

Political Theory of Alexis de Tocqueville
Winter 2017

POSC 352
Tues Thurs 10:10-11:55
Weitz 230

Prof: Barbara Allen

Office Hours M-Th
Sign up using Moodle link

The Course

Tocqueville's Context

Between May 1831 and February 1832, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont toured the “New World” of North America. Their journey took them through New England and the Mid Atlantic, north to French Canada, west to the frontier, Green Bay in the Michigan Territory, and south to New Orleans, via the Mississippi River. Tocqueville was 25 and Beaumont was 28 when they embraced the social and cultural life of New York City, Philadelphia, Boston—and especially New Orleans where they joined New Years Eve festivities on Bourbon Street. Visits to *La Nouvelle-Orléans* in *Le Vieux Carré* (Old Square, AKA The French Quarter) and *Rue Bourbon* were, for Tocqueville and Beaumont, perhaps either nostalgic or ironic. Following the Revolution (1789–1799) overturning *l'ancien régime*, France had seen in succession, The First Republic (1792–1804), The First Empire of Napoleon (1804–1814 or 1815), The Bourbon Restoration (1814–1830) and the July Revolution (1830), which for Tocqueville and Beaumont changed everything.

Tocqueville and Beaumont were young jurists in the government court system, their first appointments out of law school. In July, soon after starting their new jobs, Tocqueville and Beaumont witnessed the three-day revolution culminating in a coup d'étate that changed their lives completely. In brief,

The French Revolution netted waves of “republic” qua democracy, arbitrary rule and terror, empire, restoration of monarchy, and the next republic. The short-lived, “100 Days” of Napoleon's return to Empire (20 March – 8 July 1815) had been followed by the Second Restoration of monarchy under the aging, relatively liberal Louis XVIII. He was soon succeeded by the “ultra royalist” Charles X. The July Revolution experienced by Tocqueville and Beaumont lasted about three days in which an instant of returning to republic gave way to a struggle to restore a constitutional monarchy, a revolutionary move ostensibly toward greater democracy that resulted in the installation of a new King of the French, the Orleanist, Louis Phillipe d'Orleans. Tocqueville and Beaumont, their families and close associates viewed the new monarch as a treacherous orchestrator of factional division and demagoguery with the aim of ingratiating himself with the ““money-greedy bourgeoisie.”” When Tocqueville and Beaumont were forced to swear an oath of loyalty to the government of Louis Phillipe, that was *it*. Such an act would betray their families and their growing belief that a truly republican form of government was the necessary next step—and that the “July Monarchy” (as Louis Phillipe's government was known) moved actual self-government to a far more distant horizon.

To escape the personal and professional conundrum while the dust settled on the new regime, Tocqueville and Beaumont wrote a grant, got two tickets on a ship to the US and “escaped” to study and report to their boss on the latest in criminal reform measures, the American penitentiary system.

They wrote their report in deck chairs on the way back to France in 1832. While crossing the Atlantic, Beaumont also began work on a novella, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States: a novel of Jacksonian America*, in which Beaumont assumed the unlikely point of view of a female slave in the southern United States. Tocqueville took what scholar James Schliefer calls his “second journey” to America, drafting a major work on the institutions, political culture, and mores of the peoples of the United States. *Democracy in America* was published four years later to immediate international acclaim. Tocqueville then began a new work on the democratic revolution, as yet untitled. His publisher insisted, however, that the new book take the same name as the first, and be presented as a then third volume in two parts of *Democracy in America*.

In *Democracy*, Tocqueville observed the conditions and potential for self government or majoritarian domination in the United States. Much of his analysis of the viability of institutions of self government is still pertinent today. Tocqueville is paradoxically interpreted by liberals and conservatives in support of their causes. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, his “first” *Democracy* (now volume 1) was used as *the* high school text book on American government. His work has been understood as travelogue, as the beginning of a discipline called “sociology,” and more recently, as political theory. Tocqueville’s “new science of politics” has inspired a vast literature in participatory democracy. But for Tocqueville, the question was not American institutions *per se*, but of the idea of “democracy,” or what he called “equality of social condition.” It was a “world-wide” on-going, unstoppable “democratic revolution” that he wished to study.

The “democratic revolution” had after all changed his life completely. His parents and grandparents had been imprisoned during the Revolution. The July Revolution (1830) closed one career and made possible other choices, as a political analyst and author, historian of revolution, and an elected a member of the new legislature, the Chamber of Deputies. As the Foreign Minister of Prime Minister François Guizot’s government, Tocqueville spoke and wrote about the French colonization project in North Africa, specifically Algeria. His ascent to the position of Prime Minister seemed assured until the next revolutionary wave again shifted the democratic sands beneath a fragile republican government. The Revolution of 1848 resulted in the first and only democratically elected leader of the Second Republic, Louis Napoleon. Tocqueville served as the new president’s foreign minister for a few months until this popularly elected leader declared himself President for Life of the Second Republic and ultimately Emperor of the Second Empire and dismissed the government.

