

## From Necessity, Not Choice: Lessons in Democracy from Maryland's Past



**By Jane E. Calvert and Anthony K. Lake**

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*The Center for the Study of Democracy was established in 2002 with the goal of better understanding early Maryland as an "emerging democracy," and applying the lessons to a domestic and international discussion. As the first capital of Maryland, St. Mary's City was an early example of the stirrings of American democracy. "Liberty of conscience" in religion, representative political practices, a printing press, and minority rights are a part of Maryland's early history.*

*The Center has built upon themes in Maryland's history by providing new scholarship, courses, lectures, student internships, and publications that contribute to debates about democracy. Our first occasional paper, **From Necessity, Not Choice: Lessons in Democracy from Maryland's Past** by Jane E. Calvert and Anthony Lake, underscores the intellectual purpose of the Center " 21st century Americans and democrats around the world ought to take a hard look at Maryland's 17th-century colonial experience as they seek to improve their own societies.*

*The importance of the Center's intellectual mission has been recognized at the federal level. In September 2004, the "We the People" initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) awarded the Center a \$500,000 challenge grant to underwrite its future. The Center has until April 2008 to raise \$1.5 million in new donations to meet the matching requirements.*

*It is my hope that the Center's occasional paper series will spark interest among the St. Mary's College community, the people of Maryland, and indeed all citizens striving to understand what Calvert and Lake call the "journey" of democracy "as it adapts to a world of change."*

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The sixty thousand visitors who come every year to Maryland's first capital in Historic St. Mary's City are usually impressed by the sweeping vistas of the tide-water Chesapeake, the archeological discoveries, and the vivid re-creation of the lives of some of the first European settlers in North America. Less apparent, but equally impressive, is the fact that the bucolic seventeenth-century capital was also home to powerful stirrings of democracy that can inspire today's democrats abroad, as well as those seeking to strengthen the American system of governance.

Today there are monuments in St. Mary's City that celebrate early American forms of pluralism, liberty, and inclusion. The Indian hamlet depicts the relatively peaceful relations of the settlers with Native Americans. An archeological dig is gradually revealing the location where Margaret Brent demanded her right to vote in the Maryland Assembly. The working tobacco plantation and the replica of the cargo ship, the *Dove*, give visitors insight to the lively commerce in the colony. And a reproduction of a printing press—the third press to exist in British America—lets visitors try their hand at seventeenth-century communication. At opposite ends of the small city sit the two most important structures, the 1696 State House and a Catholic chapel.

At first glance one might incorrectly conclude that the first Marylanders were democratic idealists, drawn to North American shores in order to form an idyllic example of the exercise of freedom. But the founders of Maryland, George Calvert (Lord Baltimore) and his son, Cecil, were men of their times. They did not consider themselves "democrats" nor did they believe in rule "by the people." But this does not mean that Maryland's seventeenth-century political history is meaningless. There are lessons, even inspirations, behind the monuments.

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The symbols of the roots of modern democracy on display at Maryland's first capital remind Americans that the spread of democracy in today's world is both an expression of our national ideals and in the national interest. A review of Maryland's seventeenth-century history is more compelling and hopeful than a tale of idealism. The founders of Maryland moved in democratic directions out of necessity, not choice. They thought their approach would help solve practical problems.

## Democracy or Mobocracy?

The fact that the colonists were not committed democrats should come as no surprise. After all, although majority rule and consent of the governed have always been with us in some form, it was not until our own time that American democracy came to be based on universal suffrage with full rights of citizenship guaranteed to all, regardless of social status, race, or gender. Our definition of who "the people" is has changed over the course of our history.

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Democracy as we know it today was not what the framers of the Constitution had in mind. On the contrary, they believed that pure democracy was something to be guarded against. The framers feared that such a democracy, the direct rule of the common people, could degenerate into mob rule, or what Alexis de Tocqueville later termed *democratic despotism*. Democracy was a dirty word to the framers of the Constitution; they referred to it as *mobocracy*. The role of the common people, they believed, was to choose men better educated, more virtuous, and wiser than themselves to act as their representatives. Even the men doing the choosing, those who could vote, had to demonstrate some merit in the form of property ownership. Indeed, universal white male suffrage and the abolition of property requirements did not become a national preoccupation until sixty years later, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. And true universal

suffrage—that is, the right of all adult citizens to vote—was not attained until the twentieth century when legal and social barriers to black and women suffrage were lifted. Some might argue that we still have not achieved the democratic ideals our nation represents. Democracy, in any nation, including our own, is a journey ± a continual process rather than a final state. This is what makes it so durable as it adapts to a world of change.

