

## **Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy in America (1835)**

*Alexis de Tocqueville was a 29-year-old French nobleman who in 1831 traveled to the United States in order to inquire into future of his home country France, as the two nations had experienced similar democratic revolutions. In nine months Tocqueville traveled throughout the United States writing about his findings. Below are his writings regarding the changes in communication and transportation taking place in the United States during his visit.*

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I know but one single means of increasing the prosperity of a people that is infallible in practice and that I believe one can count on in all countries as in all spots. This means is naught else but to increase the ease of communication between men. On this point the spectacle presented by American is as curious as it is informing.

The roads, the canals and the mails play a prodigious part in the prosperity of the Union. It is well to examine their effects, the value set on them, and the manner of obtaining them. America, which is the country enjoying the greatest sum of prosperity every yet accorded a nation, is also the country which, proportional to its age and means, had made the greatest efforts to produce the easy communication I was speaking of.

In France there are large and very concentrated population through which winds no road, with the result that they are more separated from the rest of the nation than half the world formerly was. I don't doubt it would take longer and cost more to have ten sacks of wheat brought from certain people in lower Brittany to Paris than to transport to the same spot all the sugar of the colonies.

In American one of the first things done in a new State is to have the mail come. In the Michigan forests there is not a cabin so isolated, not a valley so wild, that it does not receive letters and newspapers at least once a week; we saw it ourselves. It was especially the circumstance that I felt the different between our social state and that of the Americans. There are few rural districts in France where as many letters and newspapers are received as in these still wild regions of America where man still struggles against all the hardships of life.

American has undertaken and is finishing some immense canals. It already has more railroads than France. There isn't anyone who does not recognize that the discover of steam has added unbelievably to the strength and prosperity of the Union, and has done so by facilitating rapid communications between the diverse parts of this vast body.

The states of the South, where communication is less easy, are those that languish by comparison to the rest.

Source: George W. Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York, 1938) p. 590