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Tocqueville and the American Experiment

Course Guidebook

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William R. Cook was born and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana, and attended public schools there. He is a 1966 graduate of Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana (*cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa). He received Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Lehman fellowships to study medieval history from Cornell University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1971.

In 1970, Dr. Cook was appointed Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo, the honors college of SUNY. He has taught there for 30 years and holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of History. At Geneseo, Dr. Cook has taught courses in medieval and ancient history, the Renaissance and Reformation periods, and the Bible and Christian thought. Recently, he has taught a course on Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as freshman seminars that focus on several aspects of African American history and American politics. In 1992, he was named CASE Professor of the Year for New York State.

After publishing several articles on Hussite theology and monastic thought, Dr. Cook has, for more than 20 years, focused much of his research on St. Francis of Assisi. Since 1989, he has published three books about Francis and the ways he was represented in paintings in Italy. Dr. Cook has also contributed to the *Cambridge Companion to Giotto* and is currently editing (and contributing to) a collection of essays on early Franciscan art and creating a CD-ROM of early Franciscan art for New City Press.

After an unsuccessful run for the U.S. Congress in 1998, Dr. Cook has focused much of his attention on American history and political thought. He has written a history of his county (Livingston County, New York), has co-authored a collection of photographs of his hometown (Geneseo, New York) with a student, and is under contract to do a second photograph book on Dansville, New York, with one of his sons, currently a history major at Wabash College. He is also a weekly columnist for the *Livingston County News*.

In addition to his ongoing research on the Franciscan movement in Italy, Dr. Cook is working with a former student on a study of John C. Spencer and his relationship with Alexis de Tocqueville. Dr. Cook is also writing an article about Frederick Douglass and his trip to Italy in 1888 and has done research on the subject at the Library of Congress.

Dr. Cook has directed 10 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities since 1983; six have had Francis as their subject and have been conducted in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2003, he directed an NEH seminar for college teachers in Italy entitled “St. Francis and the Thirteenth Century.” This seminar will be repeated in the summer of 2005.

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Credits: Quotations provided by the University of Chicago Press. Excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, H. Mansfield and D. Winthrop, trans. (2000).

Tocqueville and the American Experiment

Scope:

It has been claimed that Alexis de Tocqueville wrote the best book ever about democracy and the best book ever about America. Both of those books are his *Democracy in America*, originally published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840. A young French nobleman living in the changed world of post-revolutionary France, Tocqueville believed that democracy was the way of the future and that America was farther along in developing a democratic society than any other nation. Hence, he set off to America in 1831 with his friend Gustave de Beaumont, ostensibly to study the American penitentiary system but primarily to learn about democracy.

Democracy in America was, for Tocqueville, not so much a dispassionate examination of a foreign land or a travel narrative as an attempt to define the essential characteristics of democracy and to guide France as it developed democratic institutions and customs in a setting and with a history far different from America's. Hence, in his book, Tocqueville distinguishes between those elements of American society that are essential to a successful democracy and those that were the results of America's unique history and geography. The result was not only a book that was useful in France and other European nations, but one that is an important analytical tool for Americans to use, even in the 21st century, in order to understand America's past. More important, Tocqueville provides the brilliant observations of an outsider that still allow Americans to understand themselves better for having encountered his writings. Furthermore, in a time when America is encouraging nations around the world to adopt democratic values and is engaged in nation building, Tocqueville can be both a guide and a reminder of the cultural context in which democratic institutions can develop and flourish. His book can be seen both as an inspiration and a warning for Americans of the 21st century.

This course will not attempt to march page by page through the weighty tome of about 700 pages in modern English editions. Instead, we will examine certain themes that play themselves out in the pages of *Democracy in America*. We will examine Tocqueville's thoughts about such "classical" issues as the nature of the judiciary and the role of freedom of the press. We will consider the often-ignored passages about the three races (white, African, and Native American). We will ponder what Tocqueville says about the importance of women in American democracy.

Today, Tocqueville is often referred to in speeches and the popular press. Often, the citations are completely erroneous or so taken out of context that they simply are ways of scoring debating points by having a canonical text on one's side. A serious study of Tocqueville will challenge people anywhere on the political spectrum and will provide insights and ways of questioning what we all too often take for granted in America.

Lecture One

An Overview of *Democracy in America*

Scope: The two volumes of *Democracy in America*, published in France in 1835 and 1840, are today usually bound together as a single volume; Tocqueville himself suggests that they should be considered a single work. Although there are some differences in approach and interpretation between the two volumes that scholars rightly study carefully, we will treat the work as a whole. One could say very broadly that the first volume is more political and the second more about the “mores” of democracy. The purpose of the book is to educate the French about democracy by describing and analyzing how American democracy works and what it embodies. Tocqueville never urges the French to adopt the American form of democracy because he is aware of the different contexts and histories of the United States and France. However, he does try to paint a full picture of American democracy even when there are no French analogues, for example, by discussing the “Indian problem” in America. Finally, we will look briefly at the themes in *Democracy in America* that we will consider in this course.

Outline

- I. A recent scholar claims that *Democracy in America* is the best book ever written about democracy and the best book ever written about America.
 - A. Tocqueville is one of the most cited writers today in the press and in political speeches.
 - B. It appears that Tocqueville is equally revered by conservatives and liberals (for example, both Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich regularly invoked Tocqueville in their speeches).
 - C. Often Tocqueville is misquoted; his best known one-liner, in fact, is not found in his writings but was first written in 1941.
 - D. *Democracy in America* is often known through one-liners, from short snippets in anthologies, or from severely edited versions.

- E. In this course, though hardly exhausting the work or doing a page-by-page analysis, I will draw from the entire work, about 700 pages in modern printed editions.
- II.** There are many profitable ways of reading *Democracy in America*.
- A. Certainly Tocqueville tells us a great deal about what America was like in 1831, the year he visited the country, during Andrew Jackson’s presidency.
 - B. Tocqueville is often regarded as a “prophet,” and indeed, he does make remarkably perceptive comments about America’s future.
 - C. *Democracy in America* can certainly be read as a work of political theory or even as a work of travel literature.
 - D. My primary interest is in studying what Tocqueville has to say about America that may still be of use to people today who seek to understand and guide the American experience.
 - E. For me, *Democracy in America* is a living work.
- III.** It is important to introduce you to how I came to know and love *Democracy in America*, given that I am not an American historian or a political scientist.
- A. I have always been something of a “political junkie” and remember watching on television gavel-to-gavel coverage of the 1952 political conventions when I was 8 years old.
 - B. I am a medieval historian, but I was trained by Brian Tierney, who has made major contributions to the study of Western political institutions.
 - C. Like many liberal arts students, I became acquainted with the writings of Tocqueville in college history and political science courses.
 - D. However, my current interest in Tocqueville stems from 1998, when I was a candidate for Congress in the 27th district of New York (a 120-mile long district that more or less followed the Erie Canal and the New York Thruway between Auburn and Buffalo).
 - 1. As a candidate for Congress, I remembered Tocqueville from college and thought I should reread what this perceptive Frenchman had to say about America.
 - 2. Tocqueville passed through my congressional district, traveling from Auburn to Buffalo.

3. He had some of his most significant learning experiences, as he recorded in his letters and journals, in Auburn, Canandaigua, and Buffalo.
 - E. Since my defeat, I have been teaching an undergraduate course on *Democracy in America*.
 - F. I have been doing research on Tocqueville and John C. Spencer, a man Tocqueville met on his travels in New York.
 1. Tocqueville stayed with Spencer in Canandaigua.
 2. Conversations that Tocqueville had with Spencer were an important part of the Frenchman's education in America.
 3. Spencer became the editor of the first American edition of *Democracy in America*.
- IV. Alexis de Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont arrived in America in May 1831 and remained until February 1832.
- A. They had an official task—to study the new American penitentiaries.
 - B. They traveled throughout the United States.
 - C. Tocqueville wrote a two-volume book about America entitled *Democracy in America* upon his return to France.
- V. There are a few worthwhile generalizations to make about the book at the outset.
- A. Tocqueville as a young man came to the conclusion that the world was inevitably moving toward democracy.
 - B. He saw America as more advanced in its democracy than any other nation on earth.
 - C. He therefore wanted to study America to see what could be learned about democracy that then could be applied to France.
 - D. The book was written for a French audience, and Tocqueville was particularly interested in those facets of American democracy that were useful to France.
 1. Tocqueville makes many direct comparisons between France and America.
 2. He is careful to point out that France cannot simply copy American ways because its history and culture are so different; rather, it is a matter of adaptation and learning from mistakes.

- E. Each volume of *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840) has a somewhat different focus, the first being more political in the narrow sense and the second being more social.
- F. However, the two volumes were perceived by the author as two parts of one whole.
- G. The book is not a chronological account of Tocqueville's journey.
- H. It contains relatively few facts and little information about the origin of particular ideas he presents.
 - 1. If we had to reconstruct Tocqueville's journey only from *Democracy in America*, we would not know about many of the most important experiences or people he encountered there.
 - 2. Fortunately, we have letters and a journal that Tocqueville wrote while in America.
 - 3. I will look briefly at those materials when examining specific issues to illustrate how Tocqueville learned from his experiences in America.
- I. The book is one of generalizations and insights.

VI. Here are a few themes we will return to in the course.

- A. Democracy is the way of the future.
- B. Because of the changes taking place in the world, there is a need for a new political science; *Democracy in America* is meant to be a part of this new political science. America has a unique history and geography, and its form and practice of democracy cannot be imitated.
- C. The essence of democracy is equality.
- D. Democracy depends on broad participation of citizens in public life at the local level.
- E. Equality leads people to withdraw into themselves.
- F. The success of democracy hinges on vibrant local political and social institutions that will limit the centralization of administrative power and encourage people to be active in politics.

Readings:

In this course, we will use the translation by Mansfield and Winthrop. Hence, the following page numbers refer to that translation, although the

sections into which the book is divided are Tocqueville's and, thus, the same in all translations.

Read the editor/translator's introduction to one of the modern translations of *Democracy in America*, for example Mansfield and Winthrop, pp. xvii–xciii.

Read *Democracy in America*, v. 1, Introduction (pp. 3–15).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does it matter that Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* for a French rather than an American audience?
2. What are the possibilities and limitations of trying to apply lessons from an old book to the present?
3. How can Tocqueville today be both a “darling of the right” and a “darling of the left”?

Lecture Two

Alexis de Tocqueville—A Brief Biography

Scope: Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) was a member of the French nobility who was born in Paris during the reign of Napoleon and grew to adulthood in a world all but unrecognizable to his ancestors. As a young man trained in the law, he came to believe that democracy was the way of the future for France and Europe and arranged to come to America in 1831 to examine the most advanced democracy the world had ever seen. The two volumes he published about America (1835 and 1840) made Tocqueville famous in France, and translations soon appeared in England and America. Tocqueville served in the French National Assembly and was briefly France’s foreign minister. His history of the French Revolution is still regarded as a classic. He died at the age of 53. Given that *Democracy in America* was written for French readers, this brief biographical sketch will provide a way of understanding how Tocqueville conceived the purpose and structure of the book.

Outline

- I. Alexis de Tocqueville was from a noble Norman family.
 - A. He was born in 1805 in Paris.
 - B. Tocqueville, the village from which he gets his name, is in Normandy, near the city of Cherbourg.
 - C. His father sympathized with the Revolution but was imprisoned for a time during the Reign of Terror.
- II. Tocqueville’s father was a government official who lived in several different cities as Alexis was growing up.
 - A. Alexis had a tutor and read the classics; he completed his secondary education in Metz.
 - B. In 1824, he went to Paris to study law.
 - C. In these years, he read the 18th-century *philosophes*, including Voltaire and Rousseau.
 - D. During this time, he came to the conclusion that democracy would replace aristocracy everywhere.

- III.** Tocqueville traveled to Italy in 1826, the first of many trips outside France.
- A.** While dreaming on the Capitoline Hill about the great men of ancient Rome, he was awakened by a procession of monks and a cowherd and led to meditate on the fragility of empires.
 - B.** Later in life, in addition to America, Tocqueville traveled to England, Ireland, Germany, Italy (again), Switzerland, and Algeria.
- IV.** In 1827, Tocqueville became a mediator at the court of law in Versailles, an unpaid apprenticeship.
- A.** While in Versailles, he first studied history seriously.
 - B.** He shared an apartment with Gustave de Beaumont, who was three years older and the deputy public prosecutor at the court in Versailles.
 - 1.** They remained lifelong friends.
 - 2.** Beaumont accompanied Tocqueville to America and wrote his own book, the novel *Marie*, based on his experience.
 - 3.** Tocqueville met his future wife, the Englishwoman Mary Mottley.
- V.** The last Bourbon king, Charles X, was overthrown in 1830.
- A.** Tocqueville took an oath of loyalty to the new regime.
 - B.** He was promised the position of substitute judge.
- VI.** Tocqueville formulated a plan to travel to America.
- A.** His friend Beaumont wrote a report to the Ministry of the Interior about the penal system in France.
 - B.** Tocqueville and Beaumont received an 18-month leave of absence from their jobs to travel at their own expense to America to study the prisons and, in particular, the new penitentiaries there.
 - C.** It is clear from Tocqueville's writings at the time that this was largely a pretext to go to the United States to study its democracy.
 - 1.** We do not know all the ways Tocqueville prepared for his trip.
 - 2.** He did read a French novel based on a trip to America by Chateaubriand, as well as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leather-Stocking Tales*.

- VII.** Tocqueville and Beaumont traveled in America from May 11, 1831, to February 20, 1832 (see Lecture Three).
- VIII.** When Tocqueville and Beaumont returned to France, they wrote *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France*.
- A. Beaumont did most of the writing.
 - B. They won a prize from the French Academy.
- IX.** From 1833 to 1840, Tocqueville was primarily occupied with writing the two volumes of *Democracy in America*.
- A. He traveled to England to see the results of the Reform Bill of 1832.
 - B. He read the *Federalist Papers* and two major commentaries on the U.S. Constitution but not contemporary literature about America.
 - C. The first volume was finished in about a year and published at the beginning of 1835.
 - 1. It was a success from the beginning.
 - 2. Again, Tocqueville won a prize from the French Academy.
 - D. The second volume took longer.
 - 1. Beaumont and Tocqueville visited England (especially industrial towns) and Ireland.
 - 2. Tocqueville married Mary Mottley.
 - 3. In 1836, Tocqueville inherited the chateau at Tocqueville.
 - 4. He sought election, first unsuccessfully, then successfully in 1839, as a deputy to the French legislative assembly.
 - 5. In 1840, the two volumes of *Democracy in America* were published together, both in French and in an English translation.
- X.** From 1839 to 1852, Tocqueville was an active legislator and political figure in France.
- A. He did not join an existing political party.
 - B. His areas of expertise and interest were prison reform and the abolition of slavery.
 - C. He also tried his hand at the newspaper business, but the paper that he bought failed.

- D. After the abdication of Louis Philippe in 1848, Tocqueville was part of a committee to draw up a new constitution.
 - 1. He fought unsuccessfully to establish a bicameral legislature in France.
 - 2. The constitution does contain elements based on Tocqueville's experience in America (for example, an elected president with a four-year term).
- E. Under Louis Napoleon, Tocqueville became Minister of Foreign Affairs from June to October 1849.
 - 1. Most of his time was devoted to events in Italy.
 - 2. He was not able to persuade Pope Pius IX to establish liberal political institutions in Rome.
- F. In a coup in 1851, Louis Napoleon (later known as Napoleon III) seized control of the state, effectively ending Tocqueville's public career.

