

Democracy is for me, and for 12 million black Americans, a goal towards which our nation is marching. It is a dream and an ideal in whose ultimate realization we have a deep and abiding faith. For me, it is based on Christianity, in which we confidently entrust our destiny as a people. Under God's guidance in this great democracy, we are rising out of the darkness of slavery into the light of freedom. Here my race has been afforded [the] opportunity to advance from a people 80 percent illiterate to a people 80 percent literate; from abject poverty to the ownership and operation of a million farms and 750,000 homes; from total disfranchisement to participation in government; from the status of chattels to recognized contributors to the American culture.

As we have been extended a measure of democracy, we have brought to the nation rich gifts. We have helped to build America with our labor, strengthened it with our faith and enriched it with our song. We have given you Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, Marian Anderson and George Washington Carver. But even these are only the first fruits of a rich harvest, which will be reaped when new and wider fields are opened to us.

The democratic doors of equal opportunity have not been opened wide to Negroes. In the Deep South, Negro youth is offered only one-fifteenth of the educational opportunity of the average American child. The great masses of Negro workers are depressed and unprotected in the lowest levels of agriculture and domestic service, while the black workers in industry are barred from certain unions and generally assigned to the more laborious and poorly paid work. Their housing and living conditions are sordid and unhealthy. They live too often in terror of the lynch mob; are deprived too often of the Constitutional right of suffrage; and are humiliated too often by the denial of civil liberties. We do not believe that justice and common decency will allow these conditions to continue.

Our faith in visions of fundamental change as mutual respect and understanding between our races come in the path of spiritual awakening. Certainly there have been times when we may have delayed this mutual understanding by being slow to assume a fuller share of our national responsibility because of the denial of full equality. And yet, we have always been loyal when the ideals of American democracy have been attacked. We have given our blood in its defense—from Crispus Attucks on Boston Commons to the battlefields of France. We have fought for the democratic principles of equality under the law, equality of opportunity, equality at the ballot box, for the guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We have fought to preserve one nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Yes, we have fought for America with all her imperfections, not so much for what she is, but for what we know she can be.

Perhaps the greatest battle is before us, the fight for a new America: fearless, free, united, morally re-armed, in which 12 million Negroes, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow Americans, will strive that this nation under God will have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, for the people and by the people shall not perish from the earth. This dream, this idea, this aspiration, this is what American democracy means to me.

Mary McLeod Bethune, African American educator and civil rights activist
"What Does American Democracy Mean to Me"
November 23, 1939

AMERICAN politics might appear polarized along a red-blue divide, but the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements are claiming to do the same thing: defend the real majority against the powerful elites and vocal interest groups that control the political system. Conservatives in the Tea Party attack big government and rally behind the slogan “Silent Majority No More!” Progressives in Occupy Wall Street denounce big business and embrace the manifesto “We Are the 99 Percent.”

On both the right and the left, strategists want to mobilize the elusive group of voters that Richard M. Nixon first labeled the “great silent majority” during a speech about the Vietnam War on Nov. 3, 1969. With one rhetorical stroke, Nixon identified a new populist category that redefined how political groups strive for influence.

At the time, polls revealed that two-thirds of Americans hoped the conflict would end quickly but simultaneously opposed antiwar demonstrations. Nixon called for unity on the home front and asked patriotic Americans to speak out against efforts by a “vocal minority” to defeat the United States. Tens of thousands of letters from self-identified members of the silent majority poured into the White House.

Nixon’s conservative populism attempted to obscure the differences between working-class and affluent voters by portraying the silent majority as both heroes and victims of this tumultuous period. In the 1968 campaign, Nixon praised the “forgotten Americans, the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators” — hard-working, tax-paying Americans whose values were under siege by antiwar protesters, urban rioters, criminals and antipoverty liberals. (...)

Nixon’s landslide reelection obscured the class and ideological divisions within his fabled silent majority. Faced with a weakening economy, Nixon portrayed Democrats as the party of racial quotas, busing, urban welfare and weakness on foreign policy. After the election, internal memos circulated by Nixon’s political team acknowledged that he had won by mobilizing a “nonpartisan” majority against liberalism rather than by creating a cohesive Republican coalition. The point person for the blue-collar strategy even warned of a fierce reaction if the administration betrayed middle-income voters by returning to “big-business-dominated Republicanism.”

The legacies of Nixon’s pursuit of the silent majority can be found across the political spectrum. In 1972, the community organizer Saul Alinsky portrayed the silent majority as “up for grabs” and promised to “show the middle class their real enemies: the corporate power elite that runs and ruins the country.” In 1980, the Religious Right televangelist Jerry Falwell proclaimed that “God is calling millions of Americans in the so-often silent majority to join in the moral-majority crusade to turn America around.” In his 1981 inaugural, Ronald Reagan updated Nixon’s formula by informing the “heroes” of America — an allegedly classless majority made up of factory workers and entrepreneurs — that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”

The Democrats regained the White House only by combining Nixon’s populist outreach to the silent majority with assurances that government intervention could address economic malaise. Bill Clinton promised to listen to the “quiet, troubled voice of the forgotten middle class,” while Barack Obama said that they had “a right to be frustrated because they’ve been ignored.”

Mr. Obama’s challenge in 2012 is not the ideological fervor of Tea Party conservatives, but rather the recognition by many working-class and middle-class voters that both parties favor Wall Street over Main Street. While activist groups on the right and left compete to portray big government or big business as the enemy, the silent majority is still out there in the volatile political center, up for grabs.