Our good fortune is that after having his ministerial career abruptly ended. Tocqueville had enough time to finish a memoir of the 1848 revolutions that swept across the continent and a volume of his history of the first of Europe’s democratic revolutions, *The Old Regime*

and the Revolution. This work features statistical inferences taken from his archival work on the vast array of pre-revolutionary government documents; it remains one of the most remarkable works on revolution and democratization.

Tocqueville is known for his innovative use of first-hand interviews, participant observation, archival research, and the statistical analysis featured in his work on *l'ancien régime*. These methodologies set Tocqueville apart from the writers of his time. It all began with a 25- and 28-year-old who wrote a grant to get out of a difficult situation by making a bold journey.

Our Context

We have several goals in our ten-week encounter with Tocqueville's works. Foremost is to uncover the coherent political theory about democratic revolutions and self government in Tocqueville's works. We will also aim our discussions toward what is incomplete in Tocqueville's theory, recalling that his ideas emerged by testing theoretical presuppositions—hypotheses—against observation and experience. We will look at his method of analysis as well as at the provisional conclusions that he draws. We will see how the hypotheses he generates from his observations and logic may apply today.

Many of Tocqueville's observations in *Democracy* will find counterparts in the America of today and the US Elections 2016. The Jacksonian Democracy that Tocqueville experienced will likely seem familiar to your own experiences of US politics, culture, and life. Questions about American race relations, gender equity, institutional reform, anti-democratic movements, as well as of federalism and American institutions, were part of Tocqueville's subject matter. The insights of *The Old Regime and Revolution* will possibly challenge the conventional wisdom, and perhaps your thinking about what it takes to be self-governing. In this work as in *Democracy*, ideas about public opinion formation and its effects on policy, "fringe" political ideologies and demagoguery, as well as the place of religious beliefs, voluntary associations, practical knowledge, and experience in the quest to understand and perhaps improve human affairs were all his concern. In the US, Tocqueville observed a brand of federalism that hardly exists in 2016; the waves of revolution in France have subsided to a degree but the instinct toward domination through authoritative institutions remains. Tocqueville's ideas about what limited authority means and the citizen's individual responsibility to prevent majority and minority tyranny can inform thought and action today.

In international affairs, the question that Tocqueville put squarely before his contemporaries is what makes self government feasible. A movement toward increasing "democracy" and what we today call "globalization" in the midst of "balance of power" geopolitics was, for Tocqueville, a foregone conclusion. What remained to be seen was whether "democracy" would liberate or enslave; or, in the case of empire and colonization, perhaps do both. Tocqueville observed social, economic, and political change at a point when old empires were falling, newer empires were using radically different technologies (including ideas) to conquer and rule. New methods of warfare and new thinking about

political violence—as Tocqueville put it, seeing peoples and societies, not governments as the enemy—would bring new rationales and methods for a country’s ascent to global dominance. Indeed, the geo-political and human struggles of the mid- and late-twentieth century and methods of warfare by insurgents can be traced directly to the decisions made in Europe during Tocqueville’s adulthood.

In sum, we have many contemporary issues “on the table” for our discussions of Tocqueville. These decisions include European colonial efforts in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Tocqueville had direct knowledge West Asia (the “Middle East”) and North Africa and corresponded extensively about India, Southeast Asia, and China. The revolution in which Tocqueville was directly involved in 1848, the “Spring Revolution” has become a metaphor and perhaps a for the revolutions today known as the “Arab Spring.” There is a great deal to take from Tocqueville’s ideas about democratic transitions in considering the reform movements taking hold in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria in 2011—and in considering why such movements “skipped over” one of the places of greatest interest to Tocqueville, Algeria.

What is to be done?

Perhaps you recognize that question as Lenin’s—his answer was ultimately was more Hobbesian than Tocquevillean. That is a difference we shall also consider at the edges of our conversation and research. Our course is a research seminar, requiring a 20+ page paper on a topic of interest to you. On the first day of our course we can discuss options for research that goes beyond texts to include Tocqueville’s methods of participant observation, depth interviews, and archival research to name a few possibilities for your work.

Tocqueville’s writings form the core of our materials for the course. These books are listed below. As important are other kinds of documents and technologies for seeing the world through Tocqueville’s eyes—and presenting our insights and analyses to others.

