

The Development of Democracy in Ancient Athens, Greece

CLASS NOTES 12/17



I. What is a Democracy?



- ▶ **A Democracy** is a form of government where the power to govern & make laws is in the hands of the citizens. People Vote on issues and the majority wins!
- ▶ **A Direct Democracy** will develop in Athens. A direct democracy is a government where the people participate DIRECTLY in the making of laws and governing the country, not through representatives – In the US we have a Republic where you vote for representatives.
 - ▶ Ex: The council of 500. In Athens EVERY male citizen's name was put into a drawing (like a lottery). If your name was chosen – YOU were a council member for ONE YEAR.

A. What caused Democracy to develop in ancient Athens, Greece?

The Simple Answer:

Attitude!



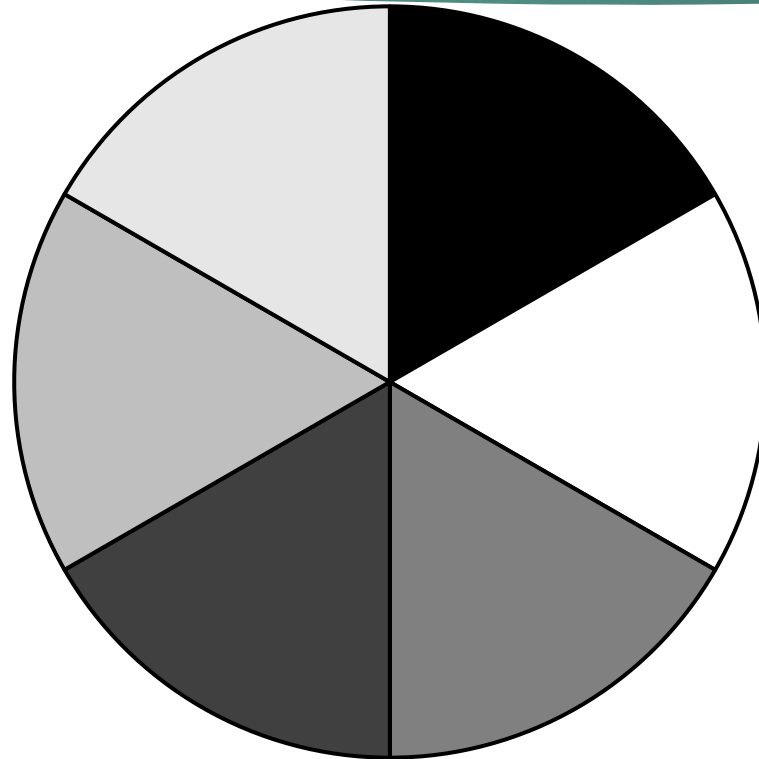
An essential part of any democracy is the “democratic attitude.”

What is the Democratic Attitude?

- This attitude means the **people get involved** because they believe that they can **make a difference!**
- The **people have control** over their own lives, they have rights, and that government needs to respect those rights or else face the anger of the people and be replaced (remember our Declaration of Independence).
- **BUT having power** to control your own destiny means making mistakes and so **you need RESPONSIBILITY!**

II. The Ingredients for Democracy ~508 B.C.

How did the democratic attitude develop in Athens?



■ Geography

■ Mythology

■ Olympic Games

■ Tyranny

■ Free Economy

■ Leadership

A. Geography



- ▶ **Very Mountainous**: this makes political unity (becoming one country) very difficult, so Greece becomes a collection of independent city-states.
- ▶ **Being a Peninsula** and having access to the Sea: The Greeks become great seafarers and shipbuilders (ex: The Trireme – superior naval warship).
 - ▶ Being a Peninsula & Very Mountainous = Independent & wealthy people
 - ▶ Trade = \$\$ (prosperity) & cultural diffusion = power and new ideas.
- ▶ Many “commoners” become prosperous, they become more independent and independence means you will want a say in rules that will affect your life (democracy).

B. Mythology



Legendary **heroes** such as Achilles and Hercules help to **influence every Greek to be “all they can be!”** Heroes were honored, fame and glory was something that all Greeks valued.

- ▶ Stories were full of **lessons about making good and bad decisions.** These **stories taught responsibility** (Remember King Midas in The Golden Touch).

Connection to Democracy? = When a person has the “democratic attitude” they understand that **freedom comes with responsibility.** (The Pursuit of Happiness does not mean you can do anything you want, making poor choices with your freedom will cause that freedom to be taken away.)

C. The Olympic Games



- ▶ Beginning in 776 B.C. only the aristocrats could compete. By 500's B.C. anyone can compete → a "potter" vs. a "noble"
- ▶ The Olympics were a civilized way of gaining fame and being a hero.
- ▶ promoted a spirit of competition where **winning was based on skill and ability**.
 - ▶ **A Meritocracy**: where leaders arose because of their skill and ability, not because of birth.

Connection to Democracy: this emphasis not on a person's noble birth but on their skill and ability (meritocracy) gives people an attitude that they are worth something, that they matter, = the democratic attitude.

D. Tyranny



- ▶ Tyranny is the **seizing of power by force** and **keeping that power by force**.
- ▶ **How did Tyranny help the development of Democracy?**
 - ▶ Tyranny has an equalizing effect (makes everyone equal b/c all are treated equally bad – without rights!) = **Equally miserable!**
 - ▶ Under the rule of a single family (like Peisistratus') all non-family – rich and poor – aristocrat and commoner – found themselves in similar circumstances.
 - ▶ Now the **Aristocrats and commoners would unite to overthrow tyranny**.

E. Free Economy



- ▶ A free economy means that there are **opportunities for people** who work hard to get ahead and make life better for themselves and their family.

Athens Economy had many advantages – started by an aristocrat named Solon in 594 B.C.

Examples:

- ▶ No debt slavery – previously you became the slave of whoever you owed money.
- ▶ Encouraged **TRADE** grow olives. (Olives = olive oil = valuable export = \$\$ = power!)
- ▶ **Rights of citizens was based on the land** you owned: this was an incentive to **work hard** because hard work **meant more status**.
- ▶ Every citizen was required to prove that they could support themselves – if not they were punished! All sons were taught a trade (job) by their parents.
- ▶ Connection to Democracy: These reforms **made Athenians more independent and gave each citizen a sense of value** → what they did made a difference!
- ▶ Solon's laws established the principle that Athens would be guided by all citizens working together. The word citizen come from the Greek meaning someone involved in Public issues.

F. Leadership



Just like in Empires, Democracy needs **great leaders who will take the risks and responsibilities** of governing.

Example:

► **Cleisthenes**: an **Aristocrat** who in 508 B.C. **sided with the commoners** who had just overthrown the tyrant Isagoras, started some changes (the white and black pebbles).

Cleisthenes took even more power from the Aristocrats by giving each male Athenian citizen the right to take part in government (no longer based on land). **Every Citizen** (Male Athenian) **could** be part of the Assembly and **vote on the laws and issues** being discussed.