

Pericles addresses Athenian citizens.

# The Birth of Democracy

In ancient Athens, a leader named Pericles helped create a form of government controlled by the people

## CHARACTERS

Ephialtes (*ef-ee-AL-teez*), a politician

Pericles (*PEHR-uh-kleez*), a politician

\*Crowds 1 & 2, groups of Athenians

Cimon (*KY-mohn*), a military general and wealthy politician

\*Farmer

\*Landlord

\*Soldier

\*Laborer

\*Aristocrat

Narrators A-E

\* Indicates a fictional character. All others were real people.

## PROLOGUE

**Narrator A:** When Americans voted for president in November, ancient Greece was probably the furthest thing from their minds. But without the citizens of Athens, we might not have had democracy, a government run by the people.

**Narrator B:** Athens didn't start out as a model for democracy. At the start of the 5th century B.C., the Athenian government consisted of the Assembly and the Areopagus. The Assembly included thousands

of free men over the age of 18. But only the wealthiest citizens could sit on the Council of the Areopagus. That group of aristocrats could overturn the Assembly's decisions.

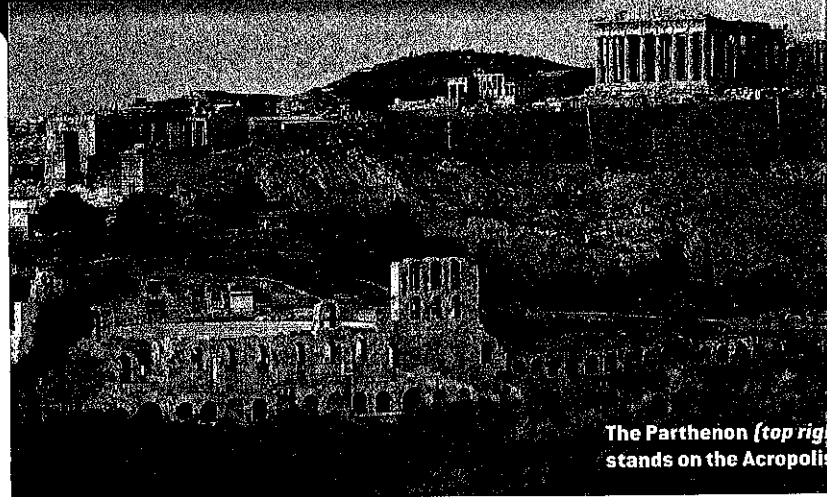
**Narrator C:** One man helped give more power to the common people. His name was Pericles.

## SCENE 1

**Narrator D:** Pericles is born into a leading family around 495 B.C.

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## TIMELINE OF ANCIENT GREECE



The Parthenon (top right) stands on the Acropolis

**Narrator E:** By the time he's 30 years old, Pericles has joined the ongoing debate about who should be represented in government. The **city-state's** most powerful leader is Cimon, a general and a member of the Areopagus. Pericles sides with the democrats, led by Ephialtes.

**Ephialtes:** Pericles, you're a strong public speaker. Let's bring down Cimon and open up the Areopagus.

**Pericles:** With pleasure. It's time ordinary citizens governed our city.

**Narrator A:** Pericles debates Cimon in the Assembly. Thousands of people, including aristocrats, soldiers, farmers, and laborers, fill the hall.

**Pericles:** Why should Cimon and the aristocrats control Athens? They don't protect the interests of the common man. The rich get richer, while you hardworking men struggle to survive. We have to involve regular citizens in government.

**Crowd 1 (pro-Ephialtes):** Down with the aristocrats!

**Cimon:** What does Pericles know about your lives? Haven't many of you dined with me at my home?

**Crowd 2 (pro-Cimon):** You're right!

▲ 5000 B.C. People begin to settle around a limestone hill on the plains of Attica, near the Aegean Sea. The hill will become known as the Acropolis, the religious and military center of ancient Athens.

621 B.C.-508 B.C. In 621 B.C., Draco devises laws for Athens. In 594 B.C., Solon, an official, reforms the laws, which many people see as too harsh. (Today *draconian* means "severe.") In 508, Cleisthenes, Pericles' great uncle, drafts a constitution

**Pericles:** Do you want to feast at Cimon's elegant home? Or do you want to have a say in your government? A handful of privileged men shouldn't have total control.

**Cimon:** Citizens, I have experience as a great military leader. I know how to protect Athens.

**Pericles:** What about protecting

the poor? Cimon has done nothing to help them. Everyone should have a voice, not just the rich.