If the definition of “the people” in 1789 America seems narrow to us now, it was radically broad compared to the previous century. In the early seventeenth century, when the first American colonies were being established, so far was democracy from consideration as a legitimate form of government that it was not even mentioned by philosophers except as a deterrent from deviant political behavior, or by politicians as an accusation against their opponents. “The people” who were represented in English Parliament were members of the landed aristocracy who had representatives in the House of Lords, and “freemen” who had representatives in the House of Commons.

According to the ancient traditions of England, freemen were given a voice in Parliament to legitimize the rule of the king, but they had no power themselves. Moreover, the House of Commons was not made up of the most common people. To be considered a freeman, one had to own a minimum amount of property. In such a highly stratified society, the masses of people were poor, uneducated, and politically ignorant. The ordinary working man was excluded from the political process. He was a political non-entity, in bondage to a life of hard labor and dependence on his social betters, there to be ruled, not to rule themselves. Consequently, democracy—the rule of the common man—was unthinkable. It was considered the rule of the rabble, the rule of a class with neither the knowledge nor the ability to make political decisions. In other words, democracy was considered little better than anarchy.

### **Democracy: An Innovative Survival Technique**

Given that both political theory and practice in England were inimical to democracy during this period in history, it would seem unlikely that it could get a foothold there. But in the American colonies it was a different story. The difficulty of transplanting English social, cultural, and political institutions intact into the wilderness encouraged—

or rather necessitated innovation as a survival tactic. Each colony became a laboratory for political experimentation that led to new forms of government and changed understandings of politics. A look at the history of early Maryland provides us with a fascinating example of innovation in the face of necessity—the creation of an early form of democracy as a survival technique for an unstable polity.



"First Landing of Leonard Calvert in Maryland," ca.1865-1870, David Achesen Woodward. Image courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

In 1632 Lord Baltimore, George Calvert, was granted the charter for Maryland. When he and his son Cecil went about the task of constructing a government, they knew that the social conditions of America would not lend themselves to a replication of the English parliamentary system. Although they were sensitive to the current climate in England that favored a measure of representative government, it was clear there would not be enough men in Maryland, let alone men of good social standing, to support Houses of Commons and Lords.

Taking this into account, their solution was to model the government of Maryland on an earlier version of the English government—the manorial or feudal system. According to historian David W. Jordan, the Calverts' plan for the new colony was neither innovative nor forward-looking. In fact, it was "outmoded." The main political unit would be the

manor or plantation, and the common people would give their allegiance to the lords. Although this system had been abandoned in England, it suited the goals of the Calverts. It would allow them to exercise power with a minimum of interference by the inhabitants of the colony.

The Calverts envisioned their relationship to the denizens of Maryland as kings to subjects. Representative government in Maryland would not mean democracy any more than it had in England. It meant again that certain men, who met specific qualifications of social status and property ownership, freemen, would have a limited voice in government. Moreover, these men would not be elected; they would be appointed by the Calverts or their deputies. And their voice would not impinge on or negate the prerogatives of the proprietors. Despite a representative clause in the Maryland charter, it did not allow for any expression of popular will. Rather, it lent legitimacy and support to the Calverts' policies—a small step towards democracy maybe, but hardly the real thing. Not all historians, however, regard the Calverts' manorial system as outmoded. John D. Krugler, for one, argues that the manorial system in the Maryland context was actually quite innovative. Rather than being merely a self-serving attempt to control the colonists, it was a conscious plan—the first in the colonies—to free the state from the burden of religious strife by disconnecting religion and politics.

In the seventeenth-century Anglo-American world, church and state, religion and politics, were intimately connected. It was assumed that political structures were ordained by God, and politics was to be understood and interpreted through theology. This posed a significant problem for a political family such as the Calverts, who embraced Catholicism. The English government had split from the Roman Catholic Church in the previous century, and Catholics were now held in great suspicion and contempt by most Englishmen. Their fear was that Catholics could not be loyal to an English Protestant king and instead would be loyal to the Pope. The Calverts must have been acutely aware of their precarious position in trying to be Catholic proprietors of a colony that would most certainly be populated mostly by Protestants.

