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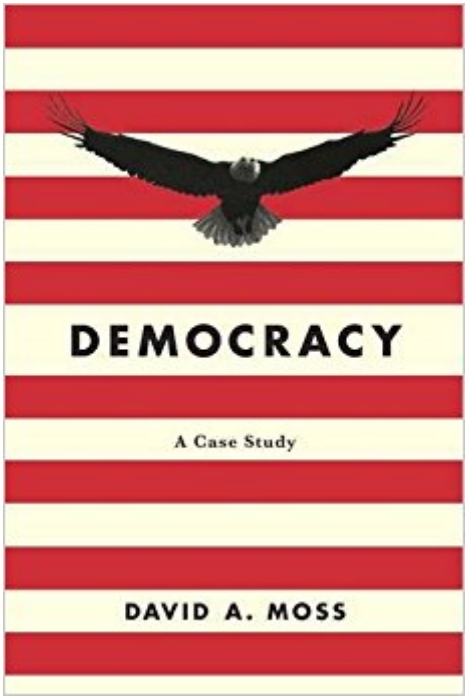
Democracy: A Case Study



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Synopsis

To all who declare that American democracy is brokenÃ¢â ¬â ¢riven by partisanship, undermined by extremism, and corrupted by wealthÃ¢â ¬â ¢history offers hope. In nearly every generation since the nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s founding, critics have made similar declarations, and yet the nation is still standing. When should we believe the doomsayers? In Democracy: A Case Study, historian David Moss adapts the case study method made famous by Harvard Business School to revitalize our conversations about governance and democracy and show how the United States has often thrived on political conflict.DemocracyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s nineteen case studies were honed in MossÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Harvard course, which is among the institutionÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most highly rated. Each one presents readers with a pivotal moment in U.S. history and raises questions facing key decision makers at the time: Should delegates to the Constitutional Convention support James MadisonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s proposal for a congressional veto over state laws? Should President Lincoln resupply Fort Sumter? Should Florida lawmakers approve or reject the Equal Rights Amendment?These vibrant cases ask readers to weigh choices and consequences, wrestle with momentous decisions, and come to their own conclusions. They provoke us to rethink which factors make the difference between constructive and destructive conflict, and they provide an opportunity to reengage the passionate debates that are crucial to a healthy society. Democracy: A Case Study invites us all to experience American history anew and come away with a deeper understanding of our democracyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s greatest strengths and vulnerabilities as well as its extraordinary resilience over time.

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Customer Reviews

This absolutely splendid book is a triumph on every level. A first-rate history of the United States, it is beautifully written, deeply researched, and filled with entertaining stories. For anyone who wants to see our democracy flourish, this is the book to read. (Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism)Brilliantly adapting the provocative format of the Harvard Business School's case study method, Democracy: A Case Study challenges readers to think anew on topics ranging from James Madison's quest for a workable federalism to such modern flashpoints as the power of the Federal Reserve and the Citizens United decision. Each episode is crisp and compelling, entertaining and inspiring. The effect is nothing less than to open the gates of our most elite university to the reading public. (Roger Lowenstein, author of America's Bank and Buffett)Democracy: A Case Study gives us the facts of key controversies in our historyÃ¢â ¬â ¢from the adoption of the Constitution to Citizens UnitedÃ¢â ¬â ¢and invites readers to decide for themselves. This novel approach makes American history a valuable resource for civic education. (Michael J. Sandel, author of What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets)In this powerfully provocative exploration of the nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s core political values, David Moss shows why after more than two centuries we cannot take democracy for granted. Drawing on a number of well-selected case studies, he invites readers to interrogate the fundamental assumptions that have informed our civil society since the ratification of the Constitution. (Timothy H. Breen, Northwestern University)If we are going to breathe new life into democracy, there is no better way to begin than by reacquainting ourselves with our history. David Moss does this brilliantly in Democracy: A Case Study. Through well-chosen examples, drawn from his case-method course at Harvard, he helps us to understand the paths chosen and not chosen, and how each generation has adapted to new realities. Democracy may be something of a contact sport, as he argues, but we can play the game better if we understand the rules and why they keep changing. This timely book goes a long way toward that end. (Ted Widmer, Brown University)This set of well-documented, accessible essays presents the prickly challenges facing the rapidly changing American democracy, for lawmakers and citizens alikeÃ¢â ¬Â|A sterling educational tool that offers a fresh presentation of how Ã¢â ¬Ëœdemocracy in America has always been a contact sport.Ã¢â ¬â„¢ (Kirkus Reviews (starred review) 2016-11-15)ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s hard to imagine a timelier book, given AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s tumultous 2016 elections, than this eminently readable survey of political disputes. (Publishers Weekly 2016-12-02)Democracy should command the attention of

teachers and students of all agesÃ¢â ¬Â¦MossÃ¢â ¬â„¢s case studies are engagingly written, well researched, rich in content and contextÃ¢â ¬Â¦Moss believes that fierce political conflicts can be constructive if they are mediated by shared ideals. He seems to demonstrate, moreover, that in a world in which Ã¢â ¬Ëœalternative factsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ are gaining traction, an informed understanding of the past can help us identify pathways to a prosperous and just democracy. (Glenn C. Altschuler Huffington Post 2017-02-09)Moss makes [his] argument in his brilliant introductory and concluding chapters, while the core of the book consists of 19 cases from throughout U.S. history that exemplify the complexity of political conflict. (Suzanne Mettler Foreign Affairs 2017-05-01)If this book does not read like a prediction of the present, then perhaps its sangfroid will nevertheless suit the reader with nerves jangled by the news. David Moss suggests we ought to be overdefensive of democracy; he recommends a salutary Ã¢â ¬Ëœpolitical hypochondria.Ã¢â ¬â„¢ It seems an appropriate neurosis for the moment. (Eric Rauchway Times Literary Supplement 2017-05-03)

