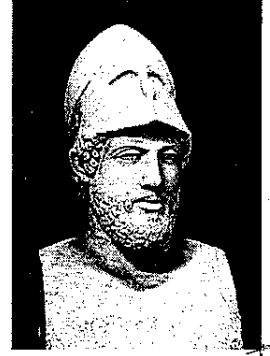


## The Funeral Oration of Pericles

This excerpt from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* records a speech made by the Athenian leader Pericles in honor of those who died fighting for Sparta in the year of the war (431 B.C.). In the speech, Pericles describes the superior qualities of the Athenian Democracy as compared with life in Sparta. This speech is one of the most famous defenses of democracy of all time.



For our government is not copied from those of our neighbors; we are an example to them rather than they to us. Our constitution is named a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our public opinion welcomes and honors talent in every branch of achievement, not for any sectional reason but on grounds of excellence alone. And as we give free play to all in our public life, so we carry the same spirit into our daily relations with one another...

We are lovers of beauty without **extravagance**, and lovers of wisdom without unmanliness. Wealth to us is not mere material for **vainglory** but an opportunity for achievement; and poverty we think it no disgrace to acknowledge but a real **degradation** to make no effort to overcome. Our citizens attend both to public and private duties, and do not allow **absorption** in their own various affairs to interfere with their knowledge of the city's. We differ from other states in regarding the man who holds **aloof** from public life not as 'quiet' but as useless; we decide or debate, carefully and in person, all matters of policy, holding not that words and deeds go ill together but that acts are foredoomed to failure when undertaken undiscussed. For we are noted for being at once adventurous in action and most reflective beforehand. Other men are bold in ignorance, while reflection will stop their onset. But the bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet **notwithstanding** go out to meet it...In a word I claim that our city as a whole is an education to Greece, and that her members yield to none, man by man, for independence of spirit, many-sidedness of **attainment**, and complete self-reliance in limbs and brain.

Terms:

- Extravagance: excess
  - Vainglory: vanity; excessive pride
  - Degradation: decline to a low or demoralized state
  - Absorption: entire occupation of the mind
  - Aloof: removed; distant
  - Notwithstanding: nevertheless; however
  - Attainment: accomplishment
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### Critical Thinking Questions:

1. How does Pericles define democracy? (*Remembering*)
2. What does Pericles say about the laws, public opinion, and public life of Athens? (*Remembering*)
3. Do you think this is a fair form of government? **Why?** (*Evaluating*)
4. Describe a perfect society in the eyes of Pericles. Be sure to include what he views as a perfect government, as well as what people of the society would spend their time doing. Answer in at least five sentences. (*Creating*)