality of slavery to Athenian democracy, not simply in terms of its contribution to the economy but with respect to the Athenian democracy's very conception of itself: an "odd mixture," he writes, "of maximum liberty for adult male citizens combined with maximum servitude for tortured and whipped slaves." And not in Athens alone. Citing Moses Finley's famous observation that "One aspect of Greek history, in short, is the advance hand in hand, of freedom and slavery," he states his preference for the formulation of Harvard professor Nathan Huggins: slavery and freedom, white and black, are joined at the hip. Although, Professor Cartledge concludes, "freedom and slavery may seem - or be made to seem for ideological purposes - polar opposites, in actual historical fact they have been mutually interdependent, both in Classical Greece and in the modern United States" (Cartledge 1993, 176, with n. 38).

As we have learned from the ancients, mention of slaves must be complemented by mention of women. We will leave for now issues regarding children and animals, although not without observing that the enemies of Athens (and, by extension, of civilization) portrayed in defeat on the Parthenon include most

prominently Amazons and the wild half-man, half-horse Centaurs. In Professor Cartledge's construct, Greek slavery not only inflicted vile harm on the slaves but "also warped and poisoned the outlook of free Greek citizen men towards not just slaves but also free women (including their own wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters)" (Cartledge 1993, 177). Other paradigms, however, have also been put forward. In 1944 the prominent Ukrainian-American psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg argued that it was men's discovery that they could subjugate women that led to a concept of mastery prompting the phenomenon of enslavement (Zilboorg 1944). More recently historian Gerda Lerner has maintained that "The oppression of women antedates slavery and makes it possible." In order to make those they have subjugated by force into slaves, she suggested, "men must have known that such a designation would indeed work. We know that mental constructs usually derive from some model in reality and consist of a new ordering of past experience. That experience, which was available to men prior to the invention of slavery, was the subordination of women of their own group" (Lerner 1986, 77). Compare the remarks of the American slaveholder George Fitzhugh in *Sociology for the South*, published in 1854 and the first book to contain the word "sociology" in its title: "Marriage is too much like slavery not to be involved in its fate." (Wish 1960, 205)

In the course of very generous observations on my book *Athens on Trial: The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Roberts 1994) Professor Cartledge has argued that the exclusion of women from the political process in Athens was unremarkable, given "that almost no Greek male conceded that they possessed the natural potential for full and equal political empowerment" and has suggested that before we cast blame on the Greeks "we must recall that the total political exclusion of women was also the practice almost everywhere in the world right down to the latter half of the twentieth century" (Cartledge 2016, 33-34). I think, though, that in

a discussion of the exclusionary history of democracy this issue is worth revisiting. Arguments that did not persuade Professor Cartledge in 1994 may not persuade him now, but perhaps I can put forward some new ammunition in support of my suggestion that this exclusion carries considerable significance.

In Athens, women were not merely excluded from the political process but barred from every public sphere (except, as Professor Cartledge has reminded me in conversation, that of religion), encouraged to remain indoors at home wherever possible while their husbands formed the important bonds of life – social, civic, sexual – with other men. It was the beautiful male body that was glorified in both highbrow and popular culture, not, as today, the beautiful female body. While Athens is hardly the only democracy to have prohibited women from voting, serving on juries, or holding political office – as recently as the 1960s women were barred from jury service in three states in the United States – it was conspicuous for the precedence it gave to ties among men.

Already in 1874 the Irish polymath John Pentland Mahaffy, graduate of Trinity College, Dublin where Professor Cartledge has taught, commented on the consequences of the advent of democracy at Athens, observing that

[the] result of this equality upon the position of woman is obvious... A common man, with an actual vote, would become of more importance than an Alcmaeonid lady, who might possibly of old have swayed her ruling husband; and so with the development of political interests, gradually absorbing all the life of every Athenian, there came, in that deeply selfish society, a gradual lowering in the scale of all such elements as possessed no political power. Old age and weaker sex were pushed aside to make way for the politician--the man of action--the man who carried arms, and exercised civic rights (Mahaffy 1874, 137).

