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## 10. STUDYING DEMOCRACY AS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

You Never Miss the Water 'til the Well Runs Dry

—The Mills Brothers

The right whale, the snow leopard, the California condor and the democratic system have a lot in common these days. All are faced with the daily reality of extinction, and all are looked upon by students as merely facts to be memorized in a textbook. And in studying these examples, students frequently feel no active connection between the things they learn in class and their 'real' lives. Instead, their eyes will pass over the pages and they will later wonder what they have read. This great passivity, this apathy, this overt compliance with dogma has led to learning without mental activity, without challenge and without understanding; inevitably, it leads to the demise of the concept that is trying to be inculcated.

This chapter will look at the term 'democracy', its state in the world today, and its present use in Social Studies subjects. However, it will look at it from a different lens than is commonly used. So often, democracy is studied as a healthy and growing political system that is spreading around the world. This is what's taught to students, along with the morphology of the term and the importance of voting. However, this form of 'rose-coloured', technical teaching fails on two levels when educating students on the subject. First, this obscures the serious threats posed to the democratic system today, both externally and internally. Second, this vision of democracy tends to enervate and disinterest students, leading to a lack of compassion for the subject. In looking at any storybook, television program or computer game of today, it is human nature to yawn at a pleasant, moralistic tale and throw it aside – especially if one can't make any pragmatic connection. Instead, the human psyche is drawn to tales of conflict and defying the odds.

It is imperative, therefore, to grab students' interest and emotions from the outset when studying democracy. I propose, therefore, to turn this concept on its head: To look at it not as an overwhelming, inevitable regime, morally superior to all other forms of government (of little interest to the adolescent mind), but as an endangered species, being attacked and driven to the brink of extinction by a series of predators. Thriving on conflict, students should, therefore, be brought into the middle of this life-or-death struggle, and shown that the actions they choose may save this besieged underdog. To prove the point, let's treat this abstract concept as any other

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‘Endangered Species’, and employ the same terminology, categorization, causes of endangerment and possible aids to its survival.

#### A FIELD GUIDE TO THE ENDANGERED *DEMOCRA* GENUS

A common fallacy perpetuated in the Western curriculum is to examine democracy in the classroom as merely a monolithic entity: ‘...government of the people, by the people, for the people...’. Unfortunately, it is then left in simplistic and vague terms, with the world split into those countries that are democratic (good) and those that are not (bad). These blurry sightings of democracy not only make it very difficult for students to comprehend in a practical way, but also do not inspire empathy. If you were a teen-ager, who would you root for – the undefeatable-yet-boring hero or the dark-horse rebel? As well, it does grave injustice to a quite complex subject. How engaged would a reader be if historians chose not to subdivide the genus *Homo*, but merely studied *sapiens*, *neanderthalensis*, *floresiensis*, chimpanzees and gorillas as one indivisible group? Perhaps a more engaging and sympathetic pursuit, therefore, would be to understand democracy as a root genus with various species. There are, in actuality, innumerable sub-groups (many the creation of cross-breeding and laboratory experiments) that derive from the genus *democra*. Indeed, it is in examining which species thrive in what location and which are near extinction that may excite and inform students. Listed below are the 5 most recognizable to the amateur ‘democratologist’ (colloquially known as “d-spotters”):

*Democra athenensis* – known in the vernacular as ‘Direct Democracy’ or ‘Pure Democracy’ (see Polybius, 1966; Hansen, 1999). In this oldest form of the genus, sovereignty is lodged with all citizens who choose to participate. When assembled, they might make laws, elect and dismiss officials, and conduct trials. Government positions are filled through the use of lottery not by election (the only modern relic of this species can be seen in the sub-species *Democra athenensis juridicae* (located solely in the greenhouse environment of the legal system). Present-day examples that still work on a national level exist in small geographical pockets, such as the *Democra athenensis plebiscita*: It has thrived mostly in Switzerland (with 240 referendums in the past 120 years), and as an additive to governments throughout North America (see Kobach, 1993; Mansfield, 1983). Outside of these small pockets (geographically and politically), this species has been on the endangered species (or extinct) list in most countries of the world. Used so little, this species has even been placed on the ‘Hypothetical List’ by many d-spotters (i.e., Cronin, 1989).

