

Daring Democracy
Igniting Power, Meaning, and Connection for the America We Want
by Frances Moore Lappé & Adam Eichen, Beacon Press
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“Show people that what they want is possible and they will act. This book, perhaps better than any other, shows Americans that the democracy they want is possible. Now we must act.”
—Lawrence Lessig, Professor of Law and Leadership at Harvard Law School

Part I Rethink the Crisis

Daring Democracy opens with a simple claim: It’s not the magnitude of a challenge that crushes the human spirit. It’s feeling useless that does us in; for humans evolved as “do-ers.” But to throw ourselves into a challenge as mighty as building democracy itself requires at least three conditions: We must believe that meeting the challenge is *essential*—that our core values, including even our survival, are at stake; that success is at least *possible*, and that there’s a rewarding *place for us* in the struggle. On each, *Daring Democracy* offers compelling evidence that indeed real democracy and the movement to realize it meet these three requirements for humans to leap into action.

To choose a way forward, we must also grasp how we got here, a place virtually none of us would actively choose. After all, most Americans across our supposed political divides believe correctly that those we elect to represent us all instead serve only a few. We’ve arrived at this dangerous spot because of unquestioned assumptions that rob citizens of power, ranging from the notion of an infallible “magical market” to the dim view of democracy itself as somehow beyond human reach. Such ideas create a “spiral of powerlessness” ending up in specific conditions, including the concentration of power, shown throughout history to elicit the worst in us. But, we insist, there’s nothing inevitable about this predicament.

Part II Expose the Roots

Few Americans realize that the ideas robbing us of power didn’t arise from thin air. They have instead been actively nurtured over more than four decades by a well-orchestrated campaign led by a handful of billionaire families. This Anti-Democracy Movement has spread deep distrust of government along with the myth that corporations’ unfettered drive to bring highest return to the already wealthy fosters prosperity for all. We reveal how the Anti-Democracy Movement manipulates Americans’ mindset behind the scenes—funding educational programs, media, and a vast non-party political network that have moved the Republican Party rapidly toward more extreme, regressive positions. We also expose this Movement’s many effective, often-hidden tactics to “rig the rules,” undermining citizens’ right to have our voices heard by unleashing private wealth’s dominance over our electoral process and selectively suppressing the vote.

Part III Create Solutions Together

Most of *Daring Democracy*, however, brings to life the underreported, emerging movement for democracy unlike any our nation has experienced. In this “movement of movements,” citizens from all walks of life—whose concerns span the full array of “issues”—are creating a canopy of hope. To save the democracy we thought we had, they show us that we must take democracy to where it’s never been. Through stories of regular citizens stepping up to enact reforms essential to democracy, we capture the thrill of democracy’s power to meet our most basic human needs for personal agency, meaning, and connection. We argue therefore that democracy is not a “you should” but a daring and noble undertaking calling each of us. We conclude that in this time of extreme peril for democracy, the opposite of evil is no longer goodness. It is courage, and the rising Democracy Movement’s edgy strategies are powerful precisely because they enable millions of regular Americans to become part of something big, historic, and courageous.

“Now, more than ever, to save our democracy, every American needs to read Daring Democracy.”
—Ann Ravel, New America Fellow and former chair of the Federal Election Commission