

"Pericles' Funeral Oration," in Thucydides (c.460/455-c.399 BCE), Peloponnesian War
(Book 2.34-46)
Triremes Inquiry Unit



"This famous speech was given by the Athenian leader Pericles after the first battles of the Peloponnesian war. Funerals after such battles were public rituals and Pericles used the occasion to make a classic statement of the value of democracy."
Paul Halsall, August 2000.

Visit the source: [Fordham University Internet Ancient History Sourcebook](https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.asp)

Excerpt:

"Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if no social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace."

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