*Democra participatorsis* – This species emphasizes the creation of opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Small pockets exist throughout the world, but are quite difficult to locate in large, breeding herds. Creatures of extremes, they are either found in exceedingly low or high altitudes. For example, while the sub-species *Democra participatorsis grassrootae* prefers the swampy environment of municipal politics

(see Zimmerman, 1999; Gerber, 1999), the *democra partipatorsis deliberae* (which argues that legitimate lawmaking can only arise from the public reflection of the citizenry) seems to only be able to survive in the rarified atmosphere of academic debate (although early fledglings have been nursed by d-spotter Joseph M. Bessette). These two should not be confused with their more distant offshoot *Democra partipatorsis radicalus*, found in the isolated regions of Chile, which seeks to focus on the importance of nurturing and tolerating difference and dissent in decision-making processes. For a full field-guide to these nascent species please refer to Chambers and Kymlicka (2002) who argue that they frequently act as a bellwether for strong liberalism.

*Ochlochra mobile vulgus* – While having all the earmarks of the genus *democra*, this is a more malignant sub-genus of the *Governmenti* family. Stemming from the original Greek *okhlos* ‘mob’ and *kratos* ‘rule of’, it has many pejorative names: ‘majoritarianism’, ‘the Bandwagon’, or ‘the herd morality’. With no formal authority whatsoever, disputes are started and ended by brute force under the motto ‘Might Makes Right’. Passion, not logic makes the rules, and it is often associated with demagoguery. This particular *bête noire* very often becomes prey for both anti- and pro-democratic predators alike. For this reason, although its name is invoked readily, this species’ lifespan is incredibly short (in fact, due to its efficient extermination by outside forces, d-spotters have not been able to predict its natural age expectancy). So far, it has been spotted only for fleeting periods of time: for examples, see 190 A.D. Rome (Dio Cassius 1927, 97–99), 1789 in Paris (Rude, 1959), 1965 in Montgomery, Alabama (Branch, 2006), and Beijing 1989 (Nathan, 2001). For a handbook of the ongoing extermination of this sub-genus and why it’s a good idea, see Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1943).

Based on differing fears of this sub-genus, two distinct branches of the *democra* genus have spawned: one branch, *Democra illiberalii* – is a hybrid species that puts only weak limits on the power of elected representatives, allowing them to rule as they please. This has several sub-species that act in specific ways. For example, the short-lived *Democra illiberalii mccarthiansis* sets limits on some rights and freedoms of its citizens in order to protect the institutions of the democracy. The more stable *Democra illiberali centrala* organizes elected representatives into a party, and once voted into office, all members are expected to follow that decision in public. At the furthest extreme is the other branch, *Democra illiberali totalitae* – in which lawfully elected representatives maintain the integrity of a nation state whose citizens, while granted the right to vote, have little or no participation in the decision-making process of the government. Of all the species shown here, this is the only one whose numbers seem to be prospering. Unfortunately, due to much cross-breeding with other genii (*oligarchsis* and *autocratsis*, for example) it is difficult to distinguish the original democratic features of the root species (outlined in the work of Popper, 1945, 1961).

*Democra representae* – Finally, this species of indirect democracy rests sovereignty in the hands of elected representatives, with accompanying rights that protect minorities from brute consensus (see observations by famous d-spotter John Rawls, 1993). Although related, numerous sub-species have emerged in

separate locations with different variations that set them apart. Examples include: the *Democra representae republicansis* (where power rests on the rule of laws and a state or country) found throughout the United States and pockets of Europe; *Democra representae sovietae* (where workers in a locality elect representatives into increasingly larger councils) once found in vast parts of Asia; and finally the *Democra representae Westminsterii* (technically a member of the *Monarcha* family, but considered *Democra* due to its bright constitutional plumage and prehensile parliament) still exists throughout the now extinct British empire.

