



## Democracy - An American Novel

by Henry Adams (1838-1918)

Not until after his death was it revealed that Henry Adams was the anonymous author of *Democracy*, which had been published to great acclaim in 1880. Though the book avoids dates and the characters are fictitious, the setting is no doubt that of Washington in the 1870s, the age of Presidents Grant and Hayes. The young widow, Madeleine Lee, wealthy and independent, is the protagonist, who leaves her New York for Washington to turn her intelligence to politics and to see what makes her country tick. There she meets (among others) Senator Silas P. Ratcliffe of Illinois, one of the most powerful and influential men of the capital, who is considering a run for the presidency, and who needs a wife to act as First Lady, a position that he believes Mrs. Lee would admirably fill. In the novel Adams plays with the themes of political necessity, compromise, corruption -- particularly the kind of corporate domination of national politics that he saw becoming all too powerful. Should honest and intelligent men keep their integrity by avoiding politics? Or would that simply mean turning over the governance of the country to power-hungry, scheming hacks? For all the witty conversations in his novel, this was a theme that plagued Adams (a presidential grandson) in life as well as literature.

**Total running time: 7:16:37**  
**Read by Nicholas Clifford**

Cover design by Kathryn Delaney  
 View of Washington in 1869



DEMOCRACY

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