Democracy

If one were to look up the definition of “democracy,” one would find it says: government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. Aristote theorized the philosophical meaning of what a democracy was and he believed that the basis of democracy was liberty, and in order to truly have liberty all had to rule and be ruled. Aristotle believed in equal representation in the state. This is something that the residents of the District of Columbia do not have. Residents in D.C. pays taxes to the government, just as other citizens of the United States do, but unlike them do not have a voting voice in Congress. By having a voting voice, congressional representatives are able to bring many opportunities into their areas of representation. Washington, DC does not have this opportunity because it is not represented in the collective voice of national government. Consequently, the absence of opportunities in the District of Columbia makes it vulnerable to crime.

The District of Columbia

Washington D.C. is located between the commonwealth of Virginia and the state of Maryland, directly on the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. The United States Census Bureau estimated the population of the District of Columbia in 2005 at 550,521. During the 1990s, Washington, D.C. was known to many as the “murder capital” with 454 homicides reported in 1993. Murder rates went down considerably to in 2005, when there were 196 reported

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1 Definition of Democracy at Dictionary.com
2 Information was collected at the U.S. Census Bureau website for quick facts which can be found at URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html
homicides. There were also 7467 reported automobiles stolen during 2005, which is not considerably better, but about the average for the last 20 years. The district has a median household income level of $43,215, notable because this average compares to the nationwide average of $43,318. However, the district has 17.5 percent of its population living below poverty levels compared to the national average of 12.5 percent, a difference of 5 percent. On the November 7, 2006 general election, the District of Columbia had 30.90 percent of its voting population turn out to vote, including those who voted by absentee ballots.

Current Legislative Bodies

The District of Columbia Council has thirteen members, who are elected to serve four year terms by the residents of the district. The Council has a role very similar to Congress. It acts as a legislative body. The United States Congress, however, has a veto power over any legislation that passes through the Council. Hence, the Council has very little power. The Council was not created until 1973 when Congress passed the District of Columbia Home Rule Act.

The United States House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the committee where all issues pertaining to congressional action come before. There is a specific

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3 Information was taken from the Metropolitan Police department for the District of Columbia Crime statistic website, this information is compiled from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, this page can be found at URL: http://mpdc.dc.gov/mpdc/cwp/view,a,1239,q,547256,mpdcNav_GID,1556.asp

4 “Ibid”...

5 U.S. Census bureau quick facts: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html

6 “Ibid”

7 This information was taken directly from the District of Columbia Board of Election and Ethics Website with the official Election day results this information can be found at URL: http://www.dcbboee.org/information/elec_2006/general_2006_results.shtm

8 This a Library of Congress data base where Congressional Research Service (CRS) has summarized the orginal text of the legislation from 1973 URL: http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d093:1.:/temp/~bdHrzM-@@@D&summ2=m&/bss/d093query.html|
sub-committee on the Federal Workforce, Post Office and the District, and this is where all of the legislation starts off before it even reaches the full committee. This sub-committee has the most power since it can actually keep things from reaching the full committee for a vote. As of 2007, this sub-committee is chaired by a member of Congress from Illinois and its minority ranking member is from Texas. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the delegate from the District of Columbia, has a seat on this committee and can vote on the committee resolution, but she cannot vote in the House chamber for final passage. She cannot vote even though she is from District of Columbia and she is the only one who has a vested interest in the true well being of the District of Columbia.

In the United States Senate the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs is the full committee that is in charge of dealing with issues pertaining to the District. More specifically, the Sub-Committee on Oversight of Government Management, The Federal Work Force, and the District of Columbia. This Sub-committee is chaired by a senator from Hawaii and the minority ranking member is from Ohio. The committee goes on to list senators from Michigan, Delaware, Arkansas, Virginia, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Alaska. These members are often under the influence of interest groups, yet are expected to do the best thing for a city that has no direct impact on their home states, one being as far away as Alaska. They are supposed to do the best thing for a city that has no direct impact on their getting reelected.