In establishing a governmental system in which the loyalty of the subject would be not to a church or religious creed, but to the lord of the manor, the Calverts hoped to mini-

mize the importance of religion in government and allay the colonists' fears of a Catholic conspiracy to oppress them. Religion would effectively be privatized. It was a novel attempt to encourage political unity without religious uniformity.

### **□Closer to democracy than they ever could have imagined□**

But the situation in Maryland did not go according to plan on either the political or the religious front. In the transition from theory to practice, the Calverts' feudal ideal broke down early on. Several factors contributed not only to the demise of their system, but also to the creation of one that came closer to democracy than they ever could have imagined. First, realities of life in Maryland set in quickly. Although the Calverts had recognized that they lacked the population for a parliamentary system, they did not count on the very low number of wealthy colonists who chose to immigrate to Maryland or the high mortality rates that kept population levels much below those of other colonies.

The result was that there were not enough men of property and standing to make the manorial political system work. Therefore, the county rather than the plantation became the primary political unit. And instead of wealthy plantation owners being appointed to the representative assembly, illiterate former servants and freemen with only modest holdings soon became the "backbone" of the early Maryland political structure. These ordinary men, moreover, were not even appointed by the Calverts. Because of the inconveniences of travel and weather, it was difficult to get appointed officials to attend the political assemblies, and the Calverts eventually had to allow representatives who would attend the assembly to be elected.

Neither was the Calverts' cause helped by their position as absentee landlords. The Lords Baltimore never got to Maryland and conducted all of their colonial business from England. Some residents of the colony resisted the Calverts' authority to dictate certain laws and policies, while others refused to acknowledge them altogether. Trying to manage all these unanticipated difficulties from across an ocean, the Calverts were forced to compromise and allow a greater popular participation than they had intended. The result was that the popular Assembly, the representative branch of Maryland government, gained a considerable amount of power and used it to their advantage against

the Calverts. In the restless pursuit of freedom that characterized most early Americans, they sought to limit the authority of the proprietors by determining their own taxes and legislation. The definition of "the people" was broadening.

Another significant factor that contributed to this de facto democratic system was the religious situation in both Maryland and England. George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, had been granted the charter for Maryland by Charles I, a Catholic sympathizer. But in 1642, Charles' government was overthrown by radical Protestant revolutionaries who were deeply hostile to Catholics. It is not likely a coincidence that the Calverts drafted the Act Concerning Religion, which was passed by the Maryland legislature in 1649, the same year that the revolutionaries beheaded Charles. In their own colony as in England, the Catholic Calverts were a minority in a population of Protestants.

The Act granted something that few governments in the world had—legal protection for people whose religious beliefs differed from those of the state-established religion. While the Calverts seemed to be more concerned with protecting their own political and economic interests than broadening the franchise or encouraging freedom of conscience for its own sake, the Act would have significant political consequences for Maryland government. Whereas in other American colonies such as Virginia and Massachusetts, political participation depended on being a member of the established church, the Act Concerning Religion opened it up to men of every religious persuasion. Even though at times members of some groups were still persecuted and denied the right to hold political office, even the most widely hated religious dissenters, the Quakers, managed to wield a significant amount of political power in early Maryland. It was also the only colony at this time to allow Catholics to vote and hold office.

With a few exceptions, the first fifty years of Maryland history were relatively peaceful despite the departure from conventional English political theory and practice. Political upheaval in England, rather than any inherent problems in the colony, caused the eventual breakdown of the system of toleration in Maryland. The anti-Catholic sentiment in England that drove James II from the throne and brought William and Mary to power in the 1688 Glorious Revolution had a profound impact on many colonial governments. As a Catholic colony, Maryland was especially vulnerable. It did not take long for the

Crown to revoke the Calverts' charter and make Maryland a royal colony. Next, in 1689 the Act Concerning Religion was abolished and the Church of England was established as the official church of Maryland. The final blow to religious toleration came in 1715 when the government of Maryland, restored to the Calvert family (now converted to the Church of England), confirmed legislation barring Catholics from political participation.