In our present age the first three species mentioned above have all but disappeared from the planet in terms of mass population. Indeed, when *The Economist* (January 2007) examined the present state of democracy in the world using five general categories (free and fair election processes, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture), only 28 out of 167 countries were rated as “Full democracies” (when speaking of democracy, most surveys and curriculum documents, use *Democra representae* interchangeably with its root genus creating confusion). Canada came in 9<sup>th</sup>, the United States came in 17<sup>th</sup> and Britain 23<sup>rd</sup>. Fifty-four were listed as “Flawed Democracies” (i.e., a variation of *Democra illiberalii*), while another 31 were considered “Hybrid regimes” (see *Democra illiberali totalitae*), and 55 were outright “authoritarian regimes”. In looking at these bleak numbers, one may observe that the genus is not as robust as popular perception may indicate.

Traditionally, *Democra representae* has been the species of choice for most hinterland populations due to one important reason: it requires the least amount of participation from citizens (voting) for the greatest payoff (rights and freedoms). However, even here it would seem that this species is especially vulnerable to extinction in this day and age. A sign of this endangerment can be seen at the ballot box where in recent years, voter turnout has shown rapid declines. In an analysis of 20 countries, researchers found an average decline of 5%: from 83% in the 1950s to 78% in the 1990s (Dalton, 1996, pp. 44–45; Wattenberg, 1998; Franklin, 2004). Using Canada as a specific example, this situation seems worse, with numbers tumbling from a 75% turnout in 1988 to 59.1% for the 2008 federal election (CBC, October 15, 2008), the lowest since Confederation in 1867. Canada’s largest province of Ontario is at the vanguard of this apathetic demographic – in the past provincial election of October 2007, the percentage of eligible voters casting ballots hit an all-time low of 52.6%, or 4.4 million of 8.4 million possible voters (Elections Ontario, 2007). Most serious for the future of the species, it would seem that even the act of voting is too much participation for most young voters who, on average, register a turnout of 38.7% in Canada (Milner, 2003; Gidengil et al., 2003; Franklin, 2005).

#### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF ENDANGERMENT?

Having now established that there exists an especial threat of endangerment to the species *Democra representae*, it becomes paramount to find out where the causes

lie. In turning to the many general sources that describe endangered species, one will find four major reasons: Habitat Destruction, Introduction of Exotic Species, Overexploitation and Disease (Facklam, 1990; Adams, 1991; Kurpis, 2002).

### *Habitat Destruction*

Flux is the natural state of the world with changes happening constantly. Minimal impacts are felt by most species when these changes occur naturally at a gradual pace. However, when radical changes happen at a fast rate, disaster may occur. With no time to react, a species will most likely die out. Of course, when looking

*An Overdeveloped Canopy of Bureaucracy* – a bureaucracy always inflicts some cost to democracy, but this cost may be usually borne insofar as it makes social order and the rule of law possible. However, when growing in soil that has become too rich with economic success, this lethargic canopy may proliferate too far, and become a great deterrent to democracy, blocking light and fresh air. In fact, even when economic growth declines, the branches of this pest may prove too difficult to prune back. Expert in this field, Max Weber (1980) notes the signs of degeneration of this democratic habitat due to this bane: when a vertical hierarchy becomes too chaotic; when individuals subvert the spirit of the law for personal gain; when officials try to avoid accountability and seek anonymity by avoiding documentation of their procedures; and especially when nepotism, patronage, corruption and political infighting counter the rules of election, recruitment and promotion. These factors have a gradual strangling effect, first on *Democra representae* who may see the political environs as a dark swamp that cannot be cut back by a single vote. Even in areas where the *Democra participatorsis* may usually dig in and survive – the municipal level – this overarching entity may take over.