Northern Virginia

Fairfax County
Fairfax County in the Northern Virginia area is directly southwest of Washington D.C., separated by the Potomac River. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 2005 Fairfax County had a population of 1,006,529 people living in the county.\(^9\) In 2005 there were twenty reported murders in all of Fairfax County, up from sixteen in 1993\(^{10}\). There were also 1604 reported automobiles stolen in 2005.\(^{11}\) Fairfax County has a median household income of $82,481 and has only 5.8 percent of the county population living below poverty level.\(^{12}\) During the November 7, 2006 general election, Fairfax County had a 53.81 percent voter turnout.\(^{13}\) Fairfax County is run locally by a board of supervisors that passes local ordinances and approves county staff positions, such as the county police commissioner. The county then has seventeen seats in the Virginia General Assembly. Fairfax County also has two seats in the Virginia State Senate. Fairfax County has two members of Congress who represent the county and is represented in the U.S. Senate by Virginia’s two senators. Fairfax County’s low levels of people living below poverty and low levels of crime are due to many of the job opportunities that representation in state and federal government bring to the area. There are many defense contractor companies that are headquartered in the area, as well as many other small businesses. It is these opportunities that democracy has made viable to the residents by having senior representation on all levels of state and federal legislative bodies.

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\(^9\) Information taken from the U.S. census bureau quick facts on Fairfax County URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/51059.html

\(^{10}\) Information was taken from the Fairfax County crime statistic as reported to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report URL: http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/crime_data2005.htm

\(^{11}\) “Ibid”

\(^{12}\) Taken from Fairfax County quick facts.

\(^{13}\) Information taken from the Virginia Commonwealth board of election results as submitted to the secretary of the State for certification URL: http://www2.sbe.virginia.gov/web_docs/Election/results/2006/Nov/htm/index.htm#011
Arlington County

Arlington County is directly southwest of Washington D.C., located between part of Fairfax County and the District. It is the home of the Pentagon, headquarters for the U.S. military. In 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that Arlington County had a population of 195,965 people. 14 In 2005, there were five reported homicides, up from four in 1993.15 There were also 419 automobiles stolen in 2005, down from 1126 in 1993.16 In Arlington County, the median household income is $66,943 and the county has 7.4 percent of the population living below poverty level.17 In the November 7, 2006 general election, Arlington County saw a 53.70 percent voter turnout. 18 The county is run by a County Board that has five members who are all elected at-large for staggered four-year terms. The county has four delegates in the State House of Delegates and two state senators. Arlington has one member of Congress in the U.S. House and is represented in the U.S. Senate by Virginia’s two senators. As is the case in Fairfax County, there are many opportunities that are available in Arlington county residents. Surprisingly, however, there is less crime in Arlington than in Fairfax, although Arlington County is closer in proximity to the city line around the District of Columbia.

Maryland

Prince George’s County

14 U.S. Census bureau quick facts for Arlington County URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/51013.html
16 “Ibid”
17 U.S. census bureau quick fact on Arlington county URL listed above.
18 Information taken from the Virginia Commonwealth Board of elections results URL: http://www2.sbe.virginia.gov/web_docs/Election/results/2006/Nov/htm/index.htm#008
Prince George’s County is in the state of Maryland and is located north, east and south of Washington D.C. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2005 that the county has 846,123 people living there. In 2005, there were 152 reported homicides and 15,188 automobiles stolen. The median household income in the county is $53,659 and has 9.4 percent of the population living below poverty level. During the November 7, 2006 general election, Prince George’s County had a 47.80 percent voter turnout. The county is run by a County Council that has nine members and acts as the legislative branch. There is a county executive who is the head of the county executive branch. These branches are also joined by a third judicial branch for the county. They all deal with local issues pertaining to county ordinances. The county is represented in the state house by 28 seats and in the state senate by 8 seats. They have three seats in the U.S. house and are represented also by the two Maryland senators in the U.S. senate. Prince George’s County almost completely surrounds the district, and it is where you can very stark changes in the levels of crime and poverty levels between the county and the district, this is a direct result of the failure of democracy due to the lack of representation.

City of Baltimore

19 Quick facts for Prince George’s County Maryland URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.html
21 Information taken from the U.S. Census bureau quick facts URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.html
22 Information found at the State of Maryland board of election of certified results URL: http://www.elections.state.md.us/elections/2006/turnout/general/county-wide.html
Located approximately 35 miles northeast of Washington D.C., it is the largest city in Maryland, with an estimated population of 628,670.\textsuperscript{23} In 2005, the city of Baltimore had 40 reported homicides and 2,953 stolen automobile.\textsuperscript{24} The median household income level is $30,078, and 22.9 percent of the population is living below poverty level.\textsuperscript{25} During the November 7, 2006 general election, Baltimore reported a 47.10 percent turnout.\textsuperscript{26} The city is run by a council of fourteen council members, who are elected from districts throughout the city. The city has three congressional seats in Congress that make up for parts of the city, which is proportionately high since there are only a total of eight seats for the entire state.