Almost exactly a hundred years later feminist historian Sarah Pomeroy would express very similar ideas:

after the class stratification that separated individual men according to such criteria as noble descent and wealth was eliminated, the ensuing ideal of equality among male citizens was intolerable. The will to dominate was such that they then had to separate themselves as a group and claim to be superior to all non-members: foreigners, slaves, and women (Pomeroy 1975, 78).

The suggestion that this phenomenon is not limited to Athens appears in the work of classicist Eva Keuls, one of the fiercest champions of the notion that women were denigrated there. Athens, Keuls wrote, provides “a kind of concave mirror in which we can see our own foibles and institutions magnified and distorted” (Keuls 1985, 12). Similarly Marilyn Arthur’s 1984 article in which the author maintained that “the democracies of ancient Greece secured liberty for all its [sic] citizens by inventing a system of private property which required women to legitimate it and slaves to work it” was entitled “Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude to Women” (Arthur 1984, 36).

Over half a century ago the British Marxist philosopher and classical scholar George Thomson identified the connection between the subjugation of women and the foundation of Athenian democracy in his *Aeschylus and Athens* (Thomson 1941, then 1968). The climax of Aeschylus’s 458 trilogy *The Oresteia* is portentous for the establishment of the polis, ending as it does in the taming of the bloodthirsty snake-haired Furies – the embodiment of female physicality and emotionality – who seek vengeance for Orestes’ murder of his mother, and the acquittal of Orestes for that murder: only the father, claims Apollo, is the true parent, while the mother merely babysits the embryo until it is ready to be born (and Athena, sprung from the head of her father

Zeus, chimes in that she has done just fine without a mother). As an archaic tribal system yields to the new order of the polis, Thomson argued, the protection and transmission of private property would be essential; “if,” he wrote,

we ask why the dramatist has made the outcome of the trial turn on the social relations of the sexes, the answer is that he regarded the subordination of women, quite correctly, as an indispensable condition of democracy. Just as Aristophanes and Plato perceived that the abolition of private property would involve the emancipation of women, so Aeschylus perceived that the subjection of women was a necessary consequence of the development of private property.” (Thomson 1968, 269)

A generation later American classicist Froma Zeitlin offered a detailed critique of the way in which the trilogy traces a progression from the matriarchy of the unnatural husband-slaying Clytemnestra (who assumes the traditional male roles of ruler and taker of life) to the patriarchy established with the resolution of Orestes’ dilemma: he is acquitted via the new institution of the masculine democracy, where power is relocated in a system of male-staffed courts (Zeitlin 1978).

In the *Oresteia*, the legal system of the male democracy now supersedes the law of the family, associated with the female, whose ultimate contribution to the community, their fertility, is now denied. Male reason dethrones female emotion. In the words of feminist theorist Nancy Hartsock, the Furies

appear as elements of the archaic “old religion,”... primitive, lawless, regressive, and tied to the forces of earth and nature, while the male, “bright Apollo,” is seen as leading toward the future – law abiding, orderly, and by implication part of the world of reason. Because of the danger the female presents to the male world, the plays can be read as a statement of the importance fifth-century Athenians gave to domesticating the forces of

disorder. Failing this domestication, they feared, the male community could not survive (Hartssock 1985, 192).

The belief that the social order necessarily posited the subjugation of women persisted, along with a connection between such subjugation with slavery and democracy. Slaveholders in the antebellum south of the United States were alarmed by the number of women (and champions of women's rights) among abolitionists; recall the remarks of George Fitzhugh on the natural bond between marriage and slavery. Throughout history, Fitzhugh believed, the organization of society had been a patriarchal structure predicated on subordinate females and servile labor. Today, the nexus has taken a slightly different form and now ties together capitalist democracy with discrimination against women and people of color. In 2007 Polity Press published *Contract and Domination*, a work that brought together two important scholars, political scientist Carole Pateman and my City University of New York colleague philosopher Charles Mills. Pateman had published an epoch-making book in 1988, *The Sexual Contract*, followed immediately by *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* in 1989; in 1997 Mills had published a compelling book that traces the same phenomenon in racial terms, *The Racial Contract* (Pateman and Mills 2007; Pateman 1988; Mills 1997). The social contract theory that had come into being in early modern Europe and has continued into modern times, both authors have argued, can better be understood as a compact by which white men came together to ensure the domination of women and people of color. A fraternal contract among free white males, the social contract that so influenced America's founders, Mills reminds us, came into being at a particular time in history: "the golden age of contract theory (1650 to 1800) overlapped with the growth of a European capitalism whose development was stimulated by the voyages of exploration that increasingly gave the contract a *racial*