XI. Tocqueville retired to his chateau.

- A. He continued to travel.
- B. He had already begun his *Recollections* about the events of 1848–1849, though this was not published until after his death.
- C. He undertook the writing of *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, still regarded as a classic study of the French Revolution.
- D. Tocqueville, whose health was always poor, died in 1859 at age 53 and was buried in the village of Tocqueville.

Readings:

Peruse the most complete biography of Tocqueville in English, André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. How does Tocqueville's aristocratic and legal background influence the way he sees and writes about America?
- 2. How does Tocqueville's knowledge of America influence the way he wishes France to develop its political institutions?
- 3. Is Tocqueville's interest in prison reform a reason or simply an excuse for him to visit America?

Lecture Three

The Journey to America

Scope: Tocqueville was only 25 years old when he and his friend Gustave de Beaumont sailed for America in 1831, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. Because they were on official business to examine the new penitentiary system in America, as it was being developed in Auburn, New York, and Philadelphia, they were given entrée to government officials and a variety of privileges. They landed in Rhode Island and journeyed first to Albany, Auburn, and Buffalo. During their stay, they traveled as far west as Green Bay, Wisconsin, and as far south as New Orleans. They met two U.S. presidents (John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson) and, quite by accident, Sam Houston. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville rarely describes specific events or conversations. However, in his letters home and his journals, we can follow him and get a feel for the kinds of experiences he had in America. Tocqueville and Beaumont did write a report on prisons in America, and Beaumont wrote an interesting novel, *Marie*, that deals with race and slavery. Obviously, the main product of this journey was the two volumes of *Democracy in America*.

Outline

- I. What was going on in the United States while Tocqueville and Beaumont were in America?
 - A. Andrew Jackson was in his first term as president.
 - B. The slave rebellion in Virginia led by Nat Turner occurred.
 - C. William Lloyd Garrison began the publication of *The Liberator*, making the abolitionist movement more visible.
 - D. There was a great religious revival in America, led by such people as Charles Finney.
 - E. Several reform movements were underway, for example, for helping prostitutes and eliminating imprisonment for debt.
 - F. Following a suspicious disappearance, the anti-Masonic party was forming.
 - G. The Whig Party was being formed.

- H. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Cherokees, but Jackson refused to enforce the ruling, leading a few years later to Cherokee removal on the “Trail of Tears.”
 - I. Jackson was trying to destroy the Bank of the United States.
 - J. The nullification crisis was reaching its climax in South Carolina.
 - K. Some extraordinary advances in technology were taking place.
 - 1. Railroad “mania” was just beginning.
 - 2. The McCormick reaper was patented in 1831.
 - 3. That great “artificial river,” the Erie Canal, had been completed in 1825, creating boom towns, such as Rochester, all along it.
- II. Let us not forget that Tocqueville and Beaumont ostensibly came to the United States to study the penitentiaries.
- A. Wherever they went, they looked at prisons.
 - B. There were two basic models:
 - 1. The *Auburn system* involved prisoners working together in silence during the day and isolation at night.
 - 2. In the *Philadelphia system*, inmates lived in larger cells and were isolated in them all the time, even doing their work there.
 - C. Tocqueville preferred the Philadelphia system.
- III. Tocqueville and Beaumont landed in Rhode Island but immediately went to New York City.
- A. They recorded in journals and letters their earliest experiences and observations in America.
 - 1. They experienced difficulty with English.
 - 2. They observed many social movements, including abolition, temperance, support for schools through taxes, and cessation of imprisonment for debt.
 - 3. Trade is the national passion.
 - 4. Americans are religious.
 - a. Catholicism is stronger than Tocqueville and Beaumont had imagined.
 - b. Protestants preach morality, not doctrine, from the pulpit.
 - 5. America is a middle-class nation.
 - 6. Lawyers are of the first rank of importance.
 - 7. Americans have pure morals and strong families.

- 8. The fine arts are in their infancy.
 - 9. Americans have a national conceit.
 - B. Tocqueville and Beaumont visited many institutions that cared for orphans, juvenile delinquents, deaf people, and others.
 - C. They visited Sing Sing prison, which was modeled on Auburn.
- IV. They spent July 4 in Albany.
- A. They observed how closely religion and politics were intertwined.
 - B. They could hardly find evidence of a state government.
- V. The two men traveled from Albany to Buffalo.
- A. Tocqueville visited an island in a lake where a home had already been abandoned as people moved west.
 - B. Tocqueville and Beaumont observed Auburn prison for several days.
 - C. They spent important days in Canandaigua at the home of John C. Spencer.
 - D. They first saw Indians while in upstate New York and were shocked at their condition.
- VI. From Buffalo, the two traveled to Michigan and Green Bay, Wisconsin; then, after returning to Buffalo, they visited Montreal and Quebec.
- A. They saw Indians in a different light as they moved west. Tocqueville and Beaumont began to think of Indians as “noble savages.”
 - B. They visited log cabins and saw life on the frontier.
- VII. In New England, Boston in particular, they came to appreciate the Puritan origins of America and its democracy.
- A. Tocqueville observed and talked to people about local government in New England.
 - B. He began to appreciate the role of juries in democracy.
 - C. He saw outward equality, but unequal riches and education still existed in private.
 - D. He met former president John Quincy Adams, who explained to him the New England roots of democracy and how the practice of slavery was the main division between parts of the nation.

- VIII.** Baltimore provided Tocqueville and Beaumont's first exposure to large numbers of blacks and to slavery.
- A.** Here, Tocqueville took his first comprehensive look at the judicial system.
 - B.** He met the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, who explained that universal suffrage got rid of much hostility between classes.
 - C.** Beaumont especially observed issues of race and slavery and later set his novel *Marie* in Baltimore.
- IX.** Tocqueville and Beaumont set out for the South via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and encountered the coldest winter in America since 1776.
- A.** They were involved in several boat accidents.
 - B.** They observed how different Kentucky and Ohio were, although the only difference was that one had slavery and the other did not.
 - C.** Tocqueville observed that the presence of slavery made whites lazy.
 - D.** The two Frenchmen saw a group of Choctaw Indians being removed to Arkansas.
 - E.** By accident, they met Sam Houston, who told them that Indians and blacks have as much native intelligence as whites; it is education that makes the difference.
 - F.** They apparently heard stories about Davy Crockett and how such an uneducated man could be elected to Congress; they learned about electioneering in America.
 - G.** They visited a sugar plantation in Louisiana that had 79 slaves.
 - H.** They saw the different colors and heard the various languages in New Orleans and were appalled by the way women with some Negro blood were treated.
 - I.** They traveled from New Orleans to Virginia in 12 days.
 - 1.** They discussed the nullification crisis.
 - 2.** They met a white man whose sons were also his slaves.
- X.** Finally, Tocqueville and Beaumont arrived in Washington.
- A.** They paid a social call on President Jackson.
 - 1.** Tocqueville wrote that he was not a man of genius.

- 2. He was surprised how informal the meeting was.
 - B. They visited both houses of Congress.
 - C. They had dinner with former president (now representative) John Quincy Adams.
- XI. Despite this extraordinary trip and diligent pursuit of knowledge, there are several aspects of American society that Tocqueville ignored or did not understand.
- A. He did not see the beginnings of urbanization and almost exclusively talked of democratic practices in villages and townships.
 - B. He wrote that there were really no political parties in America, although they were developing while he was in the country.
 - C. He did not look at the American economy very closely and almost always emphasized political rather than economic factors.
 - D. He did not understand the role of states in America, focusing almost completely on local governments and the federal government.
 - E. He did not understand inheritance laws, thinking that they were largely responsible for the development of democracy in America.

Readings:

Get acquainted with the C-SPAN Web site www.tocqueville.org, because among other things, it provides excerpts from Tocqueville's and Beaumont's writings while they were in America. Peruse the most important book about Tocqueville's journey, George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the most important issues facing Americans in 1831, and how cognizant was Tocqueville of the "news" while he traveled?
2. How did the breadth of Tocqueville's travels, especially in New England and the South, inform his understanding of America in a way no books could?
3. As a foreigner whose English was not flawless, what sorts of phenomena was Tocqueville most likely to miss while traveling?

Lecture Four

Equality of Conditions and Freedom

Scope: In the first paragraph of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville introduces the concept of *equality of conditions* as the foundation for the democratic enterprise. This, rather than freedom, is the bedrock principle of democracy. We will consider what Tocqueville means by this phrase, how it forms a basis for much of what he says in *Democracy in America*, and why he sees it as more important than freedom. In doing this, we need to be reminded that Tocqueville came from an aristocratic family and from a nation that, until very recently, had a privileged aristocracy. We will also look at the relationship between equality and freedom. It is worthwhile to consider here Tocqueville's thoughts about the differences between the democracies of antiquity, especially Athens, and democracy in America.

Outline

- I. The translation of *Democracy in America* that I will use in this course is by Mansfield and Winthrop, published by the University of Chicago Press.
 - A. *Democracy in America* is one of the greatest books ever written about democracy and about America.
 - B. We need, as citizens of a democracy, to be self-reflective, and *Democracy in America* serves as a good guide by leading us to consider important questions.
- II. Equality of conditions is the most fundamental element of democracy.
 - A. Movement toward equality of conditions is movement toward democracy.
 - B. The world's movement toward equality of conditions is a providential fact.
 - C. This movement is new and requires a new political science.
- III. Democracy is not just a form of government; it is an all-encompassing way of life.

- IV.** This movement toward equality of conditions exists in France but is much farther along in America.
- A.** Christian teaching supports equality of conditions, although Christian tradition or institutions often do not.
 - B.** Some democratic elements developed in Europe but have been recontextualized in America.
 - C.** France will follow what is happening in America but with many differences in detail.
- V.** There are some aristocratic “holdovers” in America.
- A.** The setting of bail and punishment by fines favor the wealthy.
 - B.** The South is more aristocratic than the North.
 - C.** The “colors of aristocracy” still show through in America.
- VI.** It is equality, not freedom, that is America’s prime desire.
- A.** The idea of rights descends to the least of citizens.
 - B.** There is the belief that there is more wisdom in many men than in any one; this is the theory of equality applied to the intellect.
- VII.** Ancient Athens and the Roman Republic were quite small and, in reality, aristocratic republics. Hence, they were, in many ways, unlike American democracy.
- A.** Because these republics were small, people collectively changed their opinions often.
 - B.** Books were rare, and all were for connoisseurs.
- VIII.** There are important distinctions between equality of conditions and freedom.
- A.** There can be a civil equality that does not penetrate political institutions.
 - B.** There can be equality without freedom; for example, everyone is equal under a despot.
 - C.** Equality and freedom are different in what they produce and how they are maintained.
 - 1.** Equality brings small daily pleasures.
 - 2.** Freedom requires sacrifices.
 - D.** Equality is about the elimination of barriers between people.

- E. Equality leads to a softening of mores because it produces greater sensitivity.
- IX. One irony of the love of equality in America is that many want to trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower and the beginnings of America.
- X. Equality does not create a permanent revolutionary mentality.
 - A. Too many have too much to lose.
 - B. If there is to be revolution in America, it will come from the inequality of conditions experienced by people of African descent.
- XI. Equality of conditions may be less elevated than traditional social arrangements in Europe, but it is more just.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, Introduction (pp. 3–15); v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 3 (pp. 45–53); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 1 (pp. 479–482).

Questions to Consider:

1. What is new about American democracy, given the creation of a democratic constitution in Athens more than 2,000 years earlier?
2. Why is equality of conditions the foundation of democracy, rather than the more often cited idea of individual freedom?
3. Can the principle of equality be the basis for a stable society, given that there are always inequalities?

Lecture Five

The Foundations of the American Experience

Scope: Although democracy transcends any particular manifestation of it, Tocqueville stresses specific elements of the American experience that lead to its particular expression of democratic principles. He looks to New England as the birthplace of American democracy, considering its roots in England, its form of Protestant Christianity, and its physical challenges. With regard to the latter, Tocqueville is particularly interested in the relationship of America's geography to its political and social development. Tocqueville notes that the American South, though sharing some elements of the history of New England, developed a more aristocratic society. This will become important when Tocqueville draws a startling contrast between the cultures on the two banks of the Ohio River that he observed while sailing down the Ohio and into the Mississippi.

Outline

- I. America's geography is important for an understanding of American democracy.
 - A. The earliest white settlers came to a wilderness.
 - B. The land was inhabited by Indians.
 1. There is archaeological evidence that there were more advanced civilizations before those at the time of the Europeans' arrival.
 2. In 1830, the year before Tocqueville came to America, the *Book of Mormon*, which talks about an earlier civilization existing in America, was published.
 3. The Indians Tocqueville and Beaumont encountered displayed savage virtues.
 - C. America's isolation from great powers has an impact on its security and its need for a large military.
- II. Tocqueville asks how geography affects the way America developed. He believes the future of America is in the West.

- A. Tocqueville visits an abandoned home on an island near Syracuse, New York, and this symbolizes for him the constant movement of Americans to the unsettled land in the West.
 - B. He sees “the frontier” in Wisconsin and as he sails down the Mississippi River.
 - C. He envisions a nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, having a population of, perhaps, 130 million.
 - D. By default, the westward movement has undone remaining primogeniture laws.
 - E. Many who settled recently in Ohio have already moved to Illinois.
- III.** Tocqueville believes that there will be a time in the future when the United States and Russia will be the world’s superpowers.
- A. America’s struggle will be to subdue nature, and it will be a free nation.
 - B. Russia’s struggle will be to subdue people, and it will be a nation in servitude.
- IV.** To understand the nature of American democracy, it is necessary to study its origins in New England.
- A. Settlers from England brought the habit of the township system with them.
 - 1. From the institution of the township arose the dogma of the sovereignty of the people.
 - 2. Government in the colonies began with the township.
 - B. The religious disputes in England had increased education.
 - C. In reformed England, mores had been purified.
 - D. Families, not just individuals, came to New England.
- V.** The Puritan form of Christianity included a belief in a virtually absolute democracy.
- A. Puritanism was almost as much a political theory as it was a religious system of beliefs.
 - B. Puritans believed that God deposited them in a predestined land.
 - C. The Puritans established a covenant for the general good.
 - D. In Connecticut, penal laws were derived from the Pentateuch, but they were also voted on.

- VI. Hence, democracy in America sprang full born from a feudal society in Europe because of the specific history of its founders. This helps us to understand what is sometimes called *American exceptionalism*.
- VII. In the New England towns or townships, democracy was direct, not representative. This was not the case in states settled later, such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.
- VIII. Much of what Tocqueville says about democracy in New England does not really apply to the South.
- A. It was much more aristocratic in its origins.
 - B. However, that more aristocratic part of the United States produced most of the greatest heroes of the revolutionary period.
 - C. In 1831, New England's influence was everywhere in America.
 - D. Tocqueville observed how different the two banks of the Ohio River were, the only difference being that Ohio had no slavery and, hence, work was honored there, while Kentucky had slavery and work was dishonored.
 - E. Democracy had modified relationships between masters and servants in the North, but this was not true of the South, because of slavery.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 1 (pp. 19–27); v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 2 (pp. 27–45); v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9 (pp. 264–274).

