

The reading “Living Democracy” by Moore Lappé and Paul Martin DuBois (edited by Tom Atlee) presents an ideal vision of democracy being used as more than a political institution, but rather as a way of life. I found myself agreeing with what the authors had presented, an entirely democratic society where citizens utilize the government to their own advantage, akin to John Locke’s idea of the social contract between a government and its citizens. One quote that I felt was central to the main concept of Lappé and DuBois’s vision was, “Today's problems cannot be solved without the involvement of the people most directly affected.” This core tenet of a living democracy is one that is slowly making a comeback in American society after having been lost for a few decades.

Civic engagement has always been an issue in the United States, especially in recent years due to a perceived disconnect between the government and its citizens. However, current events, sparked by the tragic murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, have created a new interest in our country’s government and its many functions that have been left unchecked by citizens who had left their trust and power in the hands of elected officials. Civic engagement also needs to be made more accessible to citizens of the United States because many groups across the country are often left out, whether it be due to geographic reasons, financial reasons etc. While it may still take time to fundamentally change how power is viewed in American society, the citizens have started to take action towards a better future. Lappé and DuBois offer a changed vision of power and how an active citizenry must realize that power is force of good. However, this dependency on elected officials is not one that can be easily resolved, especially in an election year. I don’t want to come off as pessimistic; however, I believe that after the 2020 elections, especially if Biden wins, a complacent public may very well take back the reins of society.

This reading also emphasizes the importance of open and honest public dialogue. This is, in my opinion, the single most important point of the text. By merely listening to what the other side has to say, one can learn a lot. Democracy is not a competition, but rather a group project, so communication is extremely important in making sure everyone is on the same page. Yes, a living democracy allows for various opinions, but it also calls for understanding a range of views and their reasoning. Unfortunately, partisan politics in our polarized country have negatively impacted the availability of productive public dialogue. In order to properly facilitate nationwide change, both of our major political parties must genuinely listen to each other, and understand rather than simply demonizing each other. The best way to achieve this is to have an active citizenry which truly holds its government accountable.

My only critique of this reading would be the table attached at the end, which has quite biased language. I think the table has valid critiques of formal democracy and moral community, but could have articulated those critiques in more neutral language as neither of those systems of

democracy are inherently bad. Other than that, I think this was a well written article that shows an America which can be achieved by taking the public out of their comfort zone. When democracy is an institution provided for by a founding document written over two centuries ago, the public becomes comfortable and takes the many privileges afforded to them for granted. For real change and to properly build upon the foundation given to us, we must embrace a living democracy and dust off the cobwebs of complacency that have been spun over the last 200 years.