*Economic Erosion of Social Living* – Naturalist Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) remarks that *democra's* host (the *homo sapien*) is, by nature, a self-centred creature. This runs contrary to the *democra* genus which needs a certain amount of restraint, trust and self-discipline on the part of the host for it to thrive. To make a productive symbiosis, therefore, an environment must be created whereby social living is seen by the host as an integral part of their existence. This allows the acceptance of things non-proximate or unfamiliar that, as isolated individuals, they would naturally reject. In the West, today, the economic situation has perpetuated two myths that severely weaken this relationship. For the *homo sapiens* who have achieved some financial success, the original characteristic of self-centredness emerges and the urge to be involved with a greater circle decreases. The same could be said for those who only find sporadic employment. They feel abandoned by their fellow creatures and, as Milner (2005) baldly states: “these people fail to act as political citizens (vote, or pay any attention to politics) because they have been excluded from social citizenship” (p. 16).

Paralleling the outside system, public schools are not very hospitable incubators for democracy. Beyond the content that is taught about the benefits of the democratic system, the school is set up more as a hierarchical corporation, with the students

having the least say at the bottom and receiving the least information about changes that affect their environment. Sometimes there is some illusion of democracy – teachers giving students choices (do you prefer *this* homework or *that* homework?). But, on the whole, curriculum is dictated by the central power, and rules are made by local authorities. In the past few decades this control has become tighter and tighter in the West – standardized exams are becoming the norm, accountability the watchword. As well, there is a growing sense of competition rather than social living promoted in schools. Once emerging with their diploma, newly minted citizens have become well-trained in the paternalism of the school system and after-school employment alike.

### *Introduction of Exotic Species*

While native species are plants and animals that have developed in a specific biological-geographic landscape for a lengthy period of time and have reached some harmony with its surroundings, exotic species are those that have been introduced by artificial and fast-acting methods. Sometimes they may pose no problem and eventually meld with the territory. In some unfortunate cases, however, these interlopers may have a detrimental effect on the ecology, causing harmful consequences (Kurpis, 2002). *Democra* becomes one of these terribly threatened ‘native’ species when exotic elements are introduced into the community. This is especially true when these intruders contain malignant philosophies masquerading as democracy or, like the pitcher plant, let out the enticing aroma of material benefits.

*The Stranglehold of Media propagansis* – An indispensable form of sustenance for democracy’s survival, the native species *Media jeffersonsis* (first planted in the eighteenth century in North America) sees the journalist as a counterweight to governmental power: reporting *must* stand aside from elite control, and give unbiased, investigative news of the political situation so that citizens may make informed choices. As noted by Noam Chomsky (2002), however, this species has been falling prey to the dreaded predator strain of the *Media* genus, *Media propagansis* that sees journalists as agents and adjuncts of the government. Spreading like a form of kudzu over the past few decades, this has thrived as larger newspapers, television and radio broadcasters in North America have been bought up by large corporations with strong ties to the party in power. It then begins to strangle all forms of media coverage that act as a check on the interest of the corporate elites. This is replaced with illusions which will allow the elite to continue in power. Specifically, a thin epidermis is created to give the appearance of even-handedness (i.e., criticizing the inefficiency of a war) while the tap root still whole-heartedly adopts the ground rules and terminology of the establishment (i.e., does not ask if the war is morally wrong and unjust).

Along with the creation of misinformation, this invasive species may be contributing to the spreading disease of apathy (discussed more fully below). This can be observed in the drastic decline of daily newspaper readership of young demographics compared to that of adults as a whole in *democra* breeding areas.

North American surveys have clearly shown that part of the explanation for youth abstention is the decline in attentiveness to politics as reported in the media (see Bennett, 1998, Milner, 2003). Specifically, a survey of first-year college students found that only 26.7% thought that keeping up to date with political affairs was very important or essential, compared to 57.8% in 1966 (Bronner, 1998).