Questions to Consider:

1. On what basis do Tocqueville's observations about the West precede Frederick Jackson Turner's *frontier thesis* of American history?
2. Is Tocqueville right in claiming the essentially New England origin of American democracy?
3. Why does Tocqueville begin his book about America with geography and history lessons?

Lecture Six

Does America Have a Mixed Constitution?

Scope: James Madison wrote scathingly about ancient democracy in the *Federalist Papers*, and Americans are often taught that we have a classical republic, consisting of elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. However, Tocqueville challenges this idea by arguing that there is only one overarching principle at work in America, and that principle is democracy. Of course, Tocqueville acknowledges the work of the authors of our Constitution, and he makes clear that the United States is not a larger and more modern version of Athens. Nevertheless, despite all of the ways people may qualify the term, America is a democracy. In the 21st century, our nation is, in some obvious ways, more democratic than it was in Tocqueville's day—consider the abolition of slavery, the expansion of suffrage, and direct election of senators—but it has not evolved into democracy—it has been one from its inception.

Outline

- I. James Madison wrote in the *Federalist Papers* that democracy is contentious, insecure, short-lived, and violent in death.
 - A. It is important to remember that Madison is generally considered to be the father of the Constitution.
 - B. It is clear that the principal authors of the Constitution set out to create a republic. A republic in the classical sense was defined as a mixed constitution.
 1. It has elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.
 2. It has the strengths but not the weaknesses of all three forms of government.
 3. It is more stable than any of them.
 - C. Even in the Pledge of Allegiance, we say that the flag stands for a republic rather than a democracy.
- II. Tocqueville believes that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a mixed constitution.
 - A. In each society, there is ultimately only one dominant principle of action.

- B. In America, that principle is the sovereignty of the majority.
 - C. Hence, America is, from its inception, a democracy.
- III. A commonly held view today is that America was created as a republic but, over time, has evolved into a democracy.
- A. We no longer have electors choose the president.
 - B. There is direct election of senators.
 - C. The franchise has been broadened on several occasions.
 - D. Many states have elements of direct democracy: initiative, referendum, recall.
- IV. Tocqueville recognizes “degrees” of democracy and sees that very different governmental arrangements can be classified as democracies.
- A. Even in America, there are vestiges of aristocracy, such as the arrangement of bail and fines in the criminal justice system.
 - B. There are almost never absolute goods in law.
 - 1. We should consider how different the world’s democracies are in terms of specific institutions.
 - 2. As the United States seeks to build democracies, it is clear that it is not possible to impose our form of democracy on a nation with a history so different from the United States.
- V. The purest democracy exists in America at the local level, especially in New England.
- A. Town(ship)s have direct voting.
 - B. They elect many officials for short terms.
 - C. They even elect judges.
- VI. County and state governments are intermediaries between local and national government.
- A. State legislatures have two houses elected by the same principle—one person, one vote.
 - B. The two houses of the national legislature are based on different principles.
 - 1. The House seats representatives of people, each member representing roughly an equal number.
 - 2. Senators represent states, and each state has two regardless of the population.

- VII.** Even with the various institutions of the federal government, “the empire of the majority is absolute.”
- A.** There are some real weaknesses in majoritarian rule.
 - 1. The majority can tyrannize the minority.
 - 2. Democracies are relatively weak in times of crisis.
 - 3. It is hard for a democracy to have an effective foreign policy.
 - 4. Laws do not have long duration.
 - 5. New ideas and movements are often not followed through.
 - B.** Democracies tend to focus on the present and on specific solutions, instead of considering philosophical systems and theories.
- VIII.** Democracies are not immune from evolving into despotisms.
- A.** The principle of equality can lead to concentration of power in the central government.
 - B.** Centralization of government can lead to centralization of administration.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 8 (pp. 105–161); v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 6 (pp. 220–235).

Questions to Consider:

1. What did the authors of the U.S. Constitution set out to create, and what did they set out to avoid?
2. Was the United States, properly speaking, a republic rather than a democracy when the nation received its constitution?
3. In what ways has the United States become more democratic since Tocqueville’s time?

Lecture Seven

The American Constitution

Scope: Although Tocqueville is hardly the first or last analyst of the achievements of the writers of the Constitution, he brings an interesting perspective to his task. He especially focuses on the federal judiciary as it evolved following *Marbury v. Madison*. Often, Tocqueville points out, people pay too little attention to the judicial functions of government; however, he argues that the role of the Supreme Court is essential to the preservation of a just democracy in America. He is also concerned about having a president who is eligible for reelection and points to the time of a presidential election as one of potential danger to the society. Although Tocqueville admires the American Constitution, he does not hesitate to critique it. Tocqueville also fears that too much centralization in America could lead to a gentle but destructive form of despotism.

Outline

- I. The American Constitution prescribes centralization of government but not centralization of administration.
 - A. Centralization of government (general laws and fixed principles) is necessary for a nation to function, and it exists in the American Constitution in the following areas:
 - 1. Foreign affairs
 - 2. Value of money
 - 3. Post and communications
 - 4. Taxes.
 - B. Centralization of administration (those matters that concern themselves with part of the nation) is dangerous for a democracy.
 - C. Centralization of administration will become “natural” because equality seems served by sameness everywhere.
- II. The federal government was a carefully negotiated compromise between the large and small states.
 - A. If everything were decided by majority, the small states would eventually disappear.

- B. The authors of the Constitution bent the rules of logic to craft a middle way.
 - C. The Senate favors small states; the House favors large states.
- III. The Congress is the most powerful of the three branches of government.
- A. It answers more directly to the majority.
 - B. Presidential power is inferior to legislative power. In times of national crisis, the power of the presidency will become enlarged.
 - C. The two houses of Congress are quite different.
 - 1. The House is made up of vulgar and obscure persons.
 - 2. The Senate has a large number of celebrities.
- IV. The way of electing the president is problematic.
- A. The time of the election of a president will always be a time of crisis, especially if there is a foreign threat.
 - B. There are two or three stages in the election of the president (vote of the people, vote of the electoral college, and vote in the House of Representatives if there is no majority in the electoral college).
 - C. The fact that a president can be reelected is a mistake.
 - 1. The incumbent will prostitute himself to the majority.
 - 2. Cleverness replaces patriotism at election time.
 - D. Parties identify with a candidate because his victory demonstrates that the party's view is that of the majority.
- V. The Supreme Court is the only federal court created by the Constitution.
- A. Courts use moral force, not material force, to impose justice.
 - B. The purpose of justice is to substitute the idea of right for violence.
 - C. There will always be clashes between the national and state sovereignties.
 - D. The Court is, by its nature, quite political, because it has the power to declare laws unconstitutional. Almost every political question becomes a judicial question.
 - E. Never has such immense judicial power been bestowed on a court.
 - F. In the United States, peace, prosperity, and the nation's very existence rest with the justices of the Supreme Court.

- VI.** An important limit to the power of the Supreme Court is that it can act only when appealed to.
- A.** It acts in particular cases, rather than in the realm of general principles.
 - B.** The Court’s rulings are based on the Constitution, not laws.
 - C.** The Court has only judicial means by which to attack laws.
- VII.** States are not smaller versions of the federal government, because their legislatures are elected differently.
- A.** The sovereignties of the state and of the nation will work together only with “daily enlightenment.”
 - B.** All states have nearly the same interests and the same origins.
 - C.** They all have the same language.
 - D.** General agreement among states is a relatively easy matter.
- VIII.** The American Constitution is remarkably different than those of France and England.
- A.** In France, the constitution is immutable.
 - B.** In England, the constitution changes constantly.

Readings:

Democracy in America, review v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 8 (pp. 105–161); v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 5 (pp. 56–93).

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the difference between centralization of government and centralization of administration, and what are the dangers to democracy of the latter?
2. How does Tocqueville justify the claim that the legislative branch of the federal government is the most powerful?
3. Why are states not simply the federal government writ small?

Lecture Eight

The Judiciary and Lawyers in America

Scope: In the last lecture, we considered the role of the Supreme Court. Beginning at this point, we will concentrate on what Tocqueville has to say about other levels of the judicial system in America. Tocqueville looks at the institution of the justice of the peace, a local elected official. He also emphasizes that juries in America are schools of democracy and, thus, fundamental to the functioning of democracy in America. Tocqueville discusses the importance of the legal profession, for lawyers are guardians of the law, especially in a common law system based on precedent. He considers why it is natural in America that lawyers form a core of legislators at all levels of government. He raises the question of whether lawyers form, in some sense, a type of aristocracy in America.

Outline

- I. I have already discussed the importance of the Supreme Court for the functioning of the government of the United States.
 - A. Tocqueville particularly stressed the Court's ability to declare laws unconstitutional, although that is not stated explicitly in the Constitution.
 - B. Although he does not mention *Marbury v. Madison* by name, he accepts its doctrine as defining an important constitutional principle.
- II. Tocqueville says little about state or county courts.
 - A. He does mention that the need for qualified judges is a main reason for the existence of a level of government between the township and the state.
 - B. He notes that some states elect their judges. He fears that elected judges, especially if the elections are frequent, will diminish the magistrates.
- III. Tocqueville spends a good deal of time discussing local judges, that is, justices of the peace.

- A. With the election of judges at such a local level, judicial penalties become a primary means of administration.
 - B. Justices of the peace are halfway between men of the world and magistrates.
 - C. Justices of the peace are enlightened citizens but not necessarily versed in the law.
 - D. Justices of the peace are keepers of order.
- IV. The jury is one of the most important democratic institutions.
- A. Tocqueville notes that the sanctions of political law are based in penal law.
 - B. Whoever judges criminals is the master of society.
 - C. Hence, the jury system is a key element of a democratic society.
- V. Just as important is the role of the jury as judge of civil cases.
- A. Being on a civil jury teaches people equity.
 - B. Although few people fear that they will be judged by a criminal jury, all know that they can be sued.
 - C. Serving on a civil jury combats the selfishness of individuals.
- VI. The jury serves as an important school for democracy.
- A. Members of juries meet lawyers and see them in action.
 - B. Members of juries get practical lessons on the law.
 - C. The tendency of people to try to avoid jury duty damages democracy.
- VII. By training and disposition, lawyers are a powerful barrier against the lapses of democracy.
- A. Lawyers learn the habits of order.
 - B. Lawyers have a taste for procedure.
 - C. Lawyers learn to love the regular sequence of ideas.
 - D. With this education, lawyers are opposed to the revolutionary spirit and to the unreflective passions of democracy.
- VIII. In their souls, lawyers have the tastes and habits of democracy; but their elevated position will show a conservative and undemocratic spirit.

- A. Lawyers love order and, thus, authority.
 - B. Lawyers are associated with the people by interests and birth but with aristocracy by habits and taste.
- IX.** The common law brought from England is a law of precedents.
- A. In England and America, lawyers ask what has been done, while in France, lawyers ask what one ought to wish to do.
 - B. Law founded on precedents is obscure; thus, lawyers are the only ones who really understand the law.
 - C. Lawyers in America love subtlety.
 - D. Lawyers do not like being thought of as innovators.
- X.** If there is an American aristocracy, it is the lawyers. America is favorable to lawyers holding most elective offices.
- XI.** Along with freedom of the press, the judicial system is the greatest instrument of democracy in America.
- A. Judges must listen to everyone.
 - B. The courts are the greatest guarantors of individual independence.

Readings:

Democracy in America, review v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 8 (especially pp. 130–142); v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 6 (pp. 93–99).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why are justices of the peace, judges not necessarily trained in the law, important to the American judicial system and to democracy in America?
2. Is Tocqueville correct in referring to juries as schools for democracy, and have they retained that role in modern America?
3. How can an aristocracy of lawyers be important in the preservation of democracy?

Lecture Nine

Democracy and Local Government

Scope: For Tocqueville, democracy, to a large extent, “trickles up” rather than “trickles down.” Starting with the sorts of local governmental institutions that existed in the towns of New England, Tocqueville argues that the frequent elections and numerous offices at the local level are important, not just because of their effectiveness in getting things done, but also because they are laboratories for democratic practice. It is hard for ordinary people to understand how politics works at the federal and state levels, but people develop democratic habits by participating in government and seeing results at the local level. Tocqueville worries about the centralization of administration because it will do harm to those laboratories and training grounds of democracy that we call local government.

Outline

- I. In America, the township was created first, then the county, then the state, then the federal government.
- II. The freedom in a township is a “rare and fragile thing.”
 - A. It is difficult for a township to struggle against the power of a state.
 - B. A typical township has only 2,000–3,000 citizens.
 - C. The township is to freedom as a school is to science; the second will not exist without the first.
- III. The township is the purest institution of democracy.
 - A. At least in New England, it is a direct, not a representative, democracy.
 - B. There are numerous offices and frequent elections.
 - 1. Offices include assessors, collectors, constable, clerk, overseer of the poor, school commissioners, highway inspectors, fire inspectors, supervisor of weights and measures.
 - 2. The most important judicial post is justice of the peace (see previous lecture).

3. Authority is much divided. The most power resides in a group of selectmen. Typically, there are about 19 offices at the township level.
 4. Many people hold office and, thus, can understand how government works from the “inside.”
 5. Local government becomes a training ground for people who hold higher offices.
- C. In a democracy, all citizens are equally sovereign and are to be enlightened and virtuous; this is evident at the level of township government.
 - D. Criminals rarely escape punishment, even though there are no national identity cards, because everyone helps to catch them.
 - E. It is a maxim of freedom that individuals judge their particular interests, and this happens best when people have been a part of the process of doing the common good in local government.
- IV. The township is not free to disobey the laws of the state; however, the administration must be local for a democracy to work.
- A. Although it is the state that imposes the need for schools, it is the township that builds, pays for, and directs the schools.
 - B. Essentially, the township lends its officials to higher levels of government.
- V. There are some functions of government that townships cannot perform, hence, the invention of the county.
- A. The justice system requires trained judges, and many townships do not have qualified men, thus, the establishment of county judges.
 - B. Counties also have sheriffs and jails.
 - C. Outside New England, more of the functions of local government belong to the county, even to the point of there being county legislative assemblies.
- VI. Administrative centralization is a dangerous thing for democracy because it undermines the authority of local governments.
- A. Freedom will be banished if central government is involved in details of the application of the law.
 - B. If there are oppressive laws, their impact is lessened by the ways that laws are administered locally.

- C. Tocqueville observed that New York was the state farthest along the path to administrative centralization.
- D. Tocqueville contrasts America to European states, where there is very little local government.

VII. There are ways to stifle the centralization of administration.

- A. There should be infinite opportunities for people locally to act together and feel dependent on one another.
- B. People may not be very interested in or understand what government far away is doing, but they will be interested in roads that pass through their property.
- C. Local freedoms bring people closer together.
- D. This is important, because individuals are independent but weak in a democracy.

VIII. Tocqueville looks at Europe, where the nation has taken over many functions of local government and private associations.

- A. European states have taken over charity, education, the building of infrastructure, and to some extent, religion.
- B. In contrast, in America, people feel ownership.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 1, ch. 5 (pp. 56–93); v. 2, pt. 4, ch. 5 (pp. 651–661).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why, according to Tocqueville, does democracy “trickle up” rather than “trickle down”?
2. What are the antidotes to administrative centralization?
3. Why does Tocqueville fear for democracy if the federal government takes over functions performed by local governments and private associations?

