

Say, Mean, Matter: The Hope and Fragility of Democracy in the United States

Directions: Complete the grid below, supporting your ideas with information from the sources on [Handout 1: Sources](#). Use the model in the first row to help you. In the first column, write a short quotation from the text or read the quote provided. In the middle column, rewrite the quotation in your own words. In the third column, write which strand(s) of history you think the quote relates to and why the ideas in the quote matter to you, your community, or the country.

SOURCE 1: Excerpt 1 from “Learning from the Failure of Reconstruction,” the *New Yorker*

Say <i>Write a quotation from the text, or read the quotation that is provided.</i>	Mean <i>Rewrite the quotation in your own words. What does this quotation mean? What makes you say that?</i>	Matter <i>Which strand(s) of history does this quote relate to (democratic or anti-democratic)? Why do the ideas in this quote matter to you, your community, or the country?</i>
<p>“[T]he thousands who stormed the Capitol do not believe in political democracy when they lose. They believe in it when they win, but that’s not democracy.”</p>	<p>The people who broke into the Capitol building were trying to overturn a democratic election because they didn’t like the results.</p>	<p>This quote relates to the anti-democratic strand of history. It matters to the country, because the people who stormed the Capitol wanted to disrupt the government and overturn the election. It matters to me, because the government makes decisions that impact our lives and the government should be accountable to voters, not a mob.</p>
<p>“You have these two themes of American history in juxtaposition [contrast] to each other. That’s my point. And both of them are part of the American tradition, and we have to be aware of both of them, not just the more honorable parts.”</p>		

SOURCE 2: The First South Carolina Legislature After the 1867 Reconstruction Acts (Image)

Note: Since this source is an image, the questions are slightly different than they are for the other sources.

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SOURCE 3: Excerpt from Frederick Douglass, "What the Black Man Wants"

Say <i>Write a quotation from the text, or read the quotation that is provided.</i>	Mean <i>Rewrite the quotation in your own words. What does this quotation mean? What makes you say that?</i>	Matter <i>Which strand(s) of history does this quote relate to (democratic or anti-democratic)? Why do the ideas in this quote matter to you, your community, or the country?</i>

SOURCE 4: South Carolina “Red Shirts” Battle Plan (1876)

Note: This source describes offensive stereotypes and racially-motivated violence.

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SOURCE 5: Excerpt 2 from “Learning from the Failure of Reconstruction,” the *New Yorker*

Say <i>Write a quotation from the text, or read the quotation that is provided.</i>	Mean <i>Rewrite the quotation in your own words. What does this quotation mean? What makes you say that?</i>	Matter <i>Which strand(s) of history does this quote relate to (democratic or anti-democratic)? Why do the ideas in this quote matter to you, your community, or the country?</i>

SOURCE 6: Excerpt from "They always put other barriers in place': how Georgia activists fought off voter suppression," *The Guardian*

Say <i>Write a quotation from the text, or read the quotation that is provided.</i>	Mean <i>Rewrite the quotation in your own words. What does this quotation mean? What makes you say that?</i>	Matter <i>Which strand(s) of history does this quote relate to (democratic or anti-democratic)? Why do the ideas in this quote matter to you, your community, or the country?</i>

Final Reflection: Eric Foner believes: "We teach history, but history is not **determinism [fate]**. We don't have to just relive our history over and over again. It's possible to move beyond it."¹ In light of this quote, and what I have learned about the democratic and anti-democratic strands of US history, I believe:

1. It's my responsibility to learn . . .
2. It's my responsibility to reflect on . . .
3. It's my responsibility to act by . . .

¹ Isaac Chotiner, "[Learning from the Failure of Reconstruction](#)," the *New Yorker*, January 13, 2021. Emphasis added.