*Models of Prosperity without Freedom* – Ever since Nixon ‘opened China’ to the West, the assumption has been that economic liberalization would undermine repressive regimes, making it more susceptible to the *democra* genus. Recent events, however, suggest that autocratic countries such as China have learned how to separate economic growth and freedom, enjoying the benefits of the former without any risks of the latter. In fact, it has been argued that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, countries with authoritarian regimes may be more likely to be economically successful at a more rapid pace than democratic countries. The Communist Party of China, which presides over the world’s fastest growing economy, uses this concept today as justification for its authoritarian rule: PM Wen Jiabao stated in the February 2007 issue of the *People’s Daily* (sub-species *Media propagansis pravdaensis*) that economic growth should take precedence over democratic reforms for the foreseeable future (he indicated a possible timeline of 100 years).

How does the young population of China react to this repressive government? In surveying the young urban professionals of Beijing, Chinese resident and reporter for *Time Magazine*, Simon Elegant refers to them as China’s “ME Generation” and describes their philosophy as “self-interested, apolitical pragmatism” (p. 34). The quotations he extrudes from them are telling: “On their wish list, a Nintendo *Wii* comes way ahead of democracy” (p. 35); “There’s nothing we can do about politics, so there’s no point in talking about it or getting involved” (p. 34); “I care about my rights when it comes to the quality of a waitress in a restaurant or a product I buy. But when it comes to democracy, well, that doesn’t play a role in my life” (p. 37). What it shows is that rather than merely existing under oppression, because it brings material benefits, the Chinese youth of today actually prefer it. In fact, one spoke in admonishing terms of the protesters of Tiananmen Square, and stated that the crackdown “certainly was needed” (p. 37). If not, there may have been a counter-reaction and the economic boom may not have happened. As things get materially more prosperous in the “happy” authoritarian state, and as the West’s economic future looks more uncertain, therefore, it would seem that *democra* must work very hard, as Nixon’s experiment begins to have a reverse effect.

### *Overexploitation*

A species that faces overexploitation is one that may become severely endangered or even extinct due to the rate in which the species is being exhausted. Unrestricted whaling for lamp-oil during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an example of *direct* overexploitation. *Indirect* overexploitation can also be of great concern. In these cases, animals and plants are not destroyed for their own material worth, but due to the fact that they are

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getting in the way of profit-making. This technique, informally called ‘shoot, shovel, and shut up’ (Bailey, 2003) is quite common among farmers who find an endangered species on their property.

*Using Democracy’s Name in Vain* – Democratic countries frequently do things for various reasons other than the promotion of its governmental system. They may run low on a fuel source and see plentiful amounts in other locations. They may feel that rather than turning to more expensive alternatives or having to deal through a middle-man, it may be cheaper and easier to simply enter this other country and take what they need. They may also see other countries they believe to be of lesser quality beginning to surpass them economically and militarily. To subordinate them to their former status they will invade and destroy the infrastructure of the ‘inferior’ country.

In these cases, the proper terminology for these incursions would fall under categories such as ‘laziness’, ‘avarice’, or ‘megalomania’. However, these interlopers frequently refer to the genus *democra* in order to explain any action of this sort (as in, ‘making the world safe for...’). This principle of *direct* overexploitation of the term could also work on an individual level. In certain locations, if a citizen says something that may not fit with the official version of how a government should be run, s/he may be accused of being ‘undemocratic’. In both cases, it is hoped by the government that, if used repeatedly, the population will actually believe that these unrelated aggressive techniques are actually forms of *democra*. Instead, the reverse usually happens when this term is overexploited – it becomes so watered-down that nobody can spot the real genus any more, and can be easily trodden underfoot through lack of notice.

