

PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION

EXTENSION / HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

PART OF PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION

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 ...

We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it. Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and, instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. ...

In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas, while I doubt if the world can produce a man who, where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian. And that this is no mere boast thrown out for the occasion, but plain matter of fact, the power of the state acquired by these habits proves. For Athens alone of her contemporaries is found when tested to be greater than her reputation, and alone gives no occasion to her assailants to blush at the antagonist by whom they have been worsted, or to her subjects to question her title by merit to rule. Rather, the admiration of the present and succeeding ages will be ours, since we have not left our power without witness, but have shown it by mighty proofs; and far from needing a Homer for our panegyrist [eulogist], or other of his craft whose verses might charm for the moment only for the impression which they gave to melt at the touch of fact, we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for good, have left imperishable monuments behind us. Such is the Athens for which these men, in the assertion of their resolve not to lose her, nobly fought and died; and well may every one of their survivors be ready to suffer in her cause.

➔ SOURCE 12

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War 2.37–41, trans. Richard Crawley (London: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1914).

EXTENSION / HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Is Pericles' characterisation of Athens a fair one? Consider the claims about Athens made in Source 12. Using knowledge gained from the textbook or elsewhere, organise the claims into the following table to indicate whether or not you think each claim is an accurate portrayal of Athens. For each claim, provide examples of aspects of Athenian society or history which support your assessment.

ACTIVITY

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	CLAIM	EXAMPLES SUPPORTING YOUR ASSESSMENT
ACCURATE CLAIMS		
INACCURATE CLAIMS		

CONCLUSION

Overall, do you agree or disagree with Pericles' characterisation of Athens?