## **Maryland and the Framing of the U.S. Constitution**

Although the Maryland political system was in important ways less tolerant and democratic in the eighteenth century than in the seventeenth, the colonists had learned lessons that were not forgotten with the change of regime. The half-century of democratic participation had instilled in them habits that they continued to employ throughout the remainder of the colonial period. In the seventeenth century, the popular Assembly exercised its democratic power against the Catholic proprietors. In the eighteenth century, it struggled first against the encroachments on its rights by a heavy-handed proprietary governor, and then against the Crown in the Revolution. The history of democratic activity in their early days prepared Marylanders for the challenges of self-government prior to and during the Revolution. Having had a taste of democracy, they would not relinquish it.

Interestingly, despite Maryland's unique experiment in democracy during its early years, few of America's leaders during the founding era recognized it or looked to Maryland as a source of information for the construction of the nation. The reason is no mystery. America was established and populated mainly by Protestant dissenters, and anti-Catholicism was still a powerful force throughout the whole country in the late eighteenth century.

Indeed, during the Revolution, the colonists had been rallied against the Crown by cries of "popery" and "priestcraft" from their leaders. Thus any achievements of the Catholic Calverts were held in suspicion or ignored. Only a few founders, such as James Wilson, recognized the democratic legacy Maryland had left the nation. Nevertheless, when the framers of the Constitution set about establishing a government for a large and diverse nation, they confronted the same issues and much the same necessities that the Calverts

had faced over a century before—where authority should lie and how to find a balance among the competing factions and interests that threatened to disunite the country.

After the chaos of the “Critical Period” during the Articles of Confederation when “the people” had abused their new liberties, the framers were deeply concerned about the viability of a republican government that had too strong a democratic element. The Federalists, therefore, proposed an elitist political system that would minimize the role of the people directly, and instead place power in the hands of a “natural aristocracy.” The Anti-Federalists rejected this proposal as monarchical and oppressive of the common people and called for a more popular system. The difficulty that political thinkers such as James Madison understood, however, was that a government of direct democracy required two things that America did not have—a small geographic area and a populace with uniformity of general beliefs, sentiments, and interests. To achieve the kind of uniformity necessary would mean oppression of the people and the death of liberty. Whether he was aware of the Maryland example or not, Madison provided a solution that recognized what the Calverts had discovered before they even set foot in their colony—that compromises must be made between ideal and actual practice and that certain freedoms must be allowed if a polity is to survive. The proposed federal system would provide for the greatest amount of popular participation without suppressing diversity or imposing uniformity. It would embrace religious and political pluralism as the way to balance competing interests and to prevent any one group from tyrannizing others. In this same spirit, the Anti-Federalists put separation of church and state at the top of their Bill of Rights. The result was ultimately a system much more democratic than the framers originally envisioned, with a much broader definition of “the people.”

From early Maryland to America as a whole, we can see the process of democratization unfolding. Democracy, which was first considered dangerous and undesirable in Maryland—not even a realistic alternative for governance—turned out to be the only system that would work for a diverse and restless population. The happy irony of the situation is that the very diversity and restlessness which were first seen as obstacles to

overcome are now considered the greatest strengths of our nation. And a broad definition of "the people" in America, far from being feared, is now held up as benchmark for developing countries to gauge their own success in the process of democratization.

## **Connecting the Seventeenth and Twenty-First Centuries**

If the Maryland example provided little direct guidance for the framers of the Constitution, it has left us much more today. It is important not only as a practical example of how democracy serves as an effective and peaceful means to sustain a diverse and factious polity, but also as a means for continuing and improving our present democracy into the future. A crucial component of a democratic society is the creation and use of democratic "myths," the collective memory and accepted rules of behavior that allow a democracy to sustain and perpetuate itself. The Maryland democratic experiment has provided us with a wealth of salutary myths that can enrich and inform our contemporary politic discourse.

The retelling of the Margaret Brent story is a prime example. Brent, a single woman and wealthy land-owner in early Maryland, wielded considerable power as executrix of the late Governor Leonard Calvert's estate. Her prominent position in colonial affairs, and no doubt the democratic climate of the colony, prompted her to seek a vote in the Assembly. She was, of course, denied. Women were not allowed participation in government. While the historical record indicates Brent was daring and assertive in attempting to step beyond the traditional limits on female behavior, there is no evidence that she was taking a stand on behalf of women's rights. In other words, while certainly ahead of her time, Brent was no feminist. But frequently, when her story is retold today, Brent is portrayed as an early feminist, asserting her rights self-consciously as a woman. While historians wince at this anachronism, we should rather understand this interpretation not as a misstatement of fact, but rather as a myth that functions as a reflection of the democratic values we hold today and an ideal we would like realized in the future.