**Conclusion**

The meaning of what a democracy is has been a philosophical topic for over two thousand years, but Aristotle in the Politics says it best:

“Such being our foundation and such the principle from which we start, the characteristics of democracy are as follows—the election of officers by all out of all; and that all should rule over each, and each in turn over all; ...”\textsuperscript{27} “The basis of a democratic state is liberty... One Principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn and indeed democratic justice is the application of numerical not proportionate equality: ...”\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{23} Information on population taken from U.S. Census Bureau quick facts on the city of Baltimore URL: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/2404000.html
\item\textsuperscript{24} Information taken from the City of Baltimore police force crime statistics URL: http://resources.co.ba.md.us/Documents/Police/2006_pdfsd_pdfs/pd_2005communitystats.pdf
\item\textsuperscript{25} Information taken from the Quick Facts on the city of Baltimore.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Information found at the State of Maryland board of election of certified results URL: http://www.elections.state.md.us/elections/2006/turnout/general/county_wide.html
\item\textsuperscript{27} Passage taken from Terchack, Ronald J. and Thomas C.Conte(eds). *Theories of Democracy: A Reader*. On page 61
\item\textsuperscript{28} “Ibid”
\end{itemize}
If one were to evaluate the state of democracy in the capital of the greatest democracy of the world by the words of one of the early Greek philosophical thinkers on what a democracy is they would find that there is no state of democracy in Washington D.C. If you look at Aristotle’s one line “rule over each, and each in turn over all,” you would see that the District of Columbia gets ruled over, but never has the right to rule over others in turn. There exists an imbalance of power that does not allow for the citizens of the District of Columbia to have a voice, which is an essential component to living in a fully functional democracy.

Americans, by and large, believe democracy is the gateway to freedom, where one man can live his life as he wishes. The spreading of democratic principles, so deeply embraced by the citizens of the United States, has been the justification for supporting many wars. American have largely made it their goal to bring democracy to other people and in turn to give them freedom and liberty. Yet people turn their backs on citizens of their own country at home. This inconsistency makes one wonder whether it is democracy that people wish to export to other countries around the world or if there is an ulterior political motive that people shield with the purpose of “bringing democracy to those who are less fortunate.” This behavior would lead one to believe that the strength of our belief in democracy is only as strong our position on a political issue.

Geographically, Washington D.C., Fairfax County, Arlington County, Prince George’s County, and Baltimore City are all within 52 miles of each other and, yet, there are such stark differences in crime, political participation and income, despite their populations being very close in size. The biggest problem in D.C is the crime. Compared to the number of reported homicides Baltimore, a city of similar size, which is located very close to Washington D.C, Baltimore had 156 fewer murders in 2005 than did Washington, D.C. Some people would argue
that it is because Washington D.C has a larger black population and that is why it has many crime problems. This, however, is not true, since Baltimore is a larger city by about 70,000 people and it is 64.1 percent black, while Washington D.C is smaller and is only 52.6 percent black.\(^{29}\) If one was to follow that illogic, it would have had an estimated 246 homicides instead of 40 during 2005. Prince George’s County has a population that is approximately 249,000 more people and has a higher black population with 66.1 percent and has 9.4 percent of its population living below poverty level. Compared to D.C.’s 17.5 percent, that is a difference of 8.1 percent or, measured in people, 44,592 more people living below poverty Washington D.C., the Nation’s capital, than in Baltimore, Maryland. The Federal government defines poverty as a family of four living on or below $18,850 annually.\(^{30}\) In the city of Baltimore, 19.1 percent of its population have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher, while in Washington D.C. 39.1 percent of the population has a bachelor’s degree or higher. Yet there are flagrant differences in ways of life that literally change by which county or city one lives in.

In Greece, when democracy was in its embryonic state, early Athenians knew from the start that one of the most important parts to having a democracy was participation. The Athenians derived the word “Idiot” to describe those who would not participate in their democratic state or Polis as it was known to them.\(^{31}\) When one compares the average voter turnout of the four local areas that surround Washington D.C., one would have an average of 50.60 percent voter turnout during the 2006 general election. Washington D.C. had a 30.90 percent voter turnout for the same election that is a difference of 20.30 percent or in terms of

\(^{29}\) Information on Both Washington D.C. and Baltimore racial make-up taken from the U.S. Census bureau quick facts.