*The Pursuit of Global Materials* – In *homo sapiens*’ search of profit, *democra* is frequently deemed an inconvenience to progress and done away with by government and individual citizens alike. For example – for forty years, the West fought a pitched battle in the name of *democra representae* against communist countries using the premise that they supported an undemocratic way of life. Recently, however, it seems that the West can turn a blind eye to the worst of undemocratic practices, human rights abuses, suppressions of free speech and religion, as long as it can exploit these undemocratic principles in other countries for material benefit. This overexploitation sets an example for all citizens in the breeding areas of *Democra representae*. While they are taught explicitly that totalitarianism is wrong and democracy is right, the question emerges, “Isn’t it wrong to deal with these countries, then?” The response comes at the tag at the bottom of almost every product they buy. Two problems then emerge. First, democracy becomes compromised and harder to defend by governments and citizens. Second, what form of government will be used after an un-democratic creditor comes to call?

### *Disease*

Finally, a species may fall victim to disease, or the effects of pollution that renders it subject to extinction. This is because a species may not have natural protection



against particular pathogens. Dutch elm disease, for example, has been decimating the elm population of Europe and North America from 1970 to 2000. In the animal kingdom, rabies and canine distemper viruses are presently destroying great numbers of carnivore populations of East Africa. The genus *Democra* is not immune from numerous diseases, as well: corruption, nepotism, oligarchic tendencies have always presented a problem but have been endemic as long as the genus has existed. More worrisome is virulent strains of certain diseases that have strengthened in the last twenty years:

*The pollution of Youth Cynicism* – This seems to form an especially thick pall over the British Isles. The British Electoral Commission recently found that young nonvoters were disproportionately inclined to state that they did not vote because it made little difference who won the election (2002, 18). Similarly, another U.K. survey concluded that “there aren’t enough opportunities for young people .... to influence political parties” (Henn and Weinstein 2003). In this way, based on their feelings of futility and corruption of the system, many youth actively dissent. With the feeling that “politics is something that is done to them, not something they can influence” (O’Toole et al., 2003, 359), many youth find other ways to express themselves politically – through graffiti, protests, and violence.

*The Wasting Sickness of Apathy* – Most dangerous of all causes for endangerment, it is the logical response of youth when all the causes listed above combine together. In his detailed field study of the decline of the *democra* genus in Canada, Milner (2003) describes the situation:

young citizens so inattentive to the political world around them that they lack the minimal knowledge needed to distinguish, and thus to choose, among parties or candidates. Political dropouts are of special concern, because they constitute a growing group among young people in established democracies who, despite being better educated on average, are less attentive to, and thus less informed about, available choices than were young people in earlier generations. (p. 4)

This cannot be confused with cynicism or feelings of alienation. In fact, a number of Canadian surveys show that young respondents are quite satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada, and have the lowest tendency to cite a flaw in the political process as a reason for not voting (Gidengil et al., 2004; Pammett & Leduc, 2003). Put simply, it seems that the present generation of young (potential) voters simply does not care about anything beyond their immediate vision. Milner (2003) explains that it represents

a decline in the sense of civic duty to vote. This declining sense of obligation, when set in the context of a wider generational culture given to political inattentiveness, can transform a provisional act of abstention into a habit of political dropping out. (p. 6)

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Overall, there has been not just been a drop in voting, therefore, but in all aspects related to areas of democratic citizenship and civic literacy. With only 9% of youth thinking voting is a duty, and a great percentage answering that they were “not at all interested in news about the election,” would democracy be enriched by their participation? In comparing the 1956 Gallup Polls to a 2000 Canadian Election Study, Howe (2003) makes the final, gloomy pronouncement:

it is only older Canadians who will vote simply out of duty .... younger Canadians think differently; without some knowledge to make the voting decision comprehensible and meaningful, they prefer to abstain... They know less about politics and... their impoverished knowledge is more likely to affect whether or not they vote. (p. 81)

In this way, the youth of democratic countries seem to be interchangeable with the Chinese youth described above (according to a recent survey, one in five students at New York University would give up their vote in the next US presidential for an iPod, two-thirds for the price of a year's college tuition and half would renounce their vote permanently for a million dollars. (*The Toronto Star*, December 2, 2007, ID1). As the habits of democracy fade with the previous generation, will the next generation have the will to even sign a ballot and keep the democra genus from withering?