A similar myth is that of religious liberty in early Maryland. While the rhetoric of liberty of conscience was made into law, and, indeed there existed greater religious freedom in Maryland than most other colonies, the fact is that the Calverts allowed substantial persecution of Quakers as long as it proved politically expedient for them to do so. The persecution was nowhere near as severe in Maryland as it was in Massachusetts, where

four Quakers were hanged and many mutilated, but neither was Maryland as tolerant as Rhode Island or, later, Pennsylvania where there was no persecution of religious dissenters by the government. But the important lesson here is not necessarily found in the facts or the actions, but precisely in the rhetoric and the ideal that the Act Concerning Religion represented.

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Just as the ideals of equality in the Declaration of Independence were not legally recognized until the middle of the twentieth century and are still not fully attained in practice, the ideals of the Maryland experiment were only imperfectly applied in the seventeenth century. We should expect imperfections and transgressions as we try to realize any lofty ideal such as equality or religious freedom. While we shouldn't forget the imperfections—they tell us where we must make further progress—it is the myths that remind us of, and give legitimacy to, the ideals that propel the democratic process.

## **Maryland's Lessons for Developing Democracies**

The lessons learned from early Maryland can be applied to the problems facing nations around the world as they embark upon the process of democratization. The restless drive for freedom and the popular demand for participation in the affairs of government are not limited to western cultures. As Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, writes, “the championing of pluralism, diversity, and basic liberties can be found in the history of many societies.”<sup>9</sup> He shows that these can be found over the centuries in traditional societies in India, China, Japan, Korea, Iran, Turkey and much of Africa. Thus, it should not be surprising that the last quarter-century has seen a growth in democratic governance around the world.

The communications revolution helped spread the seeds of democracy on fertile fields in most corners of the world. By 2000, multi-party elections had been held in all but five of Africa's 47 states. Freedom House, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that

monitors democratic trends around the world, rated 121 of the 192 countries in the world as "electoral democracies," with "largely representative and fair elections" in 2003.

In our own hemisphere, only one nation, Cuba, has had no recent experience with democracy. Even within those societies ruled by autocrats, like China and Saudi Arabia, there is a growing contest between democratic reformers and rulers who themselves only mouth the words of reform.

In every region where democracy is not firmly established, a struggle is underway that will decide the political future of the world. For example, the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World convened in Istanbul, Turkey in April 2004 with delegates from predominantly Muslim countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. They issued key principles for enhanced democratization that called for "accountable" political parties, multi-party elections administered by independent election commissions, independent media, freedom of information, toleration of religious minorities, equal political participation by women, and oversight of governments by parliaments and civil society. In short, the delegates of the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World are asking for evidence of the same kinds of democratic stirrings that emerged in seventeenth-century Maryland.

But the growth of democracy is rooted in more than the instinct for human freedom. As in seventeenth-century Maryland, democracy is growing because it works. Yet, the best means of pursuing democracy is by no means obvious. A good start is to understand the nature of the challenge. As the Calverts discovered, perhaps only intuitively, democracy in some form provides the answer to practical problems as well as to the universal thirst for freedom.

First, democracy provides governmental legitimacy as no other system can. Why else would so many authoritarian regimes proclaim themselves the "Democratic" Republic of this country or that? This imitation of truly democratic nations is the sincerest form of flattery. In the short run, holding elections in previously authoritarian societies can lead to instability.

But in the long run, the slow and deliberative process of democratic governance brings a larger measure of political stability. Moreover, democracy provides the widest amount of consensus in the population on governmental decisions. When the people are the ones who decide how to use their freedoms, the legitimacy of a regime is rarely in question.

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Second, real democracy, in which the rights of minorities are recognized, offers the best means of stability in societies in which ethnic and religious differences threaten to explode into civil wars. Just as the early Marylanders cooperated with the Native American population, allowed members of all religious groups to hold office, and relied upon the contributions of the "lower sorts" of people, developing democracies must reach out to all segments of their societies.

