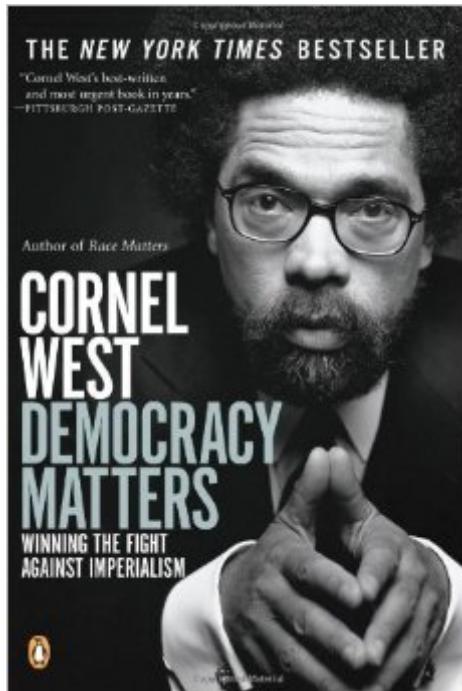


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Democracy Matters: Winning The Fight Against Imperialism



Synopsis

In his major bestseller, *Race Matters*, philosopher Cornel West burst onto the national scene with his searing analysis of the scars of racism in American democracy. *Race Matters* has become a contemporary classic, still in print after ten years, having sold more than four hundred thousand copies. A mesmerizing speaker with a host of fervidly devoted fans, West gives as many as one hundred public lectures a year and appears regularly on radio and television. Praised by *The New York Times* for his "ferocious moral vision" and hailed by *Newsweek* as "an elegant prophet with attitude," he bridges the gap between black and white opinion about the country's problems. In *Democracy Matters*, West returns to the analysis of the arrested development of democracy-both in America and in the crisis-ridden Middle East. In a strikingly original diagnosis, he argues that if America is to become a better steward of democratization around the world, we must first wake up to the long history of imperialist corruption that has plagued our own democracy. Both our failure to foster peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the crisis of Islamist anti-Americanism stem largely from hypocrisies in our dealings with the world. Racism and imperial expansionism have gone hand in hand in our country's inexorable drive toward hegemony, and our current militarism is only the latest expression of that drive. Even as we are shocked by Islamic fundamentalism, our own brand of fundamentalism, which West dubs Constantinian Christianity, has joined forces with imperialist corporate and political elites in an unholy alliance, and four decades after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., insidious racism still inflicts debilitating psychic pain on so many of our citizens. But there is a deep democratic tradition in America of impassioned commitment to the fight against imperialist corruptions-the last great expression of which was the civil rights movement led by Dr. King-and West brings forth the powerful voices of that great democratizing tradition in a brilliant and deeply moving call for the revival of our better democratic nature. His impassioned and provocative argument for the revitalization of America's democracy will reshape the terms of the raging national debate about America's role in today's troubled world.

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Customer Reviews

This book is outstanding. It outlines our anti-democratic conditions permeating American democracy, both domestically and in foreign policy and draws on the deep foundations of democratic traditions needed to draw on to combat what have lost. We have reached a rare fork in the road and it is crucial to draw on such democratic energies. West outlines three antidemocratic dogmas that dominate our current political climate: 1. Free-market fundamentalism, which trivializes the concern of public interest. The overwhelming power and influence of plutocrats and oligarchs in the economy put fear and insecurity in the hearts of anxiety-ridden workers and render money-driven, poll obsessed elected officials deferential to corporate goals of profit often at the cost of the common good. 2. Aggressive militarism. This new U.S. doctrine goes beyond preventive war but puts the green lights on the elites to sacrifice soldiers, mostly of the working and poor classes, fueling a foreign campaign which does away with multilateral decisions to that of unilateral, lone ranger imperialistic colonial invasions, all for the sole benefit of the government regardless of all others and societies. 3. Escalating authoritarianism, which is tightening security in replace of liberty and freedom. The Patriot Act is only the beginning, as we will see escalated censorship and rights removed. In this West brings out three common forms of anti-democratic nihilism: 1. Evangelical nihilism. This is the idea that might makes right, as in Thrasymachus argument in Plato's Republic. The stronger U.S. must use its military power to quiet dissenters. All must obey and submit to our correct interpretations of culture.

It's hard to know what to make of Cornell West, but more so of his detractors. West is a paradox. On one hand, he has held important positions at America's premier teaching institutions, like Harvard. On the other, he eschews the standard forms by which academics hold such position -- by publishing well-researched, highly-referenced works, many of which have little ultimate value. But West prefers sermons to citations and righteous exhortations to references. In "Democracy Matters," the West style is in full flourish. He does not attempt to prove any of his statements, and hardly

provides enough examples for the reader to be absolutely certain what he is referring to. He is a jazz artist of academe - floating serenely above the dull world of strict chord progressions and precisely-executed scales. This is simultaneously his strength and his greatest liability. The man has something to say that the safe, serene world of the academy cannot contain. On the other hand, a little rigor wouldn't hurt his cause. In "Democracy Matters," West preaches a sermon to an America that has become democratically lethargic and is losing interest in the impulses on which it was founded. West pins the blame on a trio of anti-democratic dogmas that underpin how Americans think about themselves and that propel our actions. The trio, (which due to ample repetition makes itself felt throughout the book) are free market fundamentalism, aggressive militarism and escalating authoritarianism. Needless to say, West is no fan of the Bush II administration, and he has little good to say about it adventurism overseas.

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