Tocqueville argued that the physical landscape and geo-political scene shaped language, culture, society, and politics. He began with the physical environment in his analysis of North America. We, too, will begin with maps and other visual materials that tell us about the worlds of the democratic revolution. Tocqueville maintained that ideas shaped institutions and was extremely interested in the ways ideas are formed through not only experience but existing beliefs or interpretive screens. We will look at visual representations as well as traditional research papers as presentation media that may challenge or support existing interpretative screens. We will use a workshop format for portions of our classroom time and make use of the “Idea Lab” to learn techniques and create final presentations of class research.

In addition to the research paper and its presentation in written, visual, and oral forms, you will lead one of our discussions and write a 5-7 page paper on a topic from the readings for that class.

Readings

Buy

EITHER*

Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America / De la Démocratie en Amérique*
Bilingual Edition In Four Volumes, Edited by Eduardo Nolla, Translated by
James T. Schleifer. Liberty Fund Press 2009.
SET: 978-0-86597-724-2 Designated below as “D”

YOU MAY ALSO READ ON LINE:

Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America / De la Démocratie en Amérique*
Bilingual Edition In Four Volumes, Edited by Eduardo Nolla, Translated by
James T. Schleifer. Liberty Fund Press 2009

Found at:

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/tocqueville-democracy-in-america-historical-critical-edition-4-vols-lf-ed-2010>

Designated below as “D”

Or

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, V. 1 & 2, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and
Delba Winthrop, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1835 & 1840].
9780226805368 Designated below as “D”

AND

Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Vol. 1 Trans. Alan S. Kahan.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1851].
226–80529–8 Designated below as “OR”

*You may buy either the bilingual Tocqueville Democracy from Liberty Fund Books or
the University of Chicago Press English translation. If you already own the George
Lawrence or Henry Reeve translation you may use it; figure out the reading assignments
by using the Mansfield & Winthrop translation chapter headings.

You may find helpful:

*Conversations with Tocqueville: The Global Democratic Revolution in the Twenty-first
Century*, Edited by Aurelian Craiutu and Sheldon Gellar, Lanham: Lexington
Books. 2009

Paper 0-7391-2302-5 / 978-0-7391-2302-7 Designated below as “C.”

Tocqueville’s Voyages: The Evolution of His Ideas and Their Journey Beyond His Time,
Edited by Christine Dunn Henderson. Liberty Fund Press. 2014.

Paper 978-0-86597-870-6 Designated below as “V.”

Course Requirements

Below are listed the readings and general topics for each of our meetings. Our seminar will be conducted in a lecture/discussion format during the first part of the course, covering Tocqueville's democratic theory taken from *Democracy in America*. In the second part of the course we consider Tocqueville's analysis of historical sources and first-hand observations of democratization in greater detail. We look first at his archival research on the French Revolution to think about the uses of historical data as a basis for democratic theory. Next we focus on Tocqueville's writings as the Foreign Minister in a regime that solidified French imperial dominance in North Africa. In this section of Part 2 we take up questions about race, equality, self-determination, and self-government in the nineteenth-century context of the democratic revolution. We conclude the course with presentations of our "Tocquevillean" assessment of democratic political culture in America today and contemporary issues in democratization, the subject of your 20+ page seminar paper.

Grades are based on: one full class session in which you lead our seminar discussion, one 5-7 page analytical paper prepared as a basis for the discussion, which you organize and lead; your written research paper and an oral and visual presentation of your research paper; and general class participation (evidence that you've read the material assigned for our class meetings and show up to discuss the materials). Participation grades are set initially at a "B" or 8.5 points. Your actual effort in the course will move that score up or down, accordingly. There is no additional final exam; the research paper is due in class during our last meeting. The schedule for turning in topics, bibliographies, drafts, and all papers is very strict. Only a medical or other serious emergency situation will qualify as an event justifying a late assignment. Unexcused late papers will result in a "0" for the assignment and likely a failing grade in the class. Class attendance is also vital to the proper function of a seminar. Two unexcused absences will result in a failing participation grade, lowering your overall grade by at least one letter.

Grades will be computed as follows:

Discussion leading	10%
Analytical Paper	30
Seminar Paper and presentation	50
Participation, inc. 1/12 & 2/16 discussions	<u>10</u>
Total	100%

Topics for Discussion and Reading Assignments Part 1 Tocqueville's Theory:

Thurs Jan 5 Overview of the Course; Reading Tocqueville—the importance of language, historical context of Tocqueville's writing

Tues Jan 10 Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: The democratic social condition, physical environment and mores of a people

Read: *Democracy (D)* V 1, Author's Introduction and Pt 1, Ch 1-4; V2, Pt 1, Ch 1; Author's "Notice" ("*Avertissement/* Foreword") to Volume Two

Thurs Jan 12 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: How the "democratic social condition" influences habits of thinking

Everyone Reads: **D** V2, Pt. 1, Ch 1 (review), 2–9, 17.