Third, elections, when combined with constitutional protections for minorities, can provide the centerpiece of negotiated solutions to conflict. The Lancaster House Accords that resolved the conflict between the white and African tribes in Southern Rhodesia in 1980 is a good example of democratic conflict resolution in action. The subsequent tragedy in what later became Zimbabwe can be laid squarely at the feet of the autocratic President Robert Mugabe, who trashed the democratic processes that brought him to power.

Fourth, the creation of what Amartya Sen calls "public reasoning" acts as a safety valve for tensions in the populace and a check on would-be dictators. It is central, Sen explains, that a guaranteed right of unfettered public discussion and deliberation about the theory and practice of politics exists in a democracy. A free press and open public debate let the sunshine in that gives democracies the space to grow in those crucial early years.

Moreover, as part of the expression of public opinion, dissenting views should not just be tolerated, but encouraged. Dissidents often act as the conscience of a nation, reminding the people and their leaders of endangered or transgressed rights. Anti-democratic forces fear the power of the pen and the bright lights of television and photo-journalism. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), during the last decade 347 journalists have been killed while carrying out their work. CPJ's research demonstrates that the vast majority of journalists killed since 1994 were hunted down and murdered, often in direct reprisal for their reporting. Many of the killings took place in countries such as Algeria, Russia, and Colombia where democratic idealists are locked in a struggle with anarchic or authoritarian forces.

Historically, protection for the expression of diverse opinions has prevailed in many cultures, including African tribal councils and seventh-century Japan. James Madison argued in *Federalist No. 10* that "As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed." Madison thought that a well-constructed democracy nurtured division and celebrated it as "an ailment without which [democracy] instantly expires."

Vaclav Havel and the signers of Charter 77 read Madison before they created their famous samizdat document criticizing repressive Warsaw Pact regimes. While Havel and his compatriots had to wait a dozen years for change, and endure discrimination and arrests, the group played a central role in bringing about the democratization in the late 1980s and the multi-party political systems that Eastern Europe enjoys today.

## **Popular Sovereignty and the Rule of Law**

The early Maryland experience shines brightest with the idea of popular participation and religious toleration. Considering seventeenth-century political culture, it is remarkable that Calvert and his colleagues recognized the importance of allowing such novel practices. Although they were merely trying to stabilize the polity, not create a democratic government, their experiment laid the groundwork for later ideas that democratic societies are based on popular sovereignty, rule of law, and separation of church and state.

As the sole proprietor of Maryland, Lord Baltimore expected to propose legislation to an Assembly of wealthy freemen. However, the Assembly, composed of men of only moderate wealth, quickly asserted the right to initiate its own legislation, and by 1650 the members of the lower body represented every county in the colony. Before long, the colony developed a distinctly cosmopolitan flavor. It was no longer merely a "British" colony as adventurers from Holland, France, Portugal, and Germany came to settle and trade. As they made their fortunes, these men too moved into the ranks of government.

As a nation, we have moved from reluctantly allowing participation, to placing power in the hands of the people—All the people. The ultimate source of legitimacy of our government is the will of the people and recognition that democratic nations are governed by laws, not men. Fundamental to our polity are laws protecting freedom of the person by habeas corpus, trial by jury, and a representative legislature with closely delineated functions. Developing democracies of Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, some less than a decade removed from the Ceausescus, Pinochets, Saddams, and Idi Amins that based their laws on a cult of personality, are now establishing their own forms of protection of those basic principles.

In a world of deepening religious strife, the Maryland example has particular meaning. Religious toleration has evolved in America into separation of church and state. Other young democracies, to become mature in their freedoms, must recognize this: To the degree that a government claims its legitimacy is from the will of God, there is no democracy.

When laws and policies are derived from a leader's view of God's will, to that extent the power of the people to decide is lost. The founders of the United States were men of strong religious conviction who invoked religious beliefs as a part of public debate. They understood, however, that democratic governance could be eroded or lost if leaders acted on their understanding of God's will to defy the expressed opinion of the nation's electorate. Today, both at home and abroad, it is fundamental that this separation be respected. Contemporary Iran is an extreme example of religious rule trumping the democratic expressions of the people, but the line can become blurred in any society, including our own. Nevertheless, Alexander Hamilton's argument in *Federalist No. 69*,

that the President of the United States has no "spiritual jurisdiction," remains a cornerstone of American democracy.