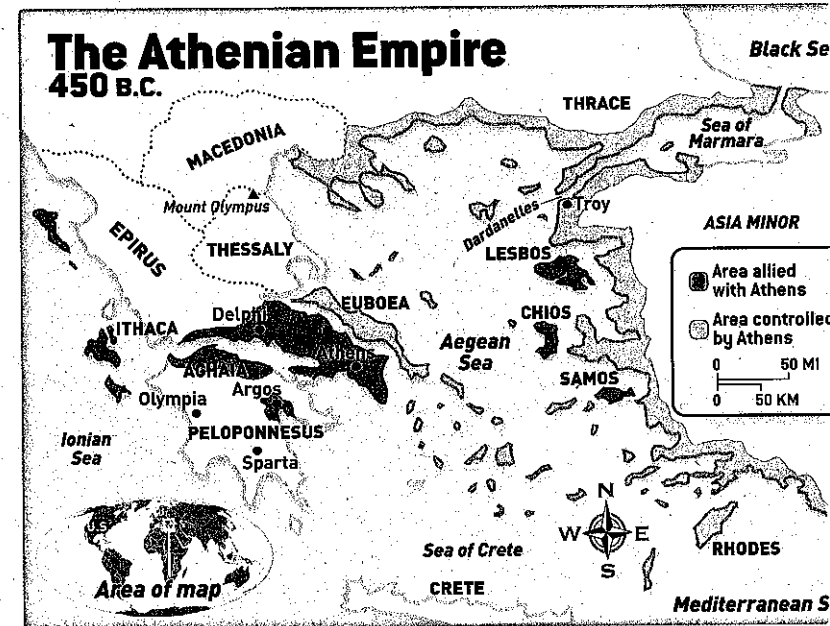
**Narrator B:** Pericles fails to defeat Cimon.

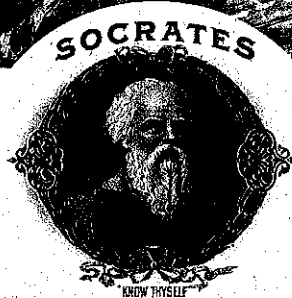
### SCENE 2

**Narrator C:** Meanwhile, daily life goes on. People crowd the market

### WORDS TO KNOW

- **Acropolis** (*n*): the highest hill in Athens and the site of ancient temples and government buildings
- **Areopagus** (*ahr-ee-OP-uh-gus*) (*n*): an Athenian council made up of wealthy citizens
- **aristocrat** (*n*): a member of the upper class
- **city-state** (*n*): an independent state consisting of one city and the region around it
- **ostracize** (*v*): to send into exile (Athenians could vote to exile a person for 10 years by writing his name on a shard of pottery.)





▲ 490 B.C. King Darius of Persia (now Iran) invades Greece. Though outnumbered, Athenians defeat the Persians at the Battle of Marathon (above). Greeks unite and defeat the Persians in 479 B.C.

▲ 480 B.C. The Golden Age of Greece begins around this time. It is characterized by great thinkers like Socrates (the father of philosophy) and dramatists like Sophocles.

431 B.C.-404 B.C. The Peloponnesian War with Sparta is the beginning of the end of Athens's Golden Age. The death of Pericles in 429 B.C. leaves the city without an effective leader.

▲ 338 B.C. King Phillip II of Macedonia defeats Athens and takes control of Greece. His son, Alexander the Great (above), goes on to spread Greek culture throughout the world.

146 B.C. The Roman Empire conquers Greece.

place, arguing about politics.

**Farmer:** I support Pericles. He wants to start paying public officials. That means regular citizens could afford to take part in government. The rich wouldn't be able to control everything anymore.

**Landlord:** But farmers and laborers don't know enough to make important decisions. Pericles would allow the poor and uneducated to overpower the intelligent citizens.

**Soldier:** I can't believe Pericles wants to give more control to the Assembly! What's next? Should we allow women and slaves to vote?

**Laborer:** Pericles will make sure that we're better represented in politics. We deserve a voice too.

### SCENE 3

**Narrator D:** Pericles continues his campaign in the Assembly. Over time, he earns Athenians' respect. In 462 B.C., he and Ephialtes persuade the Assembly to trim the power of the Areopagus. The following year, they convince the

Assembly to **ostracize** Cimon because of his support for Sparta, a rival city-state.

**Farmer:** Cimon has betrayed us!

**Narrator E:** With Cimon in exile, Pericles becomes the most powerful politician in Athens. The Assembly listens eagerly to his ideas.

**Pericles:** Any citizen—regardless of wealth—should be able to hold public office. We should also pay people who serve on juries.

**Narrator A:** At Pericles' urging, the Assembly passes a series of reforms that give citizens more rights.

### SCENE 4

**Narrator B:** As the years pass, Pericles leads Athens into costly wars. Critics question his decisions.

**Aristocrat:** Pericles, you're ruining Athens! We shouldn't invade foreign lands or fight other city-states.

**Pericles:** Friends, you might criticize some of my decisions, but look around. Athens is flourishing. Artists and thinkers flock to our city-state. Instead of arguing, we

must make Athens even greater. Let us beautify the city by building a temple in honor of the goddess Athena. We'll put it on the hilltop of the **Acropolis**. It will be the envy of Greece! Long live Athens!

### EPILOGUE

**Narrator C:** Pericles led Athens for nearly 30 years. During that time, the Assembly gained more political power and a greater number of ordinary citizens were able to take part in the government.

**Narrator D:** Under Pericles' leadership, Athens also achieved success in the arts. Around 447 B.C., Pericles delivered on his plan to build the Parthenon, a huge marble temple in honor of Athena, on the Acropolis.

**Narrator E:** The glory of ancient Athens began to ebb with the long, destructive Peloponnesian War with Sparta (431 B.C.-404 B.C.). Pericles himself died in 429 B.C. But the freedoms he championed were a model for our democracy today.

—Rachel Waugh & Rebecca Zissou