Democracy Today: Ancient Lessons, Modern Challenges—Introduction[1]

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When former APS Member James Madison wrote his famous 10th *Federalist* essay in November 1787, he tried to purge the word *democracy* from the American political vocabulary. By "a pure democracy," Madison wrote, "I mean a small society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person." That description could work well for the city-states of ancient Greece or early modern Italy—for the Athens of Thucydides or the Florence of Machiavelli. But it would never apply to the extended republic of the United States, or even to its original member states.

Yet Madison's effort to purge democracy from the American political vocabulary failed. Even in the 1780s, many Americans were already using the word *democratic* or *democratical* to describe the popular branches of their republican governments. They assumed that a proper representative assembly would be a *mirror* or a *miniature* or a *portrait* or a *transcript* of the larger society. It should literally represent the people in deliberation. By our standards, their notions of who would appear in this mirror or miniature may seem limited or even biased, but for the 18th century, they were fairly advanced and even progressive. Americans did not consciously imagine themselves being engaged in the process of creating a democratic culture, but their belief that a popular government needed strong democratic elements was nevertheless one foundation for that development. When Alexis de Tocqueville conducted his famous tour of the United States half a century after Madison wrote *Federalist* 10, his mission was not merely to describe a set of political practices and institutions, but also to make sense of an entire culture that was becoming pervasively democratic. That is why his two volumes discussing *Democracy in America* remain a landmark work of modern social science.

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1 Read 27 April 2018 as part of the *Democracy Today: Ancient Lessons, Modern Challenges* symposium.

Today we inhabit a world where democracy, if not mortally imperiled the way it seemed to be in the 1930s, nevertheless faces some extraordinary challenges. This audience is, of course, old enough to realize how preposterous such a concern would have been three decades ago, when the Soviet Union was teetering toward collapse and the People's Republic of China was facing its own incipient democratic unrest. Today we awake almost daily to wonder about the strength of authoritarian tendencies in many nations overseas and, frankly, to worry about their presence at home as well. In the age of Donald J. Trump, one source of our unease is made so manifestly obvious with each day's news and tweets that it barely warrants serious discussion. But the debilities in our hyper-partisan body politic—the very fact that we worry about how democracies fail, or whether fascistic tendencies are infecting the population—requires us to think in more substantive terms about the structure and mechanics of our democratic system.

This panel on *Democracy Today: Ancient Lessons, Modern Challenges* addressed these contemporary concerns under three broad headings: the nature of democratic deliberation, going back to its classical origins; two of the real-time challenges our own democracy is currently facing; and the way in which our ideas of how markets operate relate to the democratic character of our citizens. Three of the papers presented at the symposium are published, in revised form, in this issue. Under the first heading, Teresa Bejan and James Fishkin put Madison's caution against ancient democracy aside and draw some intriguing morals and applications from the realm of antiquity. Their papers discuss issues of free speech and democratic deliberation, two critical forms of behavior that constitute the lifeblood of any functioning democracy. Under the second heading, Kathleen Hall Jamieson provides a careful review of the ways in which agents of the Russian government, manipulating social media like Facebook and Twitter, actively worked to disrupt the 2016 election. And in the two talks not presented here, Nicholas Stephanopoulos analyzed the role of gerrymandering in distorting the mirror of representation, while Zephyr Teachout argued that a vigorous anti-monopoly policy that would foster creativity in the marketplace would also be conducive to the moral development of democratic citizens.