



The Life and Death of Democracy

By John Keane

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The Life and Death of Democracy By John Keane

From Plato to de Tocqueville to Fukuyama? an epic history of the governing philosophy that has defined Western history.

In the grand tradition of Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* comes this provocative history of world democracy, which begins with the ancient Myceans and ends in our fractious present. Overturning long-cherished notions, John Keane poses challenging questions: Did democracy actually begin in ancient Greece or earlier in Mesopotamia? Do the American and British systems actually live up to their democratic ideals? Why is there a bad moon rising over the world's democracies? Written by a leading political theorist, this book presents readers with a counterintuitive look at democracy's past, present, and future, which Keane argues lies not in the West but in the turbulent democracies of the East, especially in India. Avoiding the triumphalism of global democracy's most boisterous pundits, Keane cautions that democracy today is more fragile than ever and that, unless major corrective measures are taken, we may be sleepwalking our way into even deeper trouble.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Looking beyond the Athens-Runnymede-Philadelphia axis, political scholar Keane (*Tom Paine*) traces democracy's roots back to Sumeria and follows its tendrils as far afield as Pitcairn Island and Papua New Guinea. (A revelatory chapter on India's banyan democracy suggests that democracy's center of gravity has shifted decisively eastward.) Less interested in theory than actuality, he gives Locke, Madison and their ilk short shrift to make room for engrossing profiles of obscure politicians and reformers—medieval Spain's *cortes* (parliaments); José Batlle y Ordóñez, president of Uruguay in the early 20th century; the Australian progressives who pioneered proportional representation and women's suffrage—whose efforts built democracy from the ground up. Democracy thus emerges as less a set of fixed principles than a culture and mindset—pragmatic, antiauthoritarian, accepting of change and contingency and the ability of ordinary people to shape them. Keane's lack of theoretical rigor sometimes tells; his vision of a developing monitory democracy, characterized by a hypervigilant civil society, all-seeing media and viral politics seems more faddish than focused. But his study's broad sweep, wealth of detailed knowledge, shrewd insights and fluent, lively prose make it a must-read for scholars and citizens alike. Photos. (Aug.)

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Review

“Starred Review. Traces democracy's roots back to Sumeria and follows its tendrils as far afield as Pitcairn Island and Papua New Guinea....engrossing profiles of obscure politicians and reformers...his study's broad sweep, wealth of detailed knowledge, shrewd insights and fluent, lively prose make it a must-read for scholars and citizens alike.” (Publishers Weekly)

About the Author

John Keane, a professor of politics at the University of Westminster and the director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, is the author of many books, including the widely translated *The Media and Democracy*. He lives in London.

Users Review

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