Lecture Ten

Freedom of Speech in Theory and Practice

Scope: Although equality of conditions is the *sine qua non* of democracy, freedom is necessary for its operation. Tocqueville examines freedom of speech, its necessity, and its dangers. Like all commentators about democracy since Pericles, Tocqueville recognizes the importance of “talk” generally and political speech in particular. He examines what the limitations are on freedom of speech, not by law but by custom. He asks what the consequences are for speaking outside certain parameters that society defines. The question of the relationship between freedom of speech and public order is taken up, too. As Tocqueville so often does, he takes a principle that Americans pride themselves for holding and asks penetrating questions about its practice.

Outline

- I. There can be no democracy without freedom of speech.
 - A. Since the birth of democracy in ancient Athens, the importance of freedom of speech has been emphasized.
 - B. Tocqueville saw Americans talking—in town squares, in parlors at home, in the inns he visited where there were large tables for eating.
- II. Tocqueville noted that despite the belief in freedom of speech in America, there were limits placed on it, not by the government but by the majority.
 - A. People who have ideas close to those of the majority try to win the majority to their side.
 - B. Those whose ideas are far from the majority can accomplish nothing.
- III. Tocqueville says that when he arrived in America, he noticed the clamorous and tumultuous nature of its democracy in action.
 - A. He listened to discussions about building a church.
 - B. There were political discussions about upcoming elections.
 - C. He noted that many people discussed local improvements.

- D. He observed numerous discussions about roads and schools.
 - E. Even women attended these discussions and formed clubs, rather than engaging in theater going. This was quite different than the way women acted in France.
- IV. Despite all the speech, Tocqueville found less independence of mind and genuine freedom of discussion in America than in any place he had visited.
- A. The majority had drawn a circle around thought.
 - B. This circle was broad. Inside this circle was freedom of discussion and thought. Those whose ideas were outside the circle were the butt of jokes and objects of persecution.
 - 1. This persecution did not involve physical restraint.
 - 2. Those outside the circle were completely cut off from power.
 - 3. Political careers were closed to those outside the circle.
 - 4. The majority did intellectual violence to those outside the circle of thought they established.
 - 5. People outside the circle were free from violence, but they were treated as strangers.
 - 6. People outside the circle kept their privileges, but those privileges were useless to them.
- V. Disagreement with the masses has many consequences.
- A. Those in disagreement find themselves in isolation and despair.
 - B. It is difficult to believe what the majority rejects.
 - C. The majority does not need to constrain others because it “persuades” them.
- VI. The dominating powers in the United States do not like to be made fun of.
- A. In France, even at the court of Louis XIV, there were plays and other works that poked fun at the court, such as the plays of Molière.
 - B. The only teachers of the majority are experience and foreigners.
 - C. There is freedom of speech but not freedom of mind in America.
 - 1. There are no great writers in America because they lack freedom of mind.

2. There are unbelievers of the American way in America, but they have no organ.
3. In a way, one must renounce the rights of citizenship to deviate from the beliefs of the majority.
4. Only a few who seek power in America have virile candor or manly independence.

VII. Tocqueville and other foreigners are about the only ones who hear the real deviations from the beliefs of the majority.

VIII. Freedom of speech could be lost in America.

- A. The omnipotence of the majority could lead to loss of freedom.
- B. Freedom will be banished in America if there is centralized administration.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 7 (pp. 243–249).

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways, despite the First Amendment, is free speech limited in the United States?
2. Why, in a free country, does Tocqueville find so little independence of mind?
3. Is the majority essentially humorless and unable to make fun of itself?

Lecture Eleven

Freedom of the Press

Scope: When Tocqueville came to America, he was not convinced of the wisdom of the freedom of the press that existed here. However, he became convinced that it was absolutely necessary to the practice of democracy. He did have concerns that the press could become too powerful and, thus, a threat to democratic principles, but he saw as the “cure” for this danger the large number of newspapers and other materials that were being published in America. There must be a lot of press, he argued, to keep it from becoming too powerful and to ensure that citizens have access to a wide variety of views. Here we will look at a conversation that Tocqueville had concerning freedom of the press with John C. Spencer in Canandaigua, New York, recorded word-for-word in his journal. This will serve as a case study for how Tocqueville conducted interviews in America and how he used them, given that we can find strong echoes of Spencer’s words (without attribution) in *Democracy in America*.

Outline

- I. When Tocqueville arrived in America, he did not have a high regard for freedom of the press, and although he came to appreciate its role in a democracy, he remained critical of the concept.
 - A. In a nation with the dogma of the sovereignty of the people, censorship is an absurdity.
 - B. A free press primarily prevents evils, rather than does positive goods.
- II. The press is less powerful in America than in France.
 - A. There is no one place that dominates the United States as Paris does France.
 - B. Most of what is in French newspapers is news; three-quarters of what is in American newspapers is advertisements.
- III. Tocqueville interests himself in how the press is kept from being too powerful in America.

- A. Newspapers are rather inexpensive to create.
 - B. Just about all small towns have newspapers.
 - C. Newspapers do not make great profits; therefore, the great industrialists are not involved in the business.
 - D. The way to restrain the influence of the press is to increase the number of newspapers.
- IV. The preceding analyses are found in the first volume of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville's views were somewhat different five years later when he wrote the second volume.
- V. Tocqueville realized that free associations (political and civil) are vital to democracy, especially in preventing the tyranny of the majority.
- A. How can like-minded people act together when they are spread out and can become lost in the crowd?
 - B. They need to have newspapers (perhaps we would call some of what Tocqueville describes here as *newsletters*).
 - 1. Newspapers speak briefly to readers every day.
 - 2. As greater equality and the resulting individualism lead people to withdraw from public life, newspapers become even more important.
 - 3. Without newspapers, there is little chance of common action.
 - 4. Associations are hard to create because members do not see each other often.
 - 5. Newspapers present information and views to many people simultaneously.
- VI. Newspapers do not just guarantee freedom, but they maintain civilization.
- A. More newspapers are needed as associations multiply.
 - B. If administrative centralization occurs, newspapers will diminish in number.
 - C. Fragmented administration, on the other hand, will multiply the number of newspapers.
- VII. Tocqueville worries about Americans falling into servitude.
- A. Oppressed citizens can appeal to the nation or beyond—to humanity—through newspapers.
 - B. Freedom of the press cures most of the ills that equality produces.

C. The press is the democratic instrument of freedom *par excellence*.

VIII. We will use the issue of freedom of the press to do a brief case study concerning how Tocqueville formed his ideas during his visit to America.

A. In July 1831, Tocqueville and Beaumont stayed for three days in the home of John C. Spencer in Canandaigua, New York.

B. Spencer had already had a distinguished career as a lawyer and legislator and would later become a cabinet officer and was nominated to be a Supreme Court justice.

C. Spencer later oversaw the publication of the first American edition of *Democracy in America*.

D. Both Tocqueville and Beaumont were deeply impressed with Spencer's intellect.

IX. The visit of Tocqueville to Spencer is recorded in Tocqueville's journal, as well as in letters home from both Tocqueville and Beaumont.

A. It is important to note the neither Spencer nor most of the other people Tocqueville met are mentioned in *Democracy in America*.

B. Tocqueville does not footnote the sources for many of the ideas he borrowed from people he met.

C. Tocqueville recorded word-for-word a conversation he had with John C. Spencer about a variety of subjects, including freedom of the press.

1. Spencer explained the relative unimportance of journalists in America.

2. Spencer said that there is no city in the United States similar to Paris.

3. Spencer stressed that the way to diminish the power of the press is to multiply the number of newspapers.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 3 (pp. 172–180); v. 2, pt. 4, ch. 7 (pp. 666–673).

Questions to Consider:

1. How did Tocqueville's experiences in America change his opinion about the value of freedom of the press?
2. By what means are the dangers of freedom of the press mitigated?
3. Why are newspapers and newsletters vital in a functioning democracy?

Lecture Twelve

Political Parties

Scope: Tocqueville arrived in the United States just as political parties in the way we understand them today were being formed. It is often said, for example, that Martin Van Buren, Andrew Jackson's successor in the White House, was the first "politician" to become president. Tocqueville distinguishes great from small parties—the former based on a set of principles, the latter primarily as vehicles for electoral victories—and asks which sort exist in America at the time. Traditionally, the concept of a *party* had been decried as factionalism (Dante and Madison would agree on this). Here, Tocqueville applies the principle he enunciates at the beginning of *Democracy in America*, that the new realities of his own time demand a new political science.

Outline

- I. The modern idea of political parties in America was just beginning to form in America when Tocqueville visited in 1831, although Tocqueville seems not to have noticed this.
 - A. There is no formal role for, or even mention of, parties in the Constitution.
 - B. From ancient times, thinkers saw what we call parties as factions and considered them to be evil.
 - C. The classic presentation of this idea is by James Madison in *Federalist* no. 10.
 1. Madison saw factions as groups of citizens full of passion for a cause that was other than for the good of the entire community.
 2. Madison made clear that a faction could contain a majority of citizens.
 - D. The 1824 and 1828 presidential elections, in which the main contestants were John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, both of whom Tocqueville met, were particularly bitter and divisive.

- E. Martin Van Buren, secretary of state during part of Jackson’s first term and vice president during his second term, was the first “career politician” elected president.
- II. Tocqueville agreed with the traditional view of parties, regarding them as essentially evil.
- A. He makes a distinction between great parties and small parties.
 - 1. Great parties overturn societies; small parties agitate within society.
 - 2. Great parties tear society apart; small parties degrade society.
 - B. Tocqueville states at the beginning of *Democracy in America* that this is an altogether new time that needs a new political science.
 - C. Therefore, he tries to make careful distinctions about political parties in America and to consider their role in a democracy.
- III. Great parties once existed in America.
- A. Great parties are primarily concerned with principle.
 - B. Great parties deal primarily with generalities.
 - C. Great parties are interested in ideas.
 - D. Great parties have real convictions.
- IV. Tocqueville believed that only small parties existed in America when he visited.
- A. Small parties are interested in consequences, not principles.
 - B. Small parties are concerned with particulars, not generalities.
 - C. Small parties focus more on people than ideas.
 - D. Small parties are interested in victory more than conviction.
- V. Tocqueville writes critically about small parties.
- A. They are without political faith.
 - B. They use violent language, but they act timidly.
 - C. According to Tocqueville, small parties “always become heated in a cool way.”
- VI. After the Revolution, there were two parties.
- A. The Federalists wished to restrict popular power.
 - 1. Federalists were in the minority but had most of the heroes of the Revolution.

2. It is fortunate for the United States that the Federalists were in power in the first years of the nation.

B. The Republicans wished to extend popular power. They took control with Jefferson in 1801.

C. These parties agreed on the most essential things.

D. They were not out to destroy one another.

VII. By the time Tocqueville came to America, it was swarming with small parties; this situation threatens the nation.

A. Some parties worked to extend the use of public power, while others worked to limit it.

B. This situation existed, despite the fact that it was difficult to create small parties in the United States for the following reasons:

1. There is no religious hatred in America.

2. There is no class hatred in America.

3. There are no public miseries to exploit in America.

VIII. When Tocqueville was in America, the largest issue of the day was the National Bank of the United States.

A. The enlightened class generally favored the bank.

B. The others opposed it and supported President Jackson.

1. The bank had an independent existence, and the people, at least directly, could do nothing about it.

2. The people wanted to see if they could “shake” the bank, as they could shake other things.

IX. The wealthy class is almost completely out of political affairs.

A. Wealth is a cause of disfavor.

B. Wealth is an obstacle to political power.

X. Political parties use two weapons:

A. Newspapers (see Lecture Eleven)

B. Associations (see Lecture Fourteen).

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 2 (pp. 166–172).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why were political parties traditionally understood to be evil?
2. What are the differences between great parties and small parties?
3. What do parties do in order to be effective in promoting their causes and candidates?

Lecture Thirteen

The Problem of the Tyranny of the Majority

Scope: In its essence, democracy is majoritarian government. However, Tocqueville considers how the majority can tyrannize minorities, making the society fundamentally unjust. For Tocqueville, the danger of the tyranny of the majority is one of the most serious facing a democratic society. He looks at ways in which the Constitution is designed to lessen this danger. There are institutional safeguards; however, these are insufficient to eliminate tyranny of the majority. As Tocqueville looks at American society, he points to political associations, the subject of the next lecture, as an essential barrier to the establishment of a tyrannical rule by the majority.

Outline

- I. By definition, democracy is government by the majority.
 - A. The power of the majority is absolute.
 - B. Omnipotence generally is dangerous.
 - C. It is a detestable idea that the majority has the right to do anything.
 - D. Of all the parts of government, the legislature obeys the majority most willingly.
 1. Americans have wanted legislatures elected directly and for short terms.
 2. This generally describes state and local legislatures, but the two houses of the Congress have two different modes of election, and the Senate has long terms of office.
 3. In some states, even magistrates are elected and, hence, subject to the majority.
- II. The premise of democracy is that many men united in their opinions have more enlightenment and wisdom than any one man.
 - A. This is taking the principle of equality and applying it to intellects.
 - B. In pre-revolutionary France, it was regarded as a constant that the king cannot fail; in America, it is regarded as a constant that the majority cannot fail.

- III.** The power of the majority leads to instability.
- A.** Laws have a shorter duration in America than anywhere else in the world.
 - B.** Most states have changed their constitutions.
 - C.** The action of legislatures never slows.
 - D.** A good example of how majorities work is in the area of prison reform.
 - 1.** Recently, some men with zeal for prison reform won over the majority and, thus, the legislatures.
 - 2.** New prisons (penitentiaries) were built.
 - 3.** Overall, things did not change quickly.
 - 4.** In building the new prisons, the old ones were largely ignored and became worse.
 - 5.** The majority is fickle and soon became fascinated with other issues.
 - 6.** Overall, the prison system is no better and perhaps worse despite some “model prisons.”
- IV.** The majority often has interests in conflict with those of the minority.
- A.** The irresistible force of the majority is reprehensible.
 - 1.** When the majority is doubtful, there is freedom to speak.
 - 2.** When the majority irrevocably pronounces, silence follows.
 - 3.** The majority draws a circle outside which people are penalized for speaking (see Lecture Ten).
 - B.** The lack of guarantees against the tyranny of the majority is repugnant.
- V.** The tyranny of the majority is such a danger that even dangerous means of limiting the majority’s power are a good thing.
- A.** There should be a legislature that is not the slave of the majority.
 - B.** The executive needs to be a force on its own.
 - C.** There must be an independent judiciary.
 - D.** The American Constitution provides some of the elements for each of these guards against the tyranny of the majority.
 - E.** If freedom is lost in America, it will be because the majority has driven the minority to using physical force.
- VI.** There are means by which the tyranny of the majority can be tempered.

- A. Without centralized administration, the tyranny of the majority is less dangerous.
- B. The influence of lawyers is important because they have a democratic spirit (see Lecture Eight).
- C. A judiciary that can declare laws unconstitutional is vital.
- D. The jury system educates people about rights.
- E. Associations are perhaps the best safeguard against the tyranny of the majority (see Lectures Fourteen and Fifteen).

VII. The majority is also powerful in cultural matters.

- A. There is almost unlimited trust in public opinion in America.
- B. The majority furnishes society with many ready-made opinions.
- C. The majority even decides the “law of languages.”