subtext. The evolution of the modern version of the contract... with its proclamations of the equal rights, autonomy, and freedom of all men, thus took place simultaneously with the massacre, expropriation, and subjection to hereditary slavery of men at least apparently human” (Mills 1997, 63-64). In 1776 that dedicated contractarian John Adams expressed horror that the contagion of the American revolution had prompted rebelliousness in all quarters: that children and apprentices had become disobedient, schools grown turbulent, “that Indians slighted their guardians, and negroes grew insolent to their masters” – and worse still, that he has heard from his wife the redoubtable Abigail Smith Adams that “another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented”: the tribe of females. “Depend on it,” he cautioned her, “we know better than to repeal our masculine systems....” (J. Adams 1776; J. Adams and A. Adams 2001) It is certain in theory, he wrote to the perilously egalitarian Massachusetts judge James Sullivan,

that the only moral foundation of government is the consent of the people, but to what an extent shall we carry this principle? Shall we say, that every individual of the community, old and young, male and female, as well as rich and poor, must consent, expressly to every act of legislation?... [Women’s] delicacy renders them unfit for practice and experience, in the great business of life, and the hardy enterprises of war, as well as the arduous cares of state.” (J. Adams 1776; C. Adams 1850-56).

Both in reputation and reality, moreover, democracy has been vitiated by its intimate relationship with a pernicious unbridled capitalism that is eating away at the fiber of the presumed “community” – a situation compounded by the lower wages accorded to women and the lower incomes of people of color. Irrespective of race and gender, a burgeoning economic inequality

is steadily undermining the fabric of the state. As of 2017, eight men possessed the same amount of wealth as the 3.6 billion people who comprise the poorest half of the human race; six of these men lived in the ostensibly egalitarian United States. (Oxfam International, 2017). The operative word, of course, is “ostensibly.” Principles of equality abstracted from real life fail to address the disabilities under which years of injustice have placed so many of its purportedly equal citizens who continue to be “othered” in a variety of ways too numerous to detail here. I had the privilege of rereading Professor Cartledge’s book this year in tandem with activist Astra Taylor’s meticulously researched *Democracy May Not Exist, But We’ll Miss It When It’s Gone*. “If we believe that democracy should serve all of society,” she writes, “how can we call ourselves democratic when workers juggle multiple jobs as record-breaking profits flow to owners and investors? When millions of people, disproportionately poor and people of color, are locked behind bars? When access to learning and lifesaving treatments are denied to those who can’t pay?” (Taylor 2019, 9). As Franklin Roosevelt observed, “Necessitous men are not free men.” In the United States, African-American families hold about \$5.04 for every \$100 in white family wealth (Badger 2017; Thompson 2018). As of 2014, a quarter of all Native Americans and Alaska natives were living in poverty (Krogstad 2014), and women in the United States are three times as likely as men to fall below the poverty line.

These are dark days for democracy. Of course, as Professor Cartledge has reminded us, there are pockets of hope. Developments such as the robust citizen participation in the redrafting of the national constitution in Iceland that he cites (Cartledge 2016, 310) are immensely heartening. Yet like Professor Cartledge I remain deeply concerned. Under attack from both right and left, democracy needs to reassess how it can best earn the confidence of the diverse electorate by serving the needs of all. It

is likely that this will entail some degree of uncoupling itself from capitalism. In contemplating what democracy has and had not achieved in the world, Professor Cartledge's book has performed an immensely important service.

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