Title: American Democracy in the 1840s-1850s

Narrator: We will resume our study of the evolution of the American democracy with the principal issues of the 1840s and 50s. We have a significant head start, as we have just completed Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. That provides us with a relatively deep and insightful perspective of both the American North and the South in the early 1840s.

In deference to the scope of the course and time available, we will identify the two primary conflicts of the period. The issues were states’ rights (nullification) and slavery. They were based on the differing perspectives of the industrial North versus the agrarian South.

Title: George Fitzhugh

Narrator: George Fitzhugh lived from 1806 to 1881; his principle book was *Cannibals All*. It was published in 1857. Mr. Fitzhugh provided us with the unblemished pre-Civil War view of slavery. He presented a full refutation of classical liberalism. His arguments were based on the natural hierarchy of races and classes, and the role of the state enforcing that order.

Fitzhugh’s central arguments were as follows:
- Those higher in the hierarchy live off the work of those below them
- Those lower in the hierarchy are dependent upon those above
- Thus, there is a mutual dependence
- Stable society is a byproduct of the system
- Society is organic, bound by tradition, and supported by hierarchy
Narrator: George Fitzhugh also made the following points:

- He attacked John Locke, Adam Smith, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson as “all architects of ruin”
- There are no such things as natural rights
- “Society alone defines freedom and the rights it spawns”
- “The sovereignty of the individual, at the core of liberalism, when pressed, destroys order, and with it society”
- Southern slavery is preferable to Northern “wage slavery”

Narrator: John C. Calhoun was a much calmer voice in the debate that involved states’ rights and slavery. He lived from 1782 to 1850. His principle book *Union and Liberty* was published in 1811. While he used more sophisticated arguments, he shared many of Fitzhugh’s beliefs. His desire was to conserve and protect the legacy of slaveholding Southern society. As a U.S. Senator, he proposed a system that he called “concurrent majorities.” Political theorists usually use the term “brokered democracy.” In a brokered democracy, the interests of all major groups must not be steamrolled. Legislatures, then, should act as brokers and all the new laws should be acceptable to all the major social and regional interests.

Narrator: There is no need to introduce Abraham Lincoln; he lived from 1809 until his assassination in 1865. Lincoln’s three primary accomplishments were: first he preserved the union, second he freed the slaves, and third he reconstituted American government.

The short Gettysburg Address is usually considered among the best speeches ever given. In terms of our discussion, the salient point is his focus on the principle that all men are created equal.

The slaves were indeed freed. In some cases by the Emancipation Proclamation, but finally with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. They are worth the time for a detailed review. You may want to
spend some extra time on the 14th Amendment as Article 4 seems relevant in contemporary political discussions.

Lincoln’s reconstitution of America revolved around an enhanced notion of federalism in which the majority rules. He felt that freedom must be nurtured and advanced and that it must rely on equality. Lincoln indicated that “affirmative government action is appropriate in preserving equality.” In a related statement, he indicated that “government is not the enemy of freedom, tyrannical government is.” The Declaration of Independence is Lincoln’s principal base for his focus on rights and equality.

Slide 7
Title: The Decades Following the Civil War

Slide Content:

[Image of a drawing depicting the exterior of two railcars, the one labeled “Car for White Folks” is in excellent condition, the car labeled “Jim Crow Car” is in very poor condition]

Narrator: In terms of social progress, the decades following the civil war were unfortunate. The formally Confederate South gradually retreated into an apartheid-like system. Southern states used black codes that limited the right of blacks and other minorities. The Supreme Court in the following decades clearly deemphasized the protection of individual rights and failed to address related segregation.

With the advent of the 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, the right to vote was extended to women. The definition of “the people” within the term “we the people” was extended to all citizen adults, with the obvious exception of southern blacks and minorities.

Slide 8
Title: The Appropriate Role of Democratic Government

Slide Content:

[Image of a stick figure scratching its head, debating what direction to take]

Narrator: The second great conflict involves the appropriate role of democratic government in finding a correct position between social Darwinism and active liberal federalism, as reflected in the new deal.

Slide 9
Title: William Graham Sumner

Slide Content:

[Portrait of William Graham Sumner from 1902]
Narrator: One of the principal proponents of social Darwinism was William Graham Sumner who lived from 1840 to 1910. His principle book is *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other*. It was published in 1883.

The primary tenants of social Darwinism as expressed by William Graham Sumner are as follows:
- Men are greedy and covetous; they will be selfish and tyrannical if they dare
- The idea or notions of natural rights are rejected
- The essential core of an individual is self-reliance
- Happiness is not guaranteed; it must be earned
- Equality of chances is acceptable
- Government interference of any kind in human competition is wrong:
  - It is immoral as it absolves individuals from their responsibilities for self-improvement
  - It is socially dysfunctional and inefficient; it impedes progress

Slide 10

Title: Herbert Croly

Slide Content:

[Portrait of Herbert Croly from around 1920]

Narrator: Active liberal federalism was best described by Herbert Croly, who lived from 1869 to 1930. His book is titled *The Promise of American Life*. His principle ideas are as follows:
- A substantial satisfaction of economic needs is an essential part of the American ideal. The ability to accommodate those reasonable needs was made more difficult by the end of the frontier
- Jefferson's minimal state liberalism will not work
- The concentration of wealth denies access to economic improvement to most
- The core principle of equality is endangered
- Social Darwinism undermines social and political stability
- Government must pursue policies that address these problems

According to Croly, government should do the following:
- Balance liberty and equality in the interests of all
- Preserve property rights that are earned
- Property rights should not outlast their utility. Inheritance must be limited, and extreme poverty must be addressed

The new deal was principally built around Croly’s concepts. Many of the key components of the new deal were initially rejected by the Supreme Court. However, the court moved significantly to accommodate the Roosevelt administration after his landslide victory in 1936.

Slide 11

Title: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
Narrator: Because of the overwhelming importance of World War II in the progress of American political thought, we are going to discuss a German philosopher named Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who lived from 1772 to 1831. His *Philosophy of History* was published in 1837. The key ideas are as follows:

- Divine providence presides over all events. History is therefore simply a history of God’s interaction with the world
- People are free only if they understand and comply with God’s plan
- God’s plans work only through countries. His will is carried out through the actions of national leaders. God ignores most countries. God selects a few countries through their deserving leaders. The most deserving leaders of the past are: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon. The selected leaders are heroes and are above simple morality

The philosophy provided the ideological underpinning of the Nazi Party and the other fascists. Nationalism is a concept that expresses itself over a wide range of perspectives. Nationalism is a component of the comfortable patriotism that provides a reasonable bond between citizens and their countries. The extreme, ultra nationalist form was used by Nazi and Fascist leaders.

Slide 12

Title: Concluding Thoughts

Narrator: While the issue of slavery has been resolved, the appropriate work of democratic government is still very much in play. This course has provided you with an idea of both of the extremes, and hopefully, provided you with some intellectual tools. In the final analysis, you will need to draw your own conclusions. Political scientists always recommend objective analysis.

Beginning with the next module, we will broaden our perspectives to consider democratic as well as authoritarian governments and institutions in other countries. Put on your traveling shoes.

Slide 13

End of Presentation