Sign up to read one additional chapters in this part: Set 1: Chs 10-12; Set 2: Chs 13–16; Set 3: Chs 18-21.

Workshop: Maps and other artifacts that demonstrate Tocqueville's conjectures, based on the American case.

******* Initial Thoughts on Research due on Moodle to be discussed in class****

Tues Jan 17 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics: The conception and function of American Government—Tocqueville instructs the French on problems in the structure of relationships; balancing liberty and equality; multiple centers of decision making authority

Read: **D** V1, Pt. 1, Ch 5–8 **Focus on Ch 5**; Pt. 2, Ch 1

Thurs Jan 19 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:

Individualism, tyranny, and the concentration of political power

Read: **D** V 2, Pt. 2, Ch 1–3 and Pt. 4, Ch 1–8

Tues Jan 24 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics: Tyranny of majority and minority; public opinion and common belief; extrapolation of Tocqueville's analysis to a general theory of problems of tyranny in organizations and associations

Read: **D** V1, Pt. 2, Ch 2–7 **Focus on Chs 5, 7**

*******Research Plans Due in Class*******

Thurs Jan 26 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: Continuing the discussion of individualism, tyrannical opinion, and totalitarianism

Read: **D** V 2, Pt. 2, Ch 10–12, 16–20 and Pt. 3, Ch 13–17.

Tues Jan 31 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics: Institutional and normative solutions to majority tyranny; residual problems of majority and minority tyranny: self-interest properly understood, voluntary association, religion, federalism....

D V1, Pt 1, Ch 8 (review), Pt. 2 Ch 1 and 4 (review), 8 and 9; V 2, Pt. 2, Ch 4-9, 14, 15

Thurs Feb 2 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: Social equality and social distance/difference

Read: **D V 2**, Pt. 3 Ch 1–12.

Selections from Arlie Russell Hochschild. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right, A Journey to the Heart of Our Political Divide*. New York: The New Press. Chs: 1–4, 6, 7, 9, 14–16. (e-reserve).

Mon Feb 6 MID TERM BREAK

Tues Feb 7 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: The “democratic peace” hypothesis and the global context

Read: **D V 2**, Pt. 3, Ch 18–26.

Vincent Ostrom, “Citizen Sovereigns, The Implications of Hamilton’s Query and Tocqueville’s Conjecture about the Democratic Revolution,” *Conversations with Tocqueville (C)* Ch 2. (e-reserve)

David Clinton, “Why Did M. Tocqueville Change His Mind? Civic Virtue and International Society,” *Liberalism Confronts the World*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 17–43. (e-reserve).

Thurs Feb 9 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:

“Race” and the Democratic Revolution

Read: **D V1 pt 2** Ch 10;

Barbara Allen, “Racial Equality and Social Equality: Understanding Tocqueville’s Democratic Revolution and the American Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1970. **C**, Ch 5 (e-reserve).

Barbara Allen, “The Undertow of Race Prejudice in the Current of Democratic Transformation: Tocqueville on the ‘Three Races of North America,’” *Tocqueville’s Voyages (V)*, Ch 9. (e-reserve).

Tues Feb 14 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: Is the Democratic Revolution “Global?”

Read: Alexis de Tocqueville, “Essay on Algeria (1841),” *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press 2001) 59–116 (e-reserve).

Thurs Feb 16 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics: Another view of methods; archives, experience, and an in-depth analysis of democratization and centralized authority

Read: *Old Regime and the Revolution (OR)* V1 Bk 1

Workshop Presentations: Can Tocqueville Go Where Tocqueville Did Not Go?

Sign Up to read and present points from one of the following:

“Democracy in Russia a Tocquevillean Perspective,” Peter Rutland, **C**, Ch 9

“The Road to Democracy in China: A Tocquevillean Analysis,” Jianxun Wang, **C**, Ch 12.

“Tocqueville and Democracy in Japan,” Reiji Matsumoto,” V, Ch 15,

Tues Feb 21 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: The political culture of revolution

Read: **ORV1** Bk 2 Ch 1–8

*******Research Paper Draft Due in Class*******

Thurs Feb 23 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: The social culture of revolution

Read: **ORV1** Bk 2 Ch 9–12

Tues Feb 28 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:

I. Revisiting the centralization thesis and its meaning for the democratic revolution hypothesis

Read: **OR V1** Bk 3

II. Our provisional conclusions about the democratic revolution: Liberty, Equality—and Empire? Or, A New World Community through Universal Associations? Or...?

Thurs Mar 2 Final Project Workshop

Tues Mar 7 Final Project Workshop

Thurs Mar 9 Presentations of our work

*******Final Research Written Paper due in Class*******