#### WAYS TO SAVE THIS ENDANGERED SPECIES

Even though things look grim for the near future, the *democra* genus has proven quite hardy in the most unlikely of habitats. In fact, the more inhospitable the territory, the more starkly its visible signs can be observed. What has to be changed, therefore, is the mentality of young citizens. No longer MUST they be taught the wonders of democracy. They have to be brought to a point where they desperately WANT it to be taught to them, and consider it a key nutrient to their survival. This may be aided by the following five techniques:

##### *Integration Rather than Captive Breeding*

Captive breeding of *Democra representae* has been an ongoing mandate from most Western governments. Copying many attempts by United States and Europe (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta et al., 1999), the Ontario Ministry of Education, for example, has tried to combat its decline by creating a new civics course at the Grade 10 level to deal solely with its study and proliferation. This is a start, in that it allows some interaction with the species. Unfortunately, recent evidence indicates that this kind of arrangement (segregated courses presented in the traditional content-oriented fashion) is not especially appreciated by adolescents. In studies performed in Germany, Holland, the United States and Australia, these ‘one-shot’ courses are seen as the most boring of all school experiences for students, are rarely discussed at home, and have no appreciable affect on youth's perception of democracy and civic

duty (Händle et al., 1999; Hahn, 1998; Civics Expert Group, 1994; Dekker, 1999; Dekker & Portengen, 2000). In less certain terms, the same can be said for Canadian experiments (Hébert, 2002; Chareka & Sears, 2006).

The first step that has to be taken is the realization that captive breeding only has limited success (for an overall discussion, see Deblieu, 1993). The *Democra* genus does not do well in a penned environment of a single public school course devoted to its study. In keeping it in a corral of this sort, students often fail to see the relation to and impact of this species on their lives. As such, democracy must be integrated throughout the curriculum as an underlying philosophy rather than something that should be looked at on Thursday afternoon between dodgeball and calculus. Teachers have to use its methods to teach. Students must work together, debate, vote on how to proceed, dissent, petition and picket if necessary. Most importantly, they must see that the purpose of learning (like democracy) is not to listen and follow an unquestioned lead, but to take part in their own fate.

### *Born to Be Wild*

In Mussolini's Italy, the trains ran on time; Hitler's regime produced the greatest economic revival in Germany's history; In Mao's China, all are 'happy in their work'. On the grounds of efficiency, Democracy cannot hope to compete with totalitarian states. It is, in short, a wild species. There is continual bureaucratic confusion, indecision from leaders, and continual discord is the normal state of things among the voting population. The trouble with those who endeavour to teach democracy is that they try to present it to students as a tamed creature. More often than not, it is demonstrated in history class that it was domesticated generations ago, with only a few tricks taught to it in recent years. It is then laid out upon students' desks to be taken apart for its anatomy to be studied. This will be of little interest to students. Rebelliousness is what they want to observe! Then why not play to democracy's strength? Instead of stressing constitution, history and institutions to the effective exclusion of different party positions on policies and issues, Delli, Carpini and Keeter (1996) point out that courses should be "taught in a realistic manner, introducing students to the conflictual, often unsettling nature of politics" (p. 279). Teachers must be willing to develop opportunities to engage in political realities, including "partisanship, without advancing one side or the other" (Beem 2005, p. 7). In so doing, there cannot be a reliance on textbooks or outdated material. To counteract the effects of the corporate media outside of the classroom, schools must use comparable techniques – the most up-to-date channels of communication, television, the internet, inviting politician to the classroom to engage in discussion, as seen in Sweden, for example (Milner, 2005, p. 12). Similarly, another study found that students who participated in open class discussions and who learn to communicate their opinions through letter-writing and debate were much more active than those who didn't have these experiences (Andolina et al., 2002). The

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key is to get students interested in democracy and to relate to it as part of their own culture and conscience.

