

YORK COUNTY COAST STAR

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LETTERS

Opinion/Letter: A reflection on the meaning of democracy

By Robert F. Lyons, Kennebunk

E.B. White, Maine's adopted son, in reply to a request from the Writers' War Board during WWII asking for a statement on "The Meaning of Democracy" wrote:

"It is the line that forms on the right. It is the don't in don't shove. It is the hole in the stuffed shirt through which the sawdust slowly trickles; it is the dent in the high hat. Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. It is the feeling of privacy in the voting booths, the feeling of communion in the libraries, the feeling of vitality everywhere. Democracy is a letter to the editor. Democracy is the score at the beginning of the ninth. It is an idea which hasn't been disproved yet, a song the words of which have not gone bad. It's the mustard on the hot dog and the cream in the rationed coffee. Democracy is a request from a War Board, in the middle of a morning in the middle of a war, wanting to know what democracy is." (The New Yorker, July 3, 1943).

E.B. White wrote this reflection after the United States had joined Britain "to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark lamentable catalogue of human crime" (Winston Churchill, House of Commons, May 13, 1940). FDR thought it brilliant and said: "I LOVE IT!"

The Meaning of Democracy is not found in the sick torrent of lies and incitement by the U.S. chief executive, concluding when a mob smeared blood, excrement, hate and death all over the U.S. Capitol on January 6th.

"What happens to me when I cross the Piscataqua and plunge rapidly into Maine at a cost of seventy-five cents in tolls? I cannot describe it. I do not ordinarily spy a partridge in a pear tree, or three French hens, but I do have the sensation of having received a gift from a true love."
- E.B. White in *Home-Coming*. December 10, 1955,

E.B. White (1899–1985) landed a position with *The New Yorker* magazine in 1927 where he worked for the rest of his career. By the end of the 1930s, White and his family were spending most of their time at his 44 acre farm in Brooklin, Maine on the Blue Hill Peninsula.