



## Democracy: An American Novel

*Henry Adams (1838 - 1918)*

Read by:	Nicholas Clifford	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
Length:	7 hours and 17 minutes	Catalog:	DB-1214
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Genre:	General Fiction, Historical Fiction		

*Democracy: An American Novel* is one of the first novels about political power and how to get it, how to use it, and how to abuse it. When it was published anonymously in 1880 speculation was that it was a joint effort of Clarence King, Henry Adams, John Hay and their spouses, a group who lived side by side in Washington a stone's throw from the White House sometimes referred to as "the Five of Hearts". Only after Henry Adams' passing in 1918 did the public learn he was the author. The book centers on Madeleine Lee, a wealthy New York widow attracted to power who moves to Washington and establishes a popular salon in the eye of the storm. She is courted by two suitors, one an honorable gentleman, the other an ambitious and conniving

politician who ends up in the president's cabinet. The president, a figure from the era of Grant and Hayes, is naïve, incompetent and corrupt. Intrigues, machinations, and deceit abound, posing conundrums of political necessity, compromise and corruption. Along the way we hear witty conversations expounding the prevailing views on the political topics of the times – suffrage, communism, Darwinism, and the destiny of the republic. The book was the source for *Democracy: An American Comedy*, an opera which premiered in Washington in 2005. The book is easily seen as an influence on Empire series of political novels by Gore Vidal and seems surprising contemporary in the present day.

**Henry Brooks Adams** (February 16, 1838 – March 27, 1918) was the grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of John Adams. His mother, Abigail, came from the wealthy Brooks family and his father, Charles Francis Adams, carried the family torch as he served in the US House of Representatives and was appointed by Abraham Lincoln to serve as his Minister, or ambassador, to England during the Civil War, during which time England's sympathies were with the Confederacy. In England he was quite taken with the work of John Stuart Mill, who championed the notion of an enlightened elite to provide leadership to governments elected by the masses and prey to ignorance, demagoguery and corruption. After the war he returned to the United States and settled in Washington, working as a journalist with an interest in rooting out corruption. He was appointed Professor of Medieval History at Harvard in 1870 and returned to Boston. He retired in 1877, settled in Lafayette Square in Washington and worked as a journalist and historian and maintained a lively circle of friendships. After the tragic suicide of his wife Clover he traveled extensively and continued to write and publish, most notably a nine-volume *History of the United States of America (1801 – 1817)*, considered by many to be a "neglected masterpiece", and the novels *Democracy* and *Esther*. He served as president of the American Historical Society in 1894 and pursued a theory of history based on the second law of thermodynamics. His scholarly activities were diminished by a stroke in 1912, but he continued to travel and maintain his many friendships until his death in 1918.