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 7 (pp. 233–249); v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 8 (pp. 250–264).

Questions to Consider:

1. Given the nature of democracy, is it inevitable that one of the greatest dangers will be the tyranny of the majority?
2. Can democracy be stable if majorities are, by their nature, unstable?
3. What safeguards can be created in a democracy to limit the power of the majority to tyrannize minorities?

Lecture Fourteen

Political Associations

Scope: Tocqueville defines political associations as groups of people united for a particular political purpose. He examines how they function and how they act effectively to advocate for the particular issue they agree about. These associations, though having memberships that are small minorities of the population, can function through meetings, conventions, newsletters, and other means to build an effective political operation. It is these political associations that serve democracy by severely limiting the likelihood of a tyranny of the majority. When Americans participate in the activities of political associations, they are practicing what Tocqueville calls *self-interest properly understood*.

Outline

- I. Freedom of association is a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority.
 - A. Associations owe their birth and development to individual will.
 - B. The freedom to assemble is also essential to the development of associations.
- II. Political associations are those organizations that seek to influence the legislature and government policies.
 - A. Tocqueville witnessed associations based around issues of public security, commerce and industry, morality and religion, and temperance.
 - B. These associations gather people of divergent minds.
 1. Associations have a single goal and limit their work to that one goal.
 2. They almost form a separate nation. The members form, first, an intellectual bond, and they gather in small assemblies.
 - C. Political associations are unified in their public actions.
 1. They march at the same time.
 2. They march toward the same goal.
 3. They march on the same path.

- D. Political associations need both local chapters and a broad communications network.
 - E. Although membership in any association is a minority, usually a small minority, of the population, those who belong exercise a great deal of influence because of their organization and focus.
- III.** Because Americans have the rights to associate and assemble, political associations in America are open and public.
- A. There are no secret societies in America.
 - 1. While Tocqueville was in America, an anti-Masonic movement was growing as a result of the disappearance in western New York of a Mason who threatened to reveal the organization's secrets.
 - 2. Tocqueville discussed this with John C. Spencer, who was a leader in the anti-Masonic movement.
 - B. There are factious people in America, but no conspirators.
 - C. Associations are peaceful in their objectives and in their means.
 - D. Associations speak publicly and petition openly.
- IV.** Newspapers (newsletters) are essential for the functioning of political associations (see Lecture Eleven).
- A. Associations, to be effective, must be numerous and spread out across the nation.
 - B. Only newspapers speak briefly to members each day.
 - C. Members are habitually and conveniently united only by newspapers.
- V.** Political associations serve a broader function in a democracy than petitioning for changes in law and governmental practice.
- A. Political associations help to develop and perfect civil associations (see Lecture Fifteen).
 - B. Political associations develop the tastes and habits of association.
 - C. Political associations draw people outside themselves and, thus, help to work against the tendencies toward individualism (see Lecture Twenty).
 - D. Political associations are schools, free of charge, where people learn about association.

- E. Only political associations can resist centralization of administration.
- VI. Participation in political associations is practicing what Tocqueville calls *self-interest well understood*.
- A. People recognize that, in serving others, they are also serving themselves.
 - B. Self-interest well understood is universally accepted in America.
 - C. Self-interest well understood may not be the most elevated philosophy, but it is the most practical.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 4 (pp. 180–186); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 7 (pp. 496–500); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 8 (pp. 500–503).

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Introduction.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Tocqueville define *political associations*, and how does he describe the ways they function?
2. Why must associations focus on one or a few things if they are to be successful?
3. How can citizens be educated so that they perceive their self-interest well understood?

Lecture Fifteen

Civil Associations

Scope: The great complement to political associations in a democracy is civil associations, those private organizations without a political focus. These associations are not only a kind of cement that helps bind Americans together, but they are also important to the functioning of democracy. People learn skills in these associations, for example, when they conduct meetings or serve as treasurers of organizations, and later use these skills in political associations or as holders of public office. Hence, civil associations, too, are vital for American democracy. They also are counterweights to the tendency to withdraw from the public sphere. We will consider Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone*, in which he demonstrates how Americans are withdrawing from participation in political parties and political associations, and explore what it, combined with *Democracy in America*, may tell us about the health of our democracy at the beginning of the 21st century.

Outline

- I. Civil associations are those organizations that do not have political purposes or goals. Tocqueville encountered a wide range of civil associations and lists some of the sorts of matters they concern themselves with.
 - A. There are commercial and industrial associations.
 - B. He characterizes some associations as religious and moral, grave and futile.
 - C. Some have a very particular focus, while others are general.
 - D. Some specific sorts of civil associations Tocqueville lists are for organizing festivals, founding seminaries and schools, building inns, raising churches, distributing books, sending out missionaries, and creating schools and prisons.
- II. Much of what was said about the importance of political associations in the last lecture also applies to civil associations (see Lecture Fourteen).
 - A. Citizens in a democracy are dependent and weak.

- B.** Civil associations bring people out of themselves and involve them in activities together.
- C.** Civil associations are a bulwark against the tyranny of the majority.

III. Civil associations do things in America that are done differently in Europe.

- A.** In England, the work of civil associations is usually accomplished by a great lord.
- B.** In France, matters that civil associations handle in America are the work of government.
- C.** Tocqueville provides a powerful comparison between France and America, using the issue of temperance.
 - 1.** In America, Tocqueville saw 100,000 men coming together to pledge that they will not drink alcohol.
 - 2.** Tocqueville writes that, at first, he saw this as amusing—why did these men not just stay at home and drink water?
 - 3.** In France, each of these men would separately have petitioned the government to regulate the taverns.
 - 4.** Tocqueville came to understand that these men wanted to patronize the idea of sobriety.
 - 5.** This showed Tocqueville the power of public and collective action.
 - 6.** It was people, not government, that brought this problem under control in America, thus lessening the likelihood of centralization of administration and consequent loss of freedom.

IV. Civil associations are at least as important in America as political associations.

- A.** Civil associations prepare citizens to become part of political associations.
 - 1.** Citizens who practice the right of association in civil associations learn about the nature of associations.
 - 2.** People learn skills in civil associations that prepare them for political associations and public office.
- B.** Civil associations are an antidote to the tendency of people to withdraw from the public sphere in a democracy.

- C. People can imagine themselves as self-sufficient in civil matters. Once they see the advantages and power of a civil association, they may turn to a political association, because in the realm of politics, it is hard even to pretend self-sufficiency.
 - D. Participation in civil associations is less risky than in political associations, thus making it easier to get involved.
- V. In recent years, several people have pointed to the decline in Americans' participation in political (and civil) associations.
- A. One book that focused on this point was Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*.
 - B. In this book, Putnam demonstrates a decline in participation, in both civil and political associations, of about 35 percent since the mid-1960s. Putnam's book asks the reasons for, and explains the results of, such a decline.
 - C. Putnam essentially agrees with Tocqueville about the good of civil associations and what is lost in their demise.
 - D. Rooted in Tocqueville but going beyond him, Putnam discusses the idea of *social capital*.
 - E. Putnam is neither fatalistic nor pessimistic in looking toward the future of associations.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 5 (pp. 489–492); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 6 (pp. 493–495).

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, section 2.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do civil associations differ from political associations?
2. What contributions do civil associations make to American society?
3. What dangers exist for a democracy whose civil associations falter?

Lecture Sixteen

Blacks and Indians

Scope: Although Tocqueville is primarily writing a book for the French, who do not have slaves and indigenous people living in their country, he cannot paint a picture of America without dealing with race, especially black slavery and the “Indian problem.” He first comes into contact with Indians in upstate and western New York, and he sees slavery first hand when he travels through the South. He is also in America at the time of the beginning of the removal of the Cherokees from their homes to the West. Although Tocqueville sees slavery as incompatible with democracy and, hence, predicts an end to it, he was aware that emancipation would not be the end of the problem of race. He also was not hopeful that the “Indian problem” could be resolved. Although some of Tocqueville’s predictions were, at least in the long run, not accurate, he nevertheless brings a perspective to the three races living in the United States that can be helpful in understanding contemporary American society. We will also take a brief look at what Tocqueville’s traveling companion, Gustave de Beaumont, had to say about slavery in his novel.

Outline

- I. Tocqueville devotes the longest chapter in *Democracy in America* to the three naturally distinct and almost inimical races that inhabit America.
 - A. The combination of differences in law, education, origin, and physical features makes the barriers between the races almost insurmountable.
 - B. Europeans make others serve them; when Europeans cannot bend them, they destroy them.
 - C. Tocqueville holds out some hope that “half-breeds” and mulattoes will be natural links between Indians, blacks, and whites.
- II. Tocqueville had a number of different impressions of Indians he met during his journey in America.
 - A. The first Indians he saw were drunks and beggars in New York.

- B. He met a group of Choctaws in the South who were being forced to move, and he closely followed the woes of the Cherokees, which were beginning while he was in America.
- C. Indians had no real concept of private wealth and property.
- D. Indians were mild and hospitable in peace but pitiless in war.
- E. Like whites, they believed in another world and, under a different name, worshiped God.
- F. To some extent, Tocqueville saw Rousseau's noble savage in the Indians.
 - 1. They had no profound corruption.
 - 2. They did not display rudeness.

III. Europeans have treated the Indians badly and unjustly.

- A. They introduced iron and brandy and made the Indians dependent, because the Indians had no way of producing those items.
- B. Europeans pushed the Indians to the West through several methods and would keep pushing them farther to the West.
 - 1. Sometimes, whites sent embassies and offered goods in return for Indian land.
 - 2. White settlers took advantage of indistinct boundaries.
 - 3. States put Indian lands under state law because they knew that the Indians would move rather than submit.

IV. The Cherokees prove that Indians have as much natural ability as whites.

- A. They developed a written language.
- B. They had a newspaper before all of them had clothes.
- C. Tocqueville quotes the Cherokees' petition to Congress in full.

V. What are the Indians' options?

- A. They could choose "civilization," but they do not want it.
 - 1. They could mingle with whites but not completely.
 - 2. They could settle down, farm the land, and adopt European ways, but Indians reject farm work as ignoble.
- B. Their other option is war.
- C. Tocqueville is pessimistic about the future of Indians in America.

VI. Tocqueville hates slavery.

- A. The Greeks and Romans had slavery and defended it.

- B. Jesus came, and in subsequent centuries of Christian civilization, slavery was abolished in Europe.
- C. Tocqueville was troubled that slavery was reintroduced into Christian society centuries after its abolition.

VII. Tocqueville evokes several impressions he had of blacks in America.

- A. They have lost the memory of their origins, language, and religion.
- B. Blacks have no families.
- C. They have developed a habit of servitude and more admire than hate their masters.
- D. When some blacks have become free in America, their freedom has been burdensome to them.
- E. In states where slavery has been abolished, blacks and whites worship the same God but not at the same altar.
- F. Tocqueville met a white man who had a black mistress and whose sons were also his slaves.

VIII. Unlike slavery in the ancient world, slavery in America is racial; thus, it will be difficult to change attitudes about it.

- A. Slavery will be abolished.
 - 1. This will happen because of whites' interests, not blacks'.
 - 2. Slavery is incompatible with democratic freedom and the enlightenment of the age.
- B. Even when blacks become free, they will still be strangers.
- C. Abolition of slavery will not eliminate prejudice of the master, prejudice of race, prejudice of the white.
- D. Abolition will actually increase the repugnance whites feel toward blacks.
- E. One current idea, returning blacks to Africa, specifically Liberia, is a good idea in theory but totally unrealistic given the number of blacks in America.

IX. One of the most poignant passages in *Democracy in America* describes the differences between the left (Kentucky) and right (Ohio) banks of the Ohio River.

- A. Everything is the same except that there is slavery in Kentucky and not in Ohio.

- B. In Ohio, the land is cultivated by whites, and there is industry and commerce; work is honored.
 - C. In Kentucky, the land is not well cultivated, and whites prefer hunting and war to work; work is dishonored.
 - D. Slavery is corrupting of the masters.
- X. Tocqueville's companion, Gustave de Beaumont, wrote a novel in 1835, *Marie or, Slavery in the United States*.
- A. It is the story of a white woman who discovers that she has some Negro blood.
 - B. It deals with racial prejudice even more than with slavery.
 - C. Because Marie finds refuge among Indians, it links American prejudice toward blacks and Indians.
- XI. Tocqueville is quite critical about white justifications for the treatment of blacks and Indians.
- A. The Americans claim that their treatment of Indians is legal and even moral; at least the Spanish are not disingenuous about their cruelty toward Indians.
 - B. In the North, where there is no slavery, the prejudice is worse, and there is less mingling with blacks. Blacks have some rights by law, but they are often ignored in fact.
 - C. Tocqueville predicts that if there is ever a revolution in America, it will be caused by the inequality of conditions between the other races and whites.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2. ch. 10 (pp. 302–396).

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Tocqueville understand what he perceives to be the essentially tragic nature of the conditions of American Indians and the possibilities for them?
2. Why is Tocqueville convinced that the abolition of slavery is inevitable?
3. What conclusions can we draw about the white majority from Tocqueville's discussion of Indians and blacks?

Lecture Seventeen

Mores and Democracy

Scope: Tocqueville is emphatic that democracy is not simply a form of government—it is a way of life. Just as there are democratic institutions, there are also democratic values and attitudes and family structures and culture. Tocqueville pays close attention to what he calls the *mores* of democracy, which he also refers to as the *habits of the heart*. Here, we will consider the larger idea of democratic values and habits. In addition to being essential to understanding our democracy, Tocqueville’s ideas are important to consider as the United States seeks to encourage and help nations without a tradition of democracy to create an egalitarian and free society and to do so quickly.

Outline

- I. Tocqueville believes that there are three main reasons why democracy is maintained in America:
 - A. The first reason stems from the accidents of the American experience, for example, its isolation from other powerful nations and, thus, its safety.
 - B. Its laws, beginning with the Constitution, are good.
 - C. The most important reason for America’s success with democracy is its mores.
- II. Tocqueville defines and describes what he means by *mores*.
 - A. Mores are, to use a famous term of Tocqueville’s, the habits of the heart.
 - B. Mores are rooted in Americans’ notions and opinions, the sum of ideas from which habits are formed.
 - C. One basis for American mores is religion, the subject of the next lecture.
- III. For Tocqueville, an important habit of the heart is the American preference for specifics rather than general ideas.
 - A. America gives the world political examples rather than lessons.

- B. Democratic people are suspicious of intellectual systems and stay close to facts.
- C. If Americans fail to pay attention to principles and look only at results, they could become incapable of change, as the Chinese are.
- D. Americans prefer the useful to the beautiful, and beautiful things must be useful.
- E. Americans do like facile generalities (different than systems) and often speak in abstractions.

IV. Americans combine something of a frontier crudeness with urbanity.

- A. In a rude cabin, people wear the clothes and speak the language of the city.
- B. They know the past, concern themselves with the future, and argue about the present.
- C. A cabin will probably have a Bible, a hatchet, and newspapers.
- D. On Sunday, families go to church and commerce is abandoned.
 - 1. In church, people are taught to regulate their desires and not to covet.
 - 2. They go home from church and read the Bible.
- E. Americans do not use the word *peasant* because it implies a simplistic way of life and thought that does not describe what happens in America.