“Who speaks for the silent majority?” (op-ed)
Matthew Lassiter, *New York Times*, November 2, 2011

1 I have only to mention the handicaps from which our efforts during the past year have suffered, and the setback, on which I shall say some words, the setback which social progress has received from the protracted dispute in the coal industry and from the upheaval caused by the General Strike. (...) Since the Great War no such threat has been made to the British
5 community. Nor did the war itself threaten in the same way the institutions upon which the life of our Commonwealth is based. There are those of its apologists who would have us believe that this was a strike like any other strike, having economic ends in view; as if, indeed, the stoppage of a nation's life and the dislocation of its industry would add one penny to the miners' wages if that strike had lasted to the crack of doom.

10 But whatever may be urged on behalf of the economic character, the logic of that strike is plain. Had it been successful, it would have over-ridden the constituted Government of the country, and the will of the community as there represented, and brought to an end our Parliamentary institutions. It so happens that the people of this country are profoundly attached to their
15 Parliamentary institutions - institutions which are the very child of the nation. When Kings came into collision with Parliament, it was the Kings who felt the shock and not Parliament. The genius of Oliver Cromwell only made a fugitive indent in the system, which he was able to suspend for a short period. He passed, and Parliamentary institutions remained. Can it be thought that the institutions of centuries, which have resisted assault from the highest quarters, assaults from men of genius, are going to fall down and collapse before such an attack as they
20 were subject to last spring?

What at the moment of that crisis was the attitude of the Parliamentary Labour Party, His Majesty's Opposition? There were men among them who, for a space, had formed His Majesty's Government, who had experience of government, the experience of the responsibilities of Parliament to the people, and who had the wit to understand what the
25 challenge meant, the challenge of the General Strike, to Parliamentary institutions. (...) There is a responsibility which rests on His Majesty's Opposition, as the alternative Government of the country, and I am confident that the country has taken note that the leaders of that party raised not a single word in protest in public, whatever their feelings in private, upon this challenge to the State, and at this time of crisis they were unequal to their responsibility. (...)

30 I would say in a few words, and, of course, it will be for posterity to judge, but in my view the General Strike, and very largely the same is true of the coal strike, are the inevitable results of tendencies which appeared in this country before the war, and which have been greatly accelerated by the war and the years of peace. There is a very close parallel between the industrial situation and the situation of Europe before the war. In each case you have the
35 agglomeration of masses of men with that curious mass psychology. You have vast bodies formed on either side in the industrial struggle; and leaders and human nature being what it is, the temptations to try your strength is almost irresistible. Collision is bound to come, the appeal to force rather than the appeal to reason, and the mere massing together of those large bodies leads in the individual to a sense of apathy and to a loss of personal responsibility among the
40 rank and file, and a curious belief that it does not matter what you do, because the Government will always step in and make it right.

Stanley Baldwin, Speech in Scarborough, October 1926.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons,

I am deeply grateful for your Loyal Addresses and for the kind and generous words in which the Lord Chancellor and Mr. Speaker have expressed them. Thank you also for what you have said about my family and the service they have given over the years. You will understand that for me personally their support has been invaluable. It is appropriate that I should come to Westminster at the start of the Jubilee celebrations in the United Kingdom. Here, in a meeting of Sovereign and Parliament, the essence of Constitutional Monarchy is reflected. It is a form of Government in which those who represent the main elements of the community can come together to reconcile conflicting interests and to strive for the hopes and aims we all share. It has adapted itself to the changes in our own society and in international relationships, yet it has remained true to its essential role. It has provided the fabric of good order in society and has been the guardian of the liberties of individual citizens. These 25 years have seen much change for Britain. By virtue of tolerance and understanding, the Empire has evolved into a Commonwealth of 36 Independent Nations spanning the five Continents. No longer an Imperial Power, we have been coming to terms with what this means for ourselves and for our relations with the rest of the world. We have forged new links with other countries and in joining the European Economic Communities we have taken what is perhaps one of the most significant decisions during my reign. At home there are greater opportunities for all sorts and conditions of men and women. Developments in science, technology and in medicine have improved the quality and comfort of life and, of course, there has also been television! We in Government and Parliament have to accept the challenges which this progress imposes on us. And they are considerable. The problems of progress, the complexities of modern administration, the feeling that Metropolitan Government is too remote from the lives of ordinary men and women, these among other things have helped to revive an awareness of historic national identities in these Islands. They provide the background for the continuing and keen discussion of proposals for devolution to Scotland and Wales within the United Kingdom. I number Kings and Queens of England and of Scotland, and Princes of Wales among my ancestors and so I can readily understand these aspirations. But I cannot forget that I was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Perhaps this Jubilee is a time to remind ourselves of the benefits which union has conferred, at home and in our international dealings, on the inhabitants of all parts of this United Kingdom. A Jubilee is also a time to look forward! We should certainly do this with determination and I believe we can also do so with hope. We have so many advantages, the basic stability of our institutions, our traditions of public service and concern for others, our family life and, above all, the freedom which you and your predecessors in Parliament have, through the ages, so fearlessly upheld. My Lords, Members of the House of Commons. For me the 25th anniversary of my Accession is a moving occasion. It is also, I hope, for all of us a joyous one. May it also be a time in which we can all draw closer together. Thank you again! I begin these celebrations much encouraged by your good wishes and expressions of loyalty.

On 4 May 1977, The Queen replied to an address from both Houses of Parliament.