

Democracy: 'Heroic Possibilities and its Sorry Achievements'

Primaries, sound bites and New Democracy

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Democracy is a funny thing.

From the early days of the Roman Senate to the modern days of Capitol Hill, there has always been a constant battle between the idealism and cynicism that people associate with the political process.

Early 20th-century essayist Agnes Repplier said it best: "Democracy forever teases us with the contrast between its ideals and its realities, between its heroic possibilities and its sorry achievements."

Still, despite the quandary of our government, now is not the time to retire to the hills in obscurity, cut all ties to the modern world, or, the oft-quoted plan B, "Move to Canada."

The political process has simultaneously become so vilified and caricatured that for the modern citizen, it's easier to mock and resent the system than to become involved and change it. It's easy, at times, to think of the government as an all-powerful, tyrannical force. And yet, throughout world history, the people have overcome these dictatorships, and the dictators find themselves facing the business end of a guillotine's blade. When the people want something, they get it, and the upcoming election is the perfect way to demonstrate what you want.

No matter who survives the primary battle royale on Super Tuesday, I assume that I will be voting Democrat in November, not because I agree with every campaign promise, but because I am honestly scared of the entire Republican corner. While the November election has the tendency to polarize the nation between the blue and the red, the primary process has the power to give voters a better choice.

Primaries are your chance for idealism, before the heroic possibilities fade into November pragmatism and another boxing match between the ass and the elephant. Go out, vote your mind and your heart and take a stand for the candidates who have not been embraced by the mainstream media.

The media also has a tendency to boil things down to such a level that most people only know their candidates by stereotypes and sound bites. How did Barack Obama become the "candidate of change," while Hillary Clinton remains associated with the "failed" policies, the sorry achievements, of the last 232 years of American government? How much does the average voter really know about the Clinton health care plan, or the Obama energy plan, or the Kucinich "Department of Peace"?

Idealism does not need to end, and we do not need to settle for the lesser of two evils.

Write to your candidates, call your Congress members and tell them who you want, what you want, and why. In the end, your vote put them there, and your vote can kick them out. Demand something from Column A and from Column B. If our candidates are too proud to admit that their rivals have something correct, then they are not the candidates for us.

We are on the cusp of a mighty power and a mighty decision. For many of us, it is our first chance to vote in a presidential election, and it is a power that we have fought bitterly for. As our parents begin to collect Social Security and we take over as the leaders of this potentially great nation, it is our job to do our research, know the issues, and vote with our hearts.

There is no such thing as a "candidate of change." It is the responsibility of the candidates to represent us, and it is our responsibility to make them.

Peace Negotiations Sour in the Philippines

Central Philippine government struggles with Islamic fundamentalist separatists

Sheli DeNola
World/National Reporter

The battle for the Philippines rages on as negotiations between the Philippine government and Islamic fundamentalist forces have faltered in past weeks.

Since it received independence from the United States in 1946, the Philippines has been a divided nation. Communist insurgents have been ruling the north, the middle of the country by the central government in Luzon, and the south by the Muslim separatist movement. Both northern and southern factions have been in constant conflict with the authorized Philippine government.

"With the decentralization of [the government's] power, a lot of local governments have come under insurgents' power. There's a lot of speculation on whether her government will survive."

these small numbers [of extremists]. On the other hand, they have also been trying to identify with more moderate elements that can be negotiated with. The aftermath of 9/11 gave the government a much stronger mandate publicly to do what was needed, and with the complete support of U.S. the threat of force is always on the table."

Kent Eaton also spoke about the need for economic reform in the country.

"Arroyo [current president of the Philippines] is a member of the huge land holding class, who do not redistribute economic wealth. It's upsetting that the president is part of this regime. Corazon Aquino is really admirable, but she's

Kent Eaton,
professor of politics at UC Santa Cruz

"Both of these insurgencies are decades in the making," said Kent Eaton, a UCSC professor of politics who specializes in international relations and the Philippines. "With the decentralization of [the government's] power, a lot of local governments have come under insurgent's power. There's a lot of speculation on whether [the new] government will survive."

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has sought an independent Islamic state since the 1970s. However, it has only recently become radicalized. In 2000 and 2001 the MILF broadened its military tactics with increased kidnapping and murders.

John Ciorciari of the H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University commented on the Philippines government's approach to dealing with the growing Muslim insurrection.

"They've tried to pick the most radical elements and fight them with guerrilla warfare," Ciorciari said. "After 9/11 the Philippine government invited [the United States] back in smaller numbers. They are trying to kill off or capture

also a member of this elite who is against economic reform."

Corazon Aquino is Undersecretary of the Department of Trade and Industry. A former president, Aquino has been instrumental in the economic reformation of the Philippines, but the wealth has not been distributed throughout the country, most of it remaining in the hands of the wealthy. Politically, this has further alienated the desperate factions.

Evantoniette Mayol grew up in the Southern province of Mindanao. Mayol moved to the U.S. in 2001 and is now a full time nursing student.

"You can't make enough money there," Mayol said. "It's hard to trust the government with so much corruption. The government and politicians need to change — the corruption is rampant. There has to be some honesty."

With no end of the conflict in sight, it remains to be seen if peace is a viable option.

"The MILF had everybody's attention," Ciorciari said. "The perverse effect of terrorism is that it provided a spotlight for the terrorist groups."