

Document A: Pericles (Modified)

The following excerpt is from a speech known as “The Funeral Oration,” delivered by the Athenian general and politician Pericles in 431 BCE. Pericles was widely seen as the leader of Athens. He gave this speech during a funeral for Athenian soldiers who died in the first year of the brutal Peloponnesian War against Sparta, Athens’s chief rival. The Athenian historian Thucydides included the speech in his book the History of the Peloponnesian War. Historians are not sure when Thucydides wrote down the speech or how close his version was to the original.

Our constitution favors the many instead of the few. This is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they give equal justice to all. Advancement in public life falls to one’s reputation for good work. **Social class** is not allowed to interfere with someone’s **merit**, and poverty does not block the way. If a man is able to serve the state, he is not stopped by the **obscurity** of his condition.

The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from being jealous of each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes. But all this ease in our private lives does not make us lawless as citizens. Fear is our chief protection against this, teaching us to obey the **magistrates** and the laws.

Source: Thucydides (c. 460-395 BCE), “Pericles’s Funeral Oration,” in The History of the Peloponnesian War.

Vocabulary

social class: someone’s position in society

merit: talent, skills, or qualifications

obscurity: unknown or unimportant

magistrates: government officials