V. Americans understand that experience brings enlightenment.

- A. Reading and writing are not sufficient.
- B. Education is directed toward politics.
- C. People bring the habits of politics into their private lives.

VI. In any society, people need some dogmatic beliefs, some accepted framework.

- A. This is difficult for Americans because of their distrust of intellectual systems.
- B. The hardest reality to understand is God.
- C. Religion is an important underpinning of the values and conduct of Americans (see Lecture Eighteen).

VII. Democratic people believe in human progress and perfectibility.

- A. Americans expect things to get better.
- B. They do not build ships to last a long time because they assume they will soon be able to build much better ones.

VIII. Americans are much attached to material well-being.

- A. The love of well-being is the dominant national taste.
- B. Equality leads to the poor longing to acquire property and the rich fearing to lose it.
- C. Tocqueville says that there can be an honest, noncorrupting materialism, but he is not convinced that he finds this in America.
- D. America has a fervent ardor, people always dreaming of what they do not have.

IX. Tocqueville fears that the love of well-being could degrade people.

- A. It is the job of religion to point people toward a view of the future (see Lecture Eighteen).
- B. It is the job of legislators to raise people's souls.
 - 1. Legislators need to help people have a taste of the infinite.
 - 2. Legislators need to show people a sense of greatness.
 - 3. Legislators should seek to instill a love of immaterial pleasures.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9 (pp. 264–302); v. 2, pt. 3, ch. 14 (pp. 578–581).

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What does Tocqueville mean by the word *mores*?
- 2. How does Tocqueville describe some of the paradoxes of American morals and manners?
- 3. Must the idea of progress always be part of a democratic culture?

Lecture Eighteen

Christianity and Democracy

Scope: Democracies are prone to changing values because of their majoritarian nature. Hence, an important question is: Where is the anchor of democracy to be found? For Tocqueville, the answer is in religion generally and Christianity specifically. Christian values are not subject to the whims of the majority; hence, they are essential for the functioning of American democracy. They also lead adherents beyond their desire for material prosperity and comfort (see Lecture Twenty-One). Tocqueville is convinced that despite its history, Christianity is, in its essence, supportive of democracy and its most essential principle, equality of conditions. Tocqueville, however, posits that if churches become directly involved in politics, they will be subject to all of the “hardball politics” of other associations; thus, they will lose influence. Tocqueville also proposes the counterintuitive belief that Catholicism is a better fit with democracy than various forms of Protestantism, including those that were present at the foundation of American society.

Outline

- I. Tocqueville believed that, in its essence and despite its corruption in Europe, Christianity was compatible with, and supportive of, democracy, because Christ operated from the premise of the equality of conditions among humans.
- II. Tocqueville believed that democracy needed a firm religious and, specifically, Christian base in order to survive.
 - A. Despotism can do without faith, but freedom cannot.
 - B. Equality isolates and stimulates love of material well-being; religion counters these tendencies.
 1. Christianity must purify, regulate, and restrain the desire for material well-being.
 2. Christianity will not turn people from the pursuit of wealth, but it will encourage them to do it honestly.

- C. Americans tend to see things in the short term; religion points them toward a future.
 - 1. Governments should act as if they believed in the immortality of the soul, because this will force citizens to take a broader view of matters.
 - 2. Governments should conform their behavior to Christian morality.
 - D. Tocqueville remarks that because Islam's founder and sacred text present much that is political and even scientific (as opposed to purely moral principles), Islam cannot serve as the basis for a democratic and enlightened society.
- III.** Democracies are subject to change as a result of the power of public opinion; for this reason, underlying, unchanging values are necessary.
- A. Philosophical systems can be the locus of stable ideas, but Americans are not much interested in systems.
 - B. Even with base values that do not change, Christianity is adapted to the American situation. Christianity in America has something of a "this worldly" quality to it.
 - C. This is even true with Catholicism, as evidenced by the fact that, in America, Catholicism never seriously challenges basic American beliefs.
- IV.** Christianity's force in America is anchored in its moral authority, which is enhanced by the separation of church and state.
- A. The clergy and the churches stay out of politics and political parties.
 - 1. Some states, including New York, wrote into their constitutions that clergy could not hold public office.
 - 2. A conversation that Tocqueville had with Reverend Wainwright in Auburn, New York, illustrates this point well.
 - 3. If churches engage in partisan politics, they will be treated like other parties and political associations.
 - 4. If churches engage in politics, they may influence some people a great deal but lose the possibility of influencing everyone.
 - 5. Politics is about interests, while religion is about love.
 - B. Churches direct mores, and through regulating families, they work to regulate the state.

1. Churches are sovereign over women, who make mores.
2. Marriage is more respected in America than anywhere in the world.
3. When a man leaves the political arena and comes home, he enters a place of peace and order; this will influence his political views and activities.
4. Even revolutionaries profess their respect for Christian mores.

V. Roman Catholicism is, at its base, favorable to democratic habits.

A. Catholicism is something akin to an absolute monarchy—one person (in the case of Catholicism, the priest) was above, and everyone else was equal.

B. It was the equality of “everyone else” that Tocqueville saw as the democratic element of Catholicism.

C. In America, Catholicism was an immigrant church.

1. There were about 1 million Irish Catholics in America.
2. Those immigrant Catholics were mostly poor.
3. All classes intermingled at the altar.
4. This is different from most Protestants, who are more independent but less equal than Catholics.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9 (pp. 264–302); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 9 (pp. 504–506).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is religion necessary for the preservation and flourishing of a democracy?
2. Through what tactics is religion most effective in guiding a nation?
3. How can Tocqueville argue that Roman Catholicism, with its hierarchy culminating in the papal office, is a better “fit” for democracy than Protestantism?

Lecture Nineteen

Education and Culture in Democracies

Scope: Tocqueville believes that education is broad but shallow in America. The average person knows more than his or her counterpart in Europe, but America lacks great scientists, writers, philosophers, and artists. Here, Tocqueville develops a theme introduced in other contexts in *Democracy in America*—his concern that democracy supports mediocrity and that a certain kind of excellence is lost in democratic egalitarianism (see Lecture Twenty-Three). He comments on the tastes and reading habits of Americans. He suggests that Americans are more interested in technology than in science. There is even a new kind of democratic historical writing that is present in America. Today, as we look at our literary tradition, from Hawthorne to Twain to Toni Morrison, and our collection of Nobel Prizes, we may easily dismiss Tocqueville's analysis and fears about American cultural and intellectual mediocrity. However, we need to ask if Tocqueville has correctly pointed out at least some tendencies of our broader culture.

Outline

- I. In general, Tocqueville sees American education and culture as broad but shallow.
 - A. More people read, but they do not read great books.
 - B. More people possess works of art, but they are often mass produced and tawdry.
 - C. Much of high culture in America comes from Europe.
 - D. While talking about culture, Tocqueville tries to make careful distinctions between qualities that are democratic and specifically American habits and practices.
- II. Education in America focuses on science, commerce, and industry, with an emphasis on producing practical results.
 - A. America could use a few great universities more than a lot of bad colleges.

- B. Study of the classics is valuable to America because they were produced in democracies and republics but written for an elite audience.
- III. No place in the world is less interested in philosophy than America.
- A. Americans depend on religion rather than philosophy to give them unshakable principles.
 - B. People use the reason of the individual and make judgments for themselves.
 - C. There is little taste in America for the kinds of general ideas that philosophers espouse, although Americans love facile generalizations.
- IV. In the area of science, America seeks practical outcomes rather than scientific principles.
- A. Science's role is less lofty in America—to satisfy the nation's desire for physical well-being.
 - B. Science requires what Tocqueville calls *meditation*, and democracies are not conducive to meditation.
 - C. The steamboat is changing the world, but there is no law of mechanics that has been discovered in America.
 - D. There is a danger that America will lose sight of scientific principles and find itself unable to change.
- V. In literature and the fine arts, America has produced great quantity but not great quality.
- A. There are two foundational elements that work against American greatness in the arts.
 - 1. The Puritanism of New England was not favorable to the development of the arts.
 - 2. Americans pursue the arts for their practical value.
 - B. Artisans have profit as their goal.
 - 1. They want the most money for the least cost.
 - 2. They look to mass produce goods; Tocqueville gives the example of the decline in the quality of watches as they become cheaper and produced in much greater quantities.
 - 3. American artists seek to copy nature, not to surpass it (as, for example, Raphael and other artists of the Renaissance did).

- 4. Artists produce works that focus on the details of private life.
- C. Washington, DC, is a modest city with a grandiose plan.
 - 1. The government can sponsor large works of art.
 - 2. Washington is deliberately grand, but Tocqueville finds it pretentious (for example, naming the legislative meeting place the Capitol).

VI. There are many books in bookstores, but most are not by known authors.

- A. One mostly finds elementary treatises, religious tracts, and political pamphlets.
- B. The great literature is largely from England.
- C. Just about every log cabin in America has a volume of Shakespeare.
- D. Americans like books that are easily read and do not require a lot of background to understand.
 - 1. There are no fixed rules in writings in America. American literature is small books with lots of spirit and imagination.
 - 2. Aristocratic writing has style and clear rules of genre. This literature consists of large books with erudition and profundity.
- E. American poetry is about people and does not look to the past. Americans do not pay attention to nature even as they seek to subdue it.
- F. American theater offers emotional rather than intellectual pleasures.
 - 1. Puritans did not think much of the theater.
 - 2. Americans, with their hard work and deep religious faith, do not much like to be made fun of, hence, the lack of comedy.

VII. The English language in America is changed because of democracy.

- A. Many new words have been added.
 - 1. They come from political jargon, mechanical arts, and business.
 - 2. Americans like to make up pompous words for simple things (for example, a tightrope walker becomes a funambulist).
- B. Americans revive obscure expressions.

- C. Words lose clarity of meaning, including some, Tocqueville notices, that are borrowed from the French.

VIII. Democratic historical writing is different from aristocratic history.

- A. Traditional history emphasizes individual people as the causes of historical change.
- B. Americans emphasize great general causes.
 - 1. With the principle of equality of conditions, historians cannot examine many individuals; hence, they turn to impersonal causes.
 - 2. This can lead to a fatalistic view of history, which can paralyze America.
 - 3. This fatalism would be re-informed by religious views that deny free will.
- C. Tocqueville believes that historians need to look at both general causes and the roles individuals play.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 1 (pp. 403–407); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 3 (pp. 411–215); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 9 (pp. 428–433); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 10 (pp. 433–439); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 11 (pp. 439–443); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 12 (pp. 443–444); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 13 (pp. 445–449); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 16 (pp. 452–458); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 20 (pp. 469–472).

Questions to Consider:

- 1. Is education in a democracy bound to be broad but shallow?
- 2. Why was Tocqueville so wrong in his suggestions about the mediocrity of American literature and the fear that scientists would pursue only the creation of “gadgets”?
- 3. What are the most important components of education for the citizens of a democracy?

Lecture Twenty

Individualism in America

Scope: Alexis de Tocqueville invented the word *individualism*. Of course, he recognizes that Americans hardly invented the concept of the individual. However, this new -ism has its origins in America. Although Tocqueville recognized the importance of people being individuals, he believed that what was developing in America was not a good thing. In an egalitarian society, Tocqueville found the tendency to withdraw from the public sphere, because there, everyone is treated equally. It was in private life that one could feel “special.” However, this withdrawal did damage to the democratic requirement that people participate in the life of the community. For many Americans today, the concept of *rugged individualism* is a positive result of American culture. Tocqueville’s different take on the creation of individualism once again creates a useful prism through which to examine this quintessentially American phenomenon.

Outline

- I. Individualism is a new human phenomenon, and in fact, Tocqueville invents the word in *Democracy in America*.
 - A. It is distinct from selfishness, which is as old as humankind.
 - B. Selfishness comes from blind instinct.
- II. Individualism disposes people to isolate themselves from those like themselves.
 - A. In an egalitarian society, there is no privilege.
 - B. It is common for people to withdraw into a circle of family and friends, where they can be treated in a special way.
 - C. People create little societies for themselves.
 - D. In doing so, they abandon public life and public concerns.
 - E. Unlike selfishness, individualism is a calculated judgment.
- III. The characteristics of individualism show how damaging it is to democracy, which relies on participation of citizens in public affairs.

- A. Individualism dries up the source of public virtues.
- B. It eventually destroys all virtues and is absorbed into selfishness.

IV. Democracy's tendencies lead to individualism.

- A. Individualism threatens to grow as people become more equal.
 - 1. As equality increases and class distinctions fade, members of society become almost strangers to one another.
 - 2. The bonds of human affection are extended but weakened.
 - 3. The equality in a democracy makes people forget their ancestors, and their descendants are hidden from them.
- B. Equality leads to withdrawal from public life, rather than the creation of common bonds.
- C. Because despotism thrives when people do not bond together, this is a danger for democracy.

V. The American desire for material well-being loosens bonds in communities.

- A. When citizens are preoccupied with private affairs, even the tiniest parties can come to power.
- B. People develop a sense of self-sufficiency if they have material well-being.
- C. Individualism leads people away from being active in public affairs, thus leaving matters for the state's involvement.
 - 1. This can lead to centralization of administration.
 - 2. This can lead to a paternalistic state.
 - 3. There will be hardly any energy left for public life.

VI. Electoral competition exacerbates the tendency to withdraw, but Americans have fought against individualism.

- A. Longing to be elected makes for temporary war and creates hatred.
- B. Freedom is the great antidote to individualism.
 - 1. Citizens act together locally and learn that they depend on one another.
 - 2. While general affairs of state interest only a few, local issues, such as where a road is built, develop bonds.
- C. In bonding on local matters, people learn that there is a relationship between the individual and the common interest.

- D. The key to fighting individualism is for communities to have vibrant local governments that can act independently.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 2 (pp. 482–484); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 3 (pp. 484–485); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 4 (pp. 485–488).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does Tocqueville have to invent the concept of individualism?
2. What are the reasons that democracy tends to weaken social bonds?
3. Given that individualism is a danger to democratic societies, what are the best ways for a democracy to prevent the development of individualism in its citizens?

Lecture Twenty-One

The Desire for Wealth in America

Scope: Tocqueville finds a kind of materialism in Americans that is disturbing to him. People are so caught up in becoming richer that they ignore other important aspects of what it means to be human. He is rather put off by the passion Americans have for commerce and industry. In some way, he anticipates the famous line of Calvin Coolidge: “The business of America is business.” Tocqueville also fears that as industry grows in America, the disparity between industrialists and laborers could be great enough to threaten the fundamental principle of the equality of conditions. If an aristocracy were to develop in America, he argues, it may well be of industrialists. Tocqueville also sees the widespread prosperity in America as a deterrent to future revolutions, for those with property are not much interested in overthrowing a government that guarantees the rights to their property. Although America was primarily an agricultural nation in 1831, Tocqueville anticipates some of the pressures that a new kind of economy would place on democratic principles.

Outline

- I. In a democracy, where there is equality of conditions, there is a longing in people to achieve material well-being.
 - A. This is essentially a middle-class passion.
 - B. Most who become rich were once poor and are intoxicated with their little enjoyments.
 - C. America is a feverish place.
- II. There are dangers for democracy as people seek and acquire material comforts.
 - A. A taste for well-being can easily put people into the hands of a master who offers to satisfy their desires.
 - B. A concern for gain leads people to ignore the bond that exists between their individual good and the common good.