\(^{30}\) Information was taken from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website URL: http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04poverty.shtml

\(^{31}\) Historical meaning of the word Idiot was taken from Dictionary.com section on the encyclopedia or historical meanings. Info can be found at URL: http://www.reference.com/search?q=Idiot
population; it is the difference of 111,755 district residents almost one quarter of the residents living in the city are not participating.

John Stuart Mills’s writes the following about what makes for the ideal government in an analysis of a democratic form of represented government:

“From these accumulated considerations it is evident, that the only government which can fully satisfy all exigencies of the social state, is one in which the whole people participate; that any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful; that the participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow; and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable, then the admission of all to show a share in the sovereign power of the state. ””...participating personally is any but some very minor portions of public business, it follows that the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative.”32.

Washington D.C. is the capital of the greatest democracy in history, yet less than one-third of its population participate in elections, and even when they do vote, it is not people from within the community who have the power to make the decisions to make a difference in the community.

Can there be democracy in a place where there is no direct representation in a state or federal legislative body? Participation is what is essential to direct representation and there is no participation because there is no representation. Representation is the most essential part of a working democracy and the absence of it leads one to believe that there is no democracy. Who is paying the price for this lack of representation and in turn a failure of democracy? The everyday citizens and members of the population who live under it are paying the price. These

32 Taken from Terchack, Ronald J. and Thomas C.Conte(eds). Theories of Democracy: A Reader. Page 46 on John Stuart Mills, Selection from Consideration on representative government(1861)
people are denied opportunities by the absence of voice in a legislative branch. It is the legislators who bring state money into areas so that problems, like crime, are reduced and so that job opportunities become available. It is this that Washington D.C. is lacking. If Washington D.C. had a legislature and federal representatives the same way that the surrounding areas have, it would offer more jobs, so that people did not feel as though they had to resort to crime, and it would encourage the most important characteristic of a representative government: participation.

Will there ever be a true state of democracy in the District of Columbia? There have been many half-hearted attempts give the District of Columbia there the right to have a vote in Congress. However, this has always been rejected due to political partisanship. Nevertheless, since there was a change of leadership in Congress following the 2006 general election that brought in a new House of Representatives and a new one-third of the Senate, there is a chance that the District will get a vote in the house. On March 9, 2007 H.R. 1433 “District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007” was introduced in the House of Representatives and is still up for debate. It is looking highly likely that since there has been a change to the political composition of Congress and some partisans negotiating that would bring another congressional seat to Utah that this bill will pass. In the bill H.R. 1433 Congress started out with a section called finding as they very commonly due and it stated:

“Congress finds as follows:

33 The passage of this bill that would give Washington D.C. finally a vote in Congress would bring another quagmire to the state of Democracy in the United States by giving the citizens of Utah two votes in congress while everyone else has one, this was included to garner more support by those in congress from those who care more about partisanship than the current state of democracy.
(1) Over half a million people living in the District of Columbia, the capital of our democratic Nation, lack direct voting representation in the United States Senate and House of Representatives.

(2) District of Columbia residents have fought and died to defend our democracy in every war since the War of Independence.

(3) District of Columbia residents pay billions of dollars in Federal taxes each year.

(4) Our Nation is founded on the principles of ‘one person, one vote’ and ‘government by the consent of the governed’.”  

Since some in Congress have finally publically stated that “one person, one vote,” it is likely that the District of Columbia will soon get its representation in Congress and it will bring about a healthier state of democracy that would encourage participation. The move to encourage participation would go a long way in lowering the crime since it would bring about a united interest among the residents to be heard as one, just as everyone else in the country enjoys. The residents of Washington, DC do believe that there is a problem, which is why they are trying to so hard to get a voice in Congress and eventually they will succeed.

In 20 years, the citizens of the District of Columbia will have a voice in Congress and it will begin to bring them more job opportunities and it will encourage more participation through that it will bring about a lower levels of crime. Congress sees that these citizens have fought for

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34 This was taken directly from the text of H.R. 1433 as it was introduced to the full U.S. House of Representatives on March 9, 2007 this bill can be found at URL: http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c110:3./temp/~c110gIIW9Y::
liberty just like any other citizen in any other state and they will begin to share in the benefits of living in a healthy democracy.