#### *Handling the Garden Tools of Democracy*

*Media propagandis* is not going to go away for the foreseeable future. For this reason, it is imperative for young citizens to cut through these strangling vines by acquiring the skills and habits of media literacy (as well as basic literacy): reading newspapers and books, using libraries, deciphering maps, writing letters, detecting bias, and placing television and the internet in context. All should be done with a skeptical eye – not to jaundice the students, but to prepare them for their life as responsible democratic citizens.

#### *Creating a Localized 'Democra' Habitat*

Classroom discussion and debate will still be of limited use if students see nothing in their environment that IS democratic. It has to be MADE immediately important to them. It cannot be done so if democracy is treated as a museum specimen. Like a dinosaur on display – it would have more impact if it were chasing you. For that reason, the school system must undertake reform to encourage more broad-based power sharing among its stakeholders. In so doing, students must be allowed to play a stronger role in the decisions that are made within the school grounds. Created at Summerhill by A.S. Neill (1960) more than two generations ago, school meetings (*Democra athensis*), attended by teachers and students alike, decide general laws and behaviour at the school. In present day, mock-elections have been created. This is a good passion play concerning *Democra representae*, but would there not be more meaning if the students did more than go through the motions to create a system of this sort in their schools? This has been tried in small pockets in Ontario (see Milner, 2005). Perhaps with more responsibility, and seeing the action-reaction of the democratic system, students may become more instilled with the need to preserve this species.

*Sustained use of 'Democra' outside the Hothouse* Once students graduate to become citizens, many believe that they should be pronounced 'full', the learning should end and participation should begin. Unfortunately, learning and participation are seen as mutually exclusive. This divide must end for democracy to flourish: Civic literacy habits and political knowledge should be promoted through educational – as distinguished from training – programs aimed at adults as well as children (Milner, 2003). Sweden, for example, is known for its creation of adult study circles. Politics, in this instance, is discussed from many angles not just from the partisan perspective. This has been promoted in the West (especially Canada) to a certain extent - through Throne Speeches and commission reports (i.e., The Rae Report, 2005). But talk is cheap; organization, infrastructure and maintenance are not.

## CONCLUSION

Of course, this exercise in Linnaean reasoning may be overstating the status of Democracy in the world today with doomsday pronouncements. In fact, many World Wide indicators show that we are, as a whole, much more democratic today than we ever been in any other point in history (*Freedom House' Annual Report, 2007*). In many countries, newfound democratic freedoms are there for a population that reaches out to grasp it. However, I think the more valid point is that, in many established, traditional democracies today, young citizens show a great lack of concern in actively embracing this system. In Canada, the government has tried numerous ways to boost civic interest. Legislation has recently been introduced to boost declining voter turnout such as: setting a fixed election date; extending the hours and number of days of advanced voting; boosting the number of polling stations; extending polling by one hour on election day. Over the past decade, initiatives from a number of public institutions, private foundations and advocacy groups have also won great acclaim for their endeavours to educate the young about democracy, notably CBC's *A People's History*, and the Historica Foundation's *Heritage Minutes*.

Unfortunately, all these conveniences and palatable tales will do nothing to attract voters or participating citizens as long as, underlying this façade, the general population has no emotional, visceral need for understanding or participation. As described by Dekker and Portengen (2000) when discussing social studies:

[It] is a low status area of the school curriculum in many countries. Politics is only one of the subjects in social studies and receives attention for only a small part of the few school hours reserved for the subject. Many social studies teachers do not give priority to political topics [and] have limited political knowledge themselves. (p. 467)

In essence, social studies is not seen as important by students because it is not seen as important by educators. As mentioned earlier, Democracy is messy and, if looked at logically, will not capture students or hard-headed curriculum developers alike. All involved must be drawn to it, fascinated by it, on a gut level. That is how it will prosper. Trying to shove it in as something to be memorized in an already crowded school day – then democracy will soon go the way of the dodo.

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