David A. Moss is Paul Whiton Cherington Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School and founder of The Tobin Project.

I have many objections to Moss's account of American history--the central premise--that Americans have strong democratic instincts and that democratic institutions are fundamentally workable in our society--is problematic at best. Still, I do recommend this book for it summaries of key moments when important political crises engaged the attention of statesmen and ordinary Americans. In fact, Moss's rather upbeat view of our past might be seen as refreshing, given the erosion of public life and of faith in our institutions--however flawed--at the moment.

Very ambitious and well-written book with a clever way to teach America's democratic history.

Do not let the fact that the book is over 700 pages scare you. A large percentage of the book is notes on the sources he used. What you are getting is 19 very interesting, well researched, short stories from the Constitutional Convention to Citizen's United. I enjoyed them all with the possible exception of the majority opinion in the Citizens's United Case. (made me angry) At the end of the book you can find the follow up to each of the 19 cases.By far the best part was the introduction and the conclusion. In the introduction he mentions that Madison was concerned about special interests subverting the common good and especially the oppression of the minority by the majority. This makes democracy inherently fragile. Political conflict has been always with us. It can either be

constructive or destructive. If we lose our faith in democracy it becomes destructive (think Civil War) if not it is usually constructive as being able to chose between the best from competing ideas. He points out that democracy is not a machine but an organism. It is made up of civil society, social reform and the press among others.In the conclusion he mentions that perhaps the United States has become more destructive and offers some suggestions to make things better. For that alone the book is worth the purchase.

WeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re reading Democracy (by David Moss) in my book group, and I have to say itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a terrific book club read! It produced one of the best book discussions we've had in a long time. By way of disclosure, the author is a relative of one of the book group members which is how our group came to read it in the first place. We decided to discuss it one chapter (one case) at a time. Written as a page-turning narrative complete with spicy, well-developed characters, a plot with plenty of conflict and cliff-hangers, and enough historic context to fill in critical gaps since our high school social study days ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ the book gave us new insights into the struggles and successes of our democracy. We started discussing it over dinner, which is our usual meeting style, and we're continuing to discuss it over emails.

The most important lesson that I take from this excellent history is that the incorporation doctrine interpretation of the 14th Amendment that applies the BofR to the states is very much against the intent of the drafters of the Constitution, who intended to limit, not expand federal powers. Many of the episodes start from a state viewpoint evolving to federal history.Each episode shows tensions and conflicts among federalists and state's rights, checks and balances, power of the Supreme Court, suffrage, freedom, slavery, industry, agriculture, feminism, education, race, corruption, inequality, tyranny of the majority and other past and current issues. The book shows that tension are sometimes constructive and often destructive as in the case of slavery. Moss's point that the difference is the degree of commitment to democracy is mostly lost, or at least a thing of the past.He thinks that Americans have lost interest in the democratic process. The recent election shows that our votes don't count. Very few of us would have selected either candidate if we had had a free choice. The book's conclusion misses the most important issue that threatens survival of democracy in the US, decline in quality of leadership. Popular election under a two party system has resulted in an inevitable decline from Washington and Jefferson to the likes of Bush and Obama. The quality of our Senators has greatly declined since popular election was instituted in 1916 while dictatorships in China and Singapore have exhibited excellent leadership since the death of Mao.The discussion of

proportional representation points out that the Constitution created not a democracy but a republic. The book contains excellent takes on all sides of each constitutional issue including judicial review, slavery, Australian ballot, Civil rights, Women's rights, unions, TARP, Citizens United and others. There's a history of central banking from the nation's founding to current operation of the Federal Reserve. Muckracking sometimes unfairly victimized people and corporations by popular prejudices. It goes on today. The only constitutional issue missing is prohibition, the predecessor of today's nanny state, designed protect us from ourselves. Though all are interesting, some of the issues have vague or obsolete relationship to democracy. The book doesn't always draw a distinction between democracy and populism.It's a good history, with 19 cases or episodes well related to constitutional law, but the conclusion is badly flawed. Voter turnout, education of electorate or ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville have only incidental effect on American governance. Far more important than who, or how many, are voting is who we get to vote for, in which the American people have no say. Currently, the greatest threat to democracy is the poor quality of leadership candidates regurgitated by our deadly two party system.Political conflict in today's democracy is not likely to end in another civil war, just a continuation of America's decline in domestic living standards and world positioning.

Informative but somewhat dry to due the excessive details in describing the cases, however, an insight into America's history.

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