

TWO VIEWS OF DEMOCRACY — WHAT IS YOURS?

THIN DEMOCRACY

LIVING DEMOCRACY

What is it?

Democracy is a *set system*: elected government plus a market economy, and we're lucky to live in a society with both. We may have to keep cleaning it up around the edges, but our democracy is basically complete – it's the culmination of human history.

Living Democracy is a *set of system-qualities* that apply throughout a culture and shape its daily life. Living Democracy is dynamic; its values of inclusion, fairness, and mutual accountability infuse not only political life but economic and cultural life as well. Living Democracy is always evolving; it's never finished.

How does it work?

The free market, along with better-qualified government and corporate executives and experts, determine what happens. The job of citizens is to vote, work, and shop. The market is driven by the rule of highest return to shareholders -- which of course concentrates wealth and power to some extent. This concentrated power inevitably influences the political process, but there's no way to avoid it without tampering with the market, killing its efficiencies and our way of life.

Citizens infuse their voices – by voting and direct participation -- into decision making. They set rules to ensure wealth is continually circulating and to keep its influence out of politics. Viewing the market as a tool not absolute law, citizens through their polities decide what should be a market commodity and what is essential to life and therefore a right of citizenship. They create “values boundaries” that guide the market -- from environmental protections to anti-trust laws -- make conscious purchasing choices that foster healthy communities.

Who gets involved?

Only officials and celebrities have public lives. Citizens choose them to carry the responsibility.

All citizens have public lives. As buyers, savers, investors, voters, advocates, clients, students, employers, workers, and members of social-benefit organizations, our actions (*conscious or not*) create the quality of our communities and the wider world.

What's required for effectiveness?

Public life is ugly and alienating. No special learning is needed, just thick skins and big egos! (Plus access to big bucks.)

Democracy is a learned art. As we acquire the “arts of democracy” -- active listening, creative conflict, negotiation, mediation, mentoring, and other relational skills – we reap the joy of effectively shaping the world we want.

What motivates human beings to engage?

Self-defense. Getting involved in public affairs is a necessary evil to protect our private lives and pursue their interests. It is the burden a free people must bear to “earn” the protection of our liberties.

Human beings realize our individual well-being depends on healthy communities and that only in public life can we develop certain gifts and fulfill deep needs: to connect with others in common purpose, to make a difference, to express our values and to fully respect ourselves. Engagement is essential to the good life.