## **The "Hearts and Minds" of a Democratic People**

In America and throughout the democratic world, we must also recognize a fundamental and challenging truth: Democracy is ultimately secured not only by its laws and institutions, but by what is in the heads and hearts of a people, what Alexis de Tocqueville called *mores*. Without a culture of democracy, no system of democracy can survive. And such a culture must not only be created—it requires constant nourishment.

Citizens of a democratic society must be accustomed to a vibrant civil society of debate and active voluntary participation in public affairs. Tocqueville noted that "If the inhabitants of democratic countries had neither the right nor the taste for uniting for political objectives, their independence would run great risks." In democracies, collaborative action by groups of equal individuals replaces the often-arbitrary power of aristocrats and tyrants. A plurality of these groups, then, prevents a tyranny of the majority, the greatest pitfall of democratic systems. International relations professor Benedict Anderson has described this democratic culture as an "imagined community." In post-totalitarian nations like Romania, Chile, Iraq, and Uganda it is the mores of people and their imagined democratic community that is both the most difficult to attain and most crucial to the success of their fledgling democracies.

As members of the "imagined community," citizens of democratic countries—both old and new—must believe that they bear some responsibility for perpetuating the democratic culture. It is for this reason, among others, that the televised pictures of torture from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were such a devastating blow to democratic hopes in many parts of the Middle East. Not only did individual Americans fail miserably as ambassadors for democracy, the damage done to the hearts and minds of democratically inclined Iraqis and those who look to the United States for cues about how to build a democratic society may be significant for years to come.

Increasingly, the "imagined community" must be seen not just as a local or national community, but a global community. Human beings are capable of empathy, of imagin-

ing the lives of others as they lived their own, so they have come to respect, at least in their better moments, the importance of individual liberty. Abraham Lincoln captured this idea in the midst of his great election debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858: "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy." Whether at home or abroad, this is a principle we must represent.

## **The Growing Stakes for American Foreign Policy**

Democratic governance has become the global standard for good governance. The United States has a fundamental stake in the spread of democracy around the world. It provides the long-term stability that serves American interests. It allows the expression of political views and discontentment which, if bottled up, can propel the discontented to violence and even terrorism.

American support for the development of democracy can be neither episodic nor, for the most part, direct. Outsiders cannot impose a political culture on another nation. Perhaps U.S. or NATO forces, or the threat of sanctions, can force change in the legal structures and political institutions of others. However, these kinds of efforts run the risk of engendering nationalist reactions that undercut the development of the democratic culture. Outside, direct pressure may occasionally be necessary, but it is never sufficient by itself.

The implications for American policies are clear. Our foreign policy makers must take a longer view by quietly offering resources and, more loudly, the moral support needed to help the brave men and women who are fighting for their democratic rights. A good place to start is by supporting local non-governmental associations that promote, for example, the status of women or the rule of law in countries struggling towards democracy.

In the area of education, schools that teach democratic values and offer alternatives to notions of theocracy of any stripe must be encouraged. Similarly, it is crucial to spur

economic growth abroad while simultaneously promoting economic justice. Those living in poverty need proof that democracy can improve the quality of their daily lives. Finally, now more than ever, there must be an international exchange between Americans and the future artists, historians, politicians, and economists of the developing democratic world. It is vital that the hurdles of visa restrictions and fears of anti-Americanism do not permanently lower the numbers of people studying abroad and coming to the United States to learn, first-hand, about the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy. In short, increasing foreign aid is important not because Americans have a responsibility to be internationalist do-gooders, but rather because it is in the self-interest of U.S. national security to live in a world with other unique democracies.

America must increase the power of democratic myths by the strength of our example as we vigorously exercise our own democratic freedoms, and protect those of others. For visitors to the historic capital of Maryland, there is inspiration in seeing one of the well-springs of the myths that help keep America democratic and free. When developing nations begin to create their own democratic myths, it will become inconceivable to the people that the military may take power, or that citizens can be denied the right to vote. Only then can a nation truly call itself a democracy.

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Cover illustration: "Leonard Calvert Lands to Establish the Palatinate of Maryland March 25, 1634," 1951. R. McGill Mackall. Image courtesy of Historic St. Mary's City.

Page 4 illustration: "First Landing of Leonard Calvert in Maryland," ca. 1865-1870, David Achesen Woodward. Image courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

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