- C. People begin to regard political obligations as onerous, because they keep them from their individual pursuits. In doing so, people *think* they are following the doctrine of self-interest, but they are not pursuing self-interest well understood.
 - D. Ambitious men can take power in such a situation, and the fear of anarchy will allow them to keep control. A nation that demands only order from its government is already enslaved.
 - E. Materialism is always dangerous but particularly so in a democracy.
- III. In a democracy, with its equality of conditions, people are, in general, discontented with what they possess.
- A. This leads them to commerce and industry, because these are the quickest and best ways of improving their fortunes.
 - B. Even those who are already rich pursue commerce, because political advancement is often not open to them.
- IV. The development of industry could lead to the creation of an aristocracy in America.
- A. Manufacturing becomes a series of specialized tasks performed by workers.
 - 1. Workers lose their facility of applying their minds to their work.
 - 2. They become more skilled but less industrious.
 - 3. They have jobs that they are unable to leave.
 - 4. Workers become weaker and more dependent.
 - B. Industry lowers workers and raises masters.
 - C. Masters and workers differ more and more.
 - D. Inequality becomes greater in the smaller societies of industry, while it is reduced in society at large. Can this continue forever?
 - E. This means that there are a few very affluent people and many in misery.
 - F. Those who find great wealth in industry do not live in the midst of the people they hire.
 - G. The very wealthy leave to public charity the nourishing of the destitute.

- H. Two men, a leader of industry and a worker, will see each other in the factory but not know each other elsewhere.
 - I. What is described above is the forming of an aristocracy.
 - J. If America develops a permanent aristocracy, it will enter by this door.
- V. Industry can flourish only in an ordered society; thus, the society that develops will desire stability.
- A. Those who are wealthy desire only that the government not interfere with their business.
 - B. The middle class has enough possessions to desire order.
 - C. The government builds infrastructure, and industry becomes dependent on the government.
- VI. So far, America has placed constraints on the tendencies of the pursuit of wealth to isolate people from one another and to excite excessive love of material well-being.
- A. American selfishness is enlightened. Americans know to sacrifice a part of their self-interest in order to save the rest.
 - B. Americans' passion for material well-being is limited. Americans have created softness but not absurdity.
 - C. The religion of America is the most important restraint.
 - 1. Religion works against isolation and the desire for immediate fulfillment.
 - 2. Americans want the best in this world without risking their status in the next.
 - D. There can be such a thing as an honest materialism that does not corrupt souls.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 10 (pp. 506–507); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 11 (pp. 508–509); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 16 (pp. 521–522); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 19 (pp. 526–529); v. 2, pt. 2, ch. 20 (pp. 530–532).

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the connection that Tocqueville makes between equality of conditions and the desire for material wealth?

2. Has Tocqueville's warning about the possibility of a commercial aristocracy in America come to pass?
3. How does the widespread material prosperity in America mitigate against the dangers of the fickleness of democracy?

Lecture Twenty-Two

The Democratic Family

Scope: Tocqueville recognizes that the definition of *family* has evolved since ancient times and that the modern American family is quite a different reality than, for example, the family in ancient Rome. He discusses some of the qualities of a democratic family, everything from inheritance laws to the personal relations between parents and their children. Tocqueville especially is interested in the roles women play in a democratic America. In fact, he states that the principal reason for the success of America is the greatness of American women. However, he also believes that women have essentially agreed to a completely domestic role in society. Only 17 years after Tocqueville passed through upstate New York, the first women's rights convention was held at Seneca Falls. We can speculate a bit about how Tocqueville might have reacted if he received in Paris the news of the ladies of Seneca Falls. This will allow us to draw, not just on his specific words about women, but on his broader conception of American democracy. Such speculation is also methodologically useful as we try to determine how we can intelligently apply Tocqueville to our own time.

Outline

- I. On the first page of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville stated that the equality of conditions affects civil as much as political society.
 - A. Equality of conditions modifies relations between citizens.
 - B. Equality of conditions modifies relationships within the family.
- II. Relations between fathers and sons are different in democratic societies.
 - A. Tocqueville has the historical perspective to realize that the family is a dynamic, not static, institution; he says that the Roman conception of family no longer exists.
 - B. The distance between fathers and sons is less.
 - C. Paternal authority is diminished.

- D. As boys grow up, filial bonds are loosened. There really is no adolescence in America.
 - E. In a democracy, a father is only a citizen who is older and richer than the son.
 - F. Fathers have more intimate and sweeter relations with their sons in democratic societies.
- III.** The relationship between a father and his sons has changed as inheritance laws have evolved in America.
- A. Inheritance laws are different in a democracy, and America already has many such democratic laws.
 - B. The movement is toward equal sharing of a father's property by his sons and away from primogeniture.
 - C. This divides the inheritance but allows the souls of brothers to intermingle because it removes jealousy.
- IV.** Although democracy loosens social bonds, it tightens family bonds.
- V.** Tocqueville states that women make mores in a society.
- A. He has argued that mores are more important than either accidental factors or laws in America's success.
 - B. Consequently, everything affecting women in America is of great political interest and consequence.
- VI.** Girls are raised in America to be independent.
- A. In general, Protestant girls are more responsible for their actions than Catholic girls; thus, religion plays a role in defining American women.
 - B. Girls in America are largely left to themselves as they are growing up.
 - 1. They are freed gradually from maternal tutelage.
 - 2. They are allowed to think for themselves, speak freely, and act alone.
 - 3. They come to know the vices and perils of society.
 - 4. They grow full of confidence.
 - C. American girls have pure mores rather than chaste minds.
 - D. Women's most tyrannical passions are not repressed, but they are taught to combat them.

1. Women are armed with reason.
2. They are honest and cold, developing judgment at the expense of imagination.

VII. When women marry, everything changes for them.

- A. Women agree when they marry to surrender their independence.
- B. Women continually sacrifice their pleasures.
- C. Women are confined within a small circle of interests and domestic duties.
- D. Paradoxically, women exercise their independence and judgment by choosing to endure sacrifice. Women's new source of pleasure is the home.

VIII. The movement toward equality of conditions has affected the relationship between men and women.

- A. It has brought down barriers between men and women.
- B. The middling economic condition of most people has led to women remaining inside the home and handling the details of domestic administration.

IX. Will the equality of conditions finally affect the inequality between men and women?

- A. There are those in Europe who assume that equality also means that men and women act alike.
- B. America has not adopted this stance but, rather, has divided the functions of men and women.
 1. Men deal with external affairs of the family, conduct business, and enter the political sphere.
 2. Women do the work within the home and family.
 3. There is no home in America so poor that this is not true.
- C. Every association has a head, and the association called the family has the man as the head.
- D. Women are not much praised, but they are much esteemed.
- E. Women are inferior to men in society but their equals intellectually and morally.

X. Of all the reasons for the success of America, the most important is the superiority of its women.

- XI.** Only 17 years after Tocqueville passed through upstate New York, the first women’s rights convention was held at Seneca Falls.
- A.** One wonders how Tocqueville responded to this news, if indeed, he heard it.
 - B.** On the one hand, he may have been surprised because he believed that women and men agreed to the “division of labor” that existed in the American family.
 - C.** On the other hand, perhaps he rethought the issue of whether women could really so completely give up their independence when they got married. And what about those women who did not marry?
 - D.** It is interesting to speculate about Tocqueville’s response to this and other events in America after his journey that may have confirmed or challenged his perceptions.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 2, pt. 3, ch. 8 (pp. 558–563); v. 2, pt. 3, ch. 9 (pp. 563–565); v. 2, pt. 3, ch. 10 (pp. 565–567); v. 2, pt. 3, ch. 12 (pp. 573–576).

Questions to Consider:

1. Is there such a thing as a democratic family?
2. Given that Tocqueville argues that families are stronger in a democracy, can a democracy flourish if the institution of the family becomes weaker?
3. Does Tocqueville’s description of independent women surrendering their independence upon marriage sound credible?

Lecture Twenty-Three

Are Democracy and Excellence Compatible?

Scope: Although we have touched on this question regarding culture and education (see Lecture Nineteen), it is a concern with implications far beyond those specific contexts. One could say generally that from Greek times, people have debated whether democracy destroys excellence or encourages it. Tocqueville is sometimes almost nostalgic about the demise of the brilliance that he sees in France's aristocratic past. Yet he also recognizes that a democratic society is more just and that this justice is its own sort of excellence. We will bring to the discussion here the question of excellence or mediocrity as it is raised in a variety of contexts throughout *Democracy in America*.

Outline

- I. At the end of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville speculates about whether a time of equality of conditions is better than the past.
 - A. In some ways, Tocqueville says a painful goodbye to aristocracy and is, perhaps, even a bit nostalgic for a world that is disappearing.
 - B. Yet even recognizing what is lost, there is a great deal to be said about the new democratic world.
- II. There have been debates about whether democracy furthers or destroys excellence since the beginnings of democracy in ancient Athens.
 - A. Pericles argued in his Funeral Oration (recorded in Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*) that democracy stimulates excellence because all citizens are stakeholders with public responsibilities.
 - B. Plato argued in his *Republic* (especially Book VIII) that democracy is government by majority, rather than by those who know, and is fundamentally unstable and unjust.
 - C. In the last century, Winston Churchill gave his own take on democracy: "Democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried from time to time."

- D. Tocqueville has a lot to add to this debate, and I will look at some passages I have already examined and some new ones to explain his feelings of ambiguity about the greatness of democracy.
- III. Tocqueville argues that America has learned people and the fewest ignorant men of any country in the world.
- A. If we look for the learned, there is a very small number.
 - B. If we look for the ignorant, America appears to be the most enlightened nation on earth.
- IV. Tocqueville is not impressed by America's officeholders.
- A. Andrew Jackson was president when Tocqueville was in America, and his low opinion of Jackson may have unduly influenced his generalization.
 - B. There is little merit among those who govern.
 - C. The most remarkable men seldom hold public office.
- V. Americans value the reasoning of individuals rather than philosophical systems.
- A. They have peaceful habits rather than heroic virtues.
 - B. There are fewer horrific acts but also fewer great actions.
 - C. America is a prosperous society rather than a brilliant society.
 - D. Democracies do more things, but they do those things less well than aristocracies.
- VI. American culture and science lack brilliance.
- A. Americans stay away from general ideas and large systems.
 - B. There are few good writers and no great historians or poets.
 - C. In democracies, science is not done for its own sake, but more people are interested in science in America than in other places.
 - D. There is a lot of art, but it lacks the highest quality.
 - E. Writers and artists seek the elegant and pretty rather than the great.
 - F. There are many books in America, but they are short, oriented toward how-to-do, and do not require much background to understand.

G. Tocqueville's generalization about American culture is that American imagination is not extinguished but used to conceive the useful and to represent the real.

VII. The American doctrine of self-interest well understood mitigates against greatness.

A. Democracy is not about great devotions but about small sacrifices.

B. Extraordinary virtue is rare but so is utter depravity.

C. People do not aim very high, but all have ambition.

D. While the individual is lowered, the species is raised.

VIII. Nevertheless, while concerning himself with the mediocrity of equality, Tocqueville pays democracy a high compliment: Democracy is more just than other forms of government, and that is, perhaps, its true greatness.

Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 7 (pp. 235–237); v. 2, pt. 1, ch. 12 (pp. 443–444); v. 1, pt. 2, ch. 8 (pp. 500–503); v. 2, pt. 4, ch. 8 (pp. 674–676).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does Tocqueville believe that, in general, the “best people” do not seek or hold public office in America?
2. Is Tocqueville right in suggesting that democracies neither produce nor require the best that humans can achieve?
3. In the final analysis, are equality of conditions and the achievement of excellence compatible?

Lecture Twenty-Four

Tocqueville's Unanswered Questions

Scope: Despite almost 700 pages of analysis, observations, and predictions, at the end, Tocqueville recognizes that there are many unanswered questions about the American experiment in democracy. Our country could become a place of crass materialism, a nation in which the majority oppresses the minority, a benevolent but harmful despotism. On the other hand, it could become a place of prosperity, enlightenment, and freedom. We will bring the course to a conclusion by reviewing Tocqueville's most important insights and applying them to the next 175 years of American history. Of course, our nation's story is still developing, but we can ask which possibilities that Tocqueville outlines are at present those in the ascent.

Outline

- I. The focus of Tocqueville has been on equality of conditions as the central tenet of democracy.
 - A. At the beginning of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville states that the growing equality of conditions is a providential fact.
 - B. At the end of the book, he asks, given the movement toward equality of conditions, whether it is for good or ill.
 1. Will it lead to servitude or freedom?
 2. Will it lead to enlightenment or barbarism?
 3. Will it lead to prosperity or misery?
- II. I will briefly deal with some elements of the second and third questions.
 - A. Let us consider the enlightenment/barbarism dichotomy.
 1. Tocqueville has positive and negative things to say about education in America (broad but not deep).
 2. He is critical of the state of the arts and science in America.
 3. He is horrified by what he calls America's irascible patriotism.

4. He has observed that Americans do not take criticism well, especially from foreigners. Americans are always proclaiming their country's superiority.
- B.** Next, we should consider whether equality of conditions leads to prosperity or misery.
1. In general, Tocqueville sees Americans as having mediocre fortunes; this is a certain kind of prosperity.
 2. Equality leads people to pursue more wealth. Pursuit of wealth breaks bonds between people.
 3. Pursuit of wealth leads to commerce and industry.
 4. There are dangers in industry of growing, even unbridgeable, inequality. In turn, this can lead to the establishment of permanent inequality of conditions, that is, an aristocracy.
- C.** Democracy can be a means toward enlightenment, prosperity, and enduring freedom. The choices are ours; they are not inevitable.
- III.** It is useful to summarize briefly the essential freedoms and their enemies that Tocqueville has enunciated.
- A.** Tocqueville has spoken about essential freedoms needed for the functioning and flourishing of a democracy:
1. Freedom of the press and a large number of newspapers
 2. Freedom to assemble and freedom of association, necessary for the development of political and civil associations
 3. Freedom of speech, with the danger that there will be a circle outside which it is prohibited to speak.
- B.** There are great threats to freedom in a democracy:
1. Tyranny of the majority
 2. Administrative centralization.
- IV.** Tocqueville believes that there is a real danger of despotism developing in democratic societies.
- A.** Americans like simple ideas.
1. They can imagine a nation in which citizens all resemble a single model.
 2. They conceive of such a nation directed by a single power.
 3. They are attracted to the idea of uniform legislation.
- B.** Americans believe in equality.
1. This can lead to the centralized administration of government.

2. Centralization is a natural tendency of democracies, because it offers uniformity, which can be taken for equality; retaining local liberties requires vigilance.
- C. American despotism would be mild.
1. It would degrade but not torment citizens.
 2. It would act as a schoolmaster, not a tyrant. Some would find comfort because they *chose* their schoolmaster.
 3. It would be paternalistic, keeping citizens children forever.
 4. The government would work for people's happiness but would seek to be the sole agent and arbiter of that happiness.
 5. The government would eventually take away from people the trouble of thinking and the pain of living.
- V. What are the principal antidotes to this gentle despotism?
- A. Religion points people in the right direction and helps to strengthen bonds between people.
 - B. Local governments must be active and do things that matter; there must be frequent elections so that people really do have control and can see results.
 - C. The judiciary needs to remain independent.
 - D. Both political and civil associations must be vibrant and constantly show that, by working together, people are pursuing their self-interest well understood.
 - E. Americans need to take seriously procedures, although they naturally disdain them. These procedures protect people from those who govern them asserting their will too easily.
 - F. There is a great need, even at great cost, to preserve individual rights, because they work against the tendency toward uniformity.
- VI. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was a great and important book in 1840, when it was published in full. It is still a great and, perhaps, a more important book as America and the world continue to move toward equality of conditions in the 21st century.

