

Progress or Dystopia? A Review of Cornel West's *Democracy Mat- ters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*

By *Tim Novak*

One need look no further than the local bookstore to discern that American democracy, if not in a moment of crisis, is certainly in a state of precipitous decline. Today, titles like *Losing America*, *Running on Empty*, and *The Sorrows of Empire* crowd the shelves, each detailing various stages of America's demise. Certainly, the very nature of democracy produces an invariable procession of self-introspection and doubt. Yet against the backdrop of this "end is nigh" speculation, and barring any immediate catastrophe, it's all too easy to be lulled into a state of bemused indifference. And so we cast aside all the dire warnings, to take blissful comfort in the naive notion that somehow, some way, it will all work itself out. This fact is confirmed by the long-standing American attitude that it alone is singularly exempt from the lessons of history. Regrettably, time and again it is precisely this failure to appreciate the contingent nature

of the historical process that has occasioned the ruin of many once great world powers. For instance, do we really need to be reminded of the fates suffered by the Greeks, Romans, Ottomans, or British? While the sky may not yet be falling on America, the warning signs are clear enough: a political system awash in corruption, an economy headed for bankruptcy, a national defense strategy enfeebled by delusions of empire, a media given over to packaging the news as a kind of ongoing burlesque, and finally a public increasingly becoming numb to it all.

It is for this reason that Cornel West's new volume, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*, is such a significant and timely book. With the stakes so high, the moment has rarely been better suited for the kind of incisive analysis readers have come to expect from the mind of Cornel West. Conceived as a sequel to his classic text,