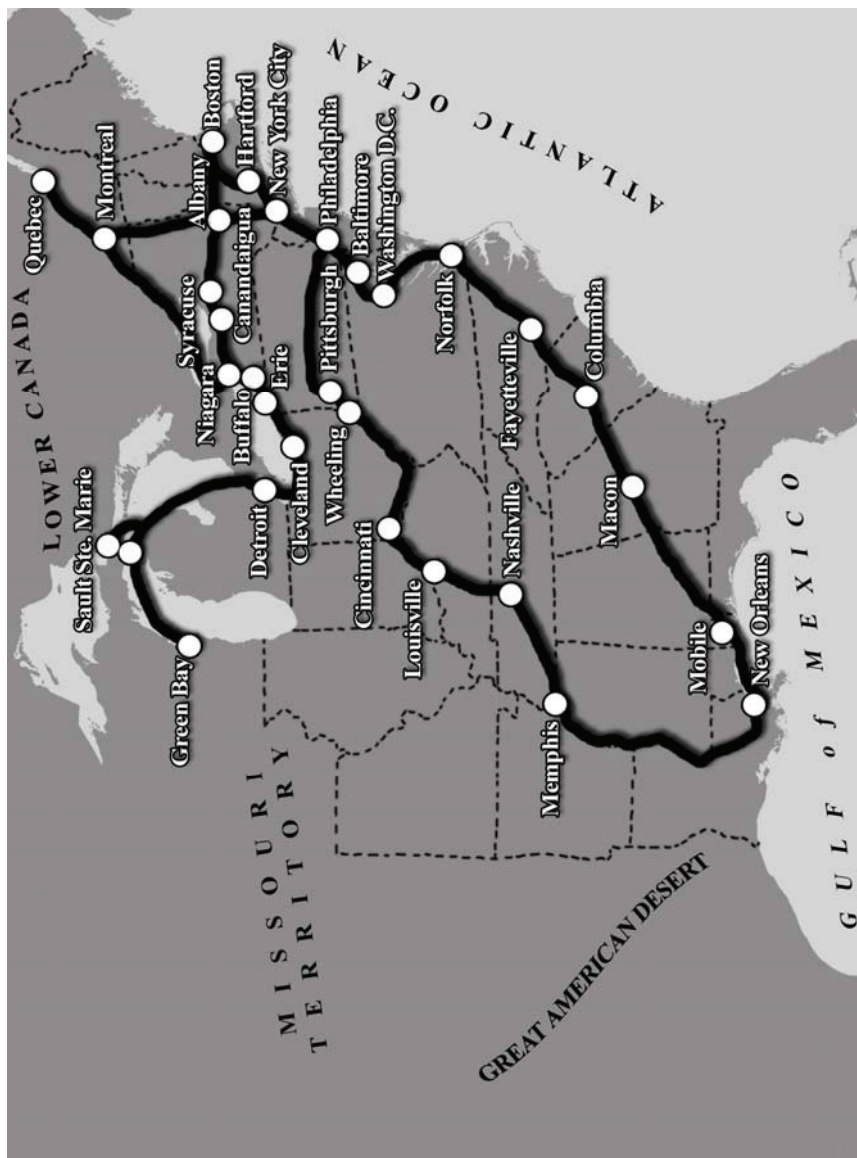
Readings:

Democracy in America, v. 1, Introduction (pp. 3–15); v. 2, pt. 4, ch. 8 (pp. 674–676).

Questions to Consider:

1. Under what conditions could democracy devolve into servitude?
2. Given Tocqueville's emphasis on material prosperity as the goal of Americans, how can he argue that democracy could produce misery rather than prosperity?
3. How could America be transformed into a land governed by a "gentle despotism"?

Map



Timeline

- 1805 Alexis de Tocqueville was born in Paris.
- 1820–1824 Tocqueville studies in the city of Metz.
- 1825–1827 Tocqueville studies law in Paris.
- 1827 Tocqueville is appointed a judicial mediator in Versailles.
- 1828 Tocqueville meets Gustave de Beaumont, who will be his traveling companion in America, and Mary Motley, whom he will later marry.
- 1830 Tocqueville reluctantly takes an oath of loyalty to the new king following the July Revolution and is appointed a substitute judge. Beaumont and Tocqueville propose a trip to America to study the American penal system.
- Jan. 1, 1831 William Lloyd Garrison publishes the first issue of *The Liberator*.
- Feb. 6, 1831 Beaumont and Tocqueville are granted an 18-month leave to study the American penal system.
- Mar. 18, 1831 The Supreme Court rules on *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*.
- Apr. 2, 1831 Beaumont and Tocqueville set sail for America.
- May 9, 1831 Beaumont and Tocqueville arrive in Newport, Rhode Island.
- May 11, 1831 The two men arrive in New York City.
- May 27, 1831 They travel up the Hudson River to visit Sing Sing Penitentiary.

June 30, 1831	They leave New York City.
July 4, 1831	Tocqueville and Beaumont attend July 4 th festivities in Albany.
July 9, 1831	They begin their visit to Auburn Penitentiary.
July 16, 1831	They arrive in Canandaigua, New York, and stay with John C. Spencer.
July 18, 1831	They arrive in Buffalo.
July 22, 1831	They arrive in Detroit and depart for Saginaw.
July 26, 1831	John C. Calhoun definitively declares himself for nullification.
Aug. 9, 1831	Tocqueville and Beaumont arrive in Green Bay.
Aug. 18, 1831	They visit Niagara Falls.
Aug. 22, 1831	Nat Turner's rebellion begins.
Aug. 23, 1831	Tocqueville and Beaumont arrive in Montreal.
Sept. 9, 1831	They arrive in Boston for a stay of almost four weeks.
Sept. 28, 1831	The Anti-Masonic Convention meets.
Oct. 12, 1831	Tocqueville and Beaumont arrive in Philadelphia for a two-week stay, visiting Eastern State Penitentiary several times.
Oct. 28, 1831	They travel to Baltimore, where they encounter slavery for the first time.
Nov. 12, 1831	The first steam-powered train makes its maiden voyage.

Nov. 25, 1831	Tocqueville and Beaumont leave Pittsburgh on an Ohio River boat for Cincinnati but hit a rock the next day.
Dec. 7, 1831	They arrive in Nashville.
Dec. 25, 1831	They begin their trip to New Orleans from Memphis on a steamboat.
Jan. 1, 1832	They arrive in New Orleans.
Jan. 3, 1832	They begin a long voyage on land and sea through the South.
Jan. 15, 1832	They arrive in Norfolk, Virginia.
Jan. 17, 1832	They arrive in Washington.
Jan. 19, 1832	Tocqueville and Beaumont meet President Andrew Jackson.
Feb. 6, 1832	They arrive in New York.
Feb. 20, 1832	They board a ship for their return voyage to France.
1832	Tocqueville resigns as a substitute judge.
1833	Tocqueville and Beaumont publish <i>On the Penitentiary System in the United States</i> . Tocqueville begins writing <i>Democracy in America</i> .
1835	The first volume of <i>Democracy in America</i> is published. John Stuart Mill publishes a favorable review in London. Tocqueville travels to England. He marries Mary Motley.
1836	Upon his mother's death, Tocqueville inherits the chateau of Tocqueville and the title of count.
1839	Tocqueville is elected to the French National Assembly and publishes a

pamphlet calling for the abolition of slavery. Henry Reeve publishes the first English translation of volume 1 of *Democracy in America*. It was later published in the United States with notes by John C. Spencer.

- 1840 Tocqueville publishes the second volume of *Democracy in America*. The second volume appears in Henry Reeve's English translation.
- 1844 Tocqueville buys a newspaper and sells it when it fails.
- 1848 After the revolution topples the Second Republic, Tocqueville is elected to the Constituent Assembly.
- 1849 From May to October, Tocqueville serves as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the cabinet of Louis-Napoleon.
- 1850 Tocqueville begins to suffer from serious health problems.
- 1851 Tocqueville is briefly imprisoned after a coup by Louis-Napoleon.
- 1852 Tocqueville resigns his public office.
- 1856 Tocqueville publishes *The Old Regime and the Revolution*.
- 1859 Alexis de Tocqueville dies and is buried in the village of Tocqueville.

Glossary

American exceptionalism: A view still often held today that America is so different from other nations that it does not follow the same patterns or “play by the same rules” as other nations.

anti-Masonic movement: A growing political movement in America at the time of Tocqueville’s visit. The movement grew when an ex-Mason was believed to have been murdered after making public some of the Masons’ secrets.

Auburn: Upstate New York city where the Auburn Penitentiary was located. The Auburn system had prisoners work together in silence in the day and live in solitary confinement.

centralization of administration: The creation of what today we might call the micro-management of governmental policies at the highest level of government, hence, depriving local governments of meaningful functions and localized ways of carrying out policies of state and federal governments.

centralization of government: The necessary accumulation of authority over certain matters, such as foreign affairs, at the highest level of government.

civil associations: Groups of people who band together for essentially nonpolitical purposes.

Democracy in America: The two-volume work about America that Tocqueville published in French in 1835 and 1840.

direct democracy: The form of democracy practiced in ancient Athens and in New England townships. In this form of democracy, citizens gather and decide matters directly, rather than through representatives.

equality of conditions: Fundamental principle of democracy, according to Tocqueville. The term refers to something similar to what people today often refer to as *equality of opportunity*.

Federalist Papers: A collection of essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to urge states to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

Garrison, William Lloyd: The best known of the abolitionists at the time of Tocqueville's visit to America. He published his first issue of *The Liberator* in 1831.

great parties: Political parties based on principles and an articulated set of beliefs.

individualism: A word coined by Tocqueville to define the tendency in democracies of people to withdraw from public activities and responsibilities.

judicial review: The principle enunciated by Chief Justice John Marshall that the federal courts may strike down legislation that is determined to be unconstitutional.

justice of the peace: A local judge who often was not a lawyer.

Louis-Napoleon: French leader who became president after the fall of the Second Republic in 1848. In 1851, he staged a coup and reestablished an empire, which he ruled under the name Napoleon III.

Madison, James: Fourth president of the United States, often also referred to as the father of the Constitution.

Marbury v. Madison: The Supreme Court decision of 1803 that articulates the doctrine of judicial review.

Marie or, Slavery in the United States: The novel that Gustave de Beaumont published after his visit with Tocqueville to America.

mores (*moeurs* in French): The basic principles of a society, what are sometimes referred to as the *habits of the heart*.

nullification: A doctrine developed circa 1830, especially in South Carolina, that claimed that states could nullify federal laws.

penitentiary: A new type of prison, designed to make criminals penitent, developed in America in the late 1820s. There were two versions, the Auburn system and the Pennsylvania system.

Pennsylvania system: A system developed at Eastern State Penitentiary near Philadelphia. Prisoners worked and lived in cells without any contact with other inmates.

private political associations: Free associations of people who band together for the purpose of achieving political goals.

republic: In the classical sense, a government with elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. According to ideas going back to classical antiquity, such a mixed constitution took the best elements of each form of government and combined them in a way to create a stable state.

self-interest well understood: Tocqueville's belief that individual self-interest had to be placed within the context of the common good.

small parties: Political parties that are more interested in winning elections than in furthering principles.

social capital: A term used in modern times to describe one sort of benefit that accrues from participating in public life in a democracy.

township (or town in some states, such as New York): The basic unit of local government, especially in New England, where direct democracy was often practiced.

tyranny of the majority: The danger that in a majoritarian, democratic society, the majority could rule almost absolutely over the minority.

Van Buren, Martin: Secretary of state and, later, vice president under Andrew Jackson; eighth president of the United States.

Biographical Notes

John Quincy Adams served as the sixth president of the United States, from 1825 to 1829. Born in 1767, Adams had a successful career as a diplomat and secretary of state before his election to the presidency. He was defeated for reelection in 1828 by Andrew Jackson, whom he had defeated four years earlier. John Quincy Adams served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1831 until his death in 1848. He met Alexis de Tocqueville, both in Boston in 1831 and in Washington in 1832.

Gustave de Beaumont was born in 1802 and met Alexis de Tocqueville in 1828, when they were both young lawyers in Versailles. Together, they traveled to America in 1831–1832 and, shortly thereafter, co-authored *On the Penitentiary System in the United States*. Beaumont also published a novel based on his experiences in America entitled *Marie or, Slavery in the United States*. He married the granddaughter of the Marquis de Lafayette. He was elected to the French National Assembly in 1840 and was briefly France's ambassador to Great Britain in 1848. Like Tocqueville, Beaumont was briefly imprisoned after Louis-Napoleon's coup of 1851. Gustave de Beaumont died in 1866.

Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States, serving from 1829 until 1837. Born in 1767, he became famous as the hero of the Battle of New Orleans at the end of the War of 1812. He lost a controversial election for the presidency in 1824 to John Quincy Adams but defeated Adams in 1828. Jackson had a tumultuous presidency. There were bitter fights over the existence of the National Bank; and the nullification crisis led to the resignation of his vice president, John C. Calhoun. Jackson died in 1845. Tocqueville met Jackson in January of 1832 and did not think highly of America's seventh president.

John Canfield Spencer was born in 1788, was educated at Union College, and was admitted to the New York bar in 1809. In the next two decades, he served in both houses of the New York legislature and one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1831, he entertained Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont at his home in Canandaigua, New York. Later, Spencer fostered the publication in America of Henry Reeve's English translation of *Democracy in America* and added notes. He served as secretary to New York governor William Seward, and he held two cabinet offices in the administration of John Tyler—secretary of war and secretary

of the treasury. Spencer was nominated for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Senate rejected him. He died in 1855.

Alexis de Tocqueville was born in Paris in 1805 and was raised in various cities in France. He was a student in Metz and later pursued the study of law in Paris, eventually becoming a judicial official in Versailles. In 1831, following the July Revolution, Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont undertook a journey to America to study the U.S. penal system. However, it is clear from his writings that Tocqueville planned for his trip to be a comprehensive study of democracy. He traveled throughout the United States between May 1831 and February 1832.

When Tocqueville returned to France, he and Beaumont set about writing a report about the penitentiary system in America. In 1835, Tocqueville published the first volume of *Democracy in America*, adding a second volume in 1840. By that time, he was a member of the French National Assembly. In 1849, he briefly held the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs but withdrew from politics following the coup of Louis-Napoleon in 1851. In his last years, lived in ill health, he produced a classic study of the French Revolution. He died in 1859.

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Internet Resources:

At the time of the preparation of this bibliography, a Google search for "Tocqueville" netted 255,000 hits; however, two Web sites are particularly important. C-SPAN has developed www.tocqueville.org, a wonderful site for all sorts of information about Tocqueville's journey and excerpts from his and Beaumont's journals and letters. In addition, the entire text of *Democracy in America* can be read online in the Henry Reeve translation of circa 1840 at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/home.html>.