The Course
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. For Tocqueville’s aging parents and other family members the July Revolution carried out against the royalists supporters of Charles X spelled disaster. The short lived (100 days) of the Second French Republic was followed by a struggle to restore a constitutional monarchy and the revolutionary move (which may be debated as ostensibly toward greater democracy) resulted in the installation of a new King of the French, the constitutional monarchy of Orleanist King, Louis Philippe d’Orleans, a figure viewed by Tocqueville and Beaumont’s families as a treacherous orchestrator of factional division and demagoguery aimed at ingratiating himself with the “money-greedy’ bourgeoisie.” When Tocqueville and Beaumont were forced to swear an oath of loyalty to the government of Louis Philippe, 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 Philippe’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 Schiefer 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. He then began a new work on the democratic revolution, as yet untitled. Tocqueville’s 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.
Tocqueville observed the conditions and potential for democracy in the United States. Much of his analysis of the viability of institutions of self-government is still pertinent today. Paradoxically, liberals and conservatives alike can interpret Tocqueville to support often diametrically opposed causes. Beginning in the mid–nineteenth century, his “first” Democracy (now volume 1) was used as the high school textbook 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. It closed one career and made possible a second choice, to stand for election to the new legislature, the Chamber of Deputies. He spoke and wrote about the French colonization project in North Africa, specifically Algeria. And was (again perhaps ironically) appointed foreign minister by Louis Napoleon, a few months before this popularly elected leader declared himself first president for life and then emperor and dismissed the government. Our good fortune is that having his ministry ended gave Tocqueville enough time to finish, in addition to his memoir of the 1848 revolutions sweeping through Europe, a volume of his history of the first European democratic revolution, The Old Regime and the Revolution. This work, although having a few questionable statistics and statistical inferences taken from his archival work on the vast array of pre-revolutionary government documents remains one of the most remarkable works on revolution and democratization. Tocqueville is also known for his innovate use of first-hand interviews and participant observation, when possible, as well as the archival research and statistical analysis of l’ancien régime. These methodologies set Tocqueville apart from the writers of his time; it all began with a 25–28-year-old who wrote a grant to get out of a difficult situation by making a bold journey.

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.

To be sure, 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. Ideas about public opinion formation and its affects 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.

Above all, the question that he 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 were, 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 geopolitical 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.

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; he was extremely interested in how ideas are shaped by experience and by existing beliefs, our “interpretive screens.” We take up Tocqueville’s challenge to consider our own interpretive screens not only in writing traditional research papers but also through visual representations of Tocqueville’s ideas, his world and its problems—and ours. 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.

Readings
Buy
EITHER*


OR

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

AND


AND

Course Requirements

Readings and Discussion
Below are listed the readings and general topics for each of our meetings. Our seminar will be conducted in a lecture/discussion/workshop format during the first part of the course, covering Tocqueville’s democratic theory taken from Democracy in America. We consider Tocqueville’s analysis of historical sources and first-hand observations of democratization in detail, looking at documents pertaining to the political culture of his times, available research materials, and the mentalité that shaped his work. In addition to looking at the documents, maps, sources, literature, and encounters that shaped his view of “America,” we look at his archival research on the French Revolution. These sources and encounters help reveal Tocqueville’s method of collecting data, including his use of archival materials, as a basis for constructing and testing hypotheses. We also look at a few of Tocqueville’s writings as the Foreign Minister of a regime that solidified French imperial dominance in North Africa.

Research Design and Seminar Paper
Today many scholars, politicians, and public intellectuals call upon “Tocqueville” to frame their pronouncements on gender, race, equality, democracy, liberation, self-determination, and self-government. But Tocqueville, although he has much to say about the democratic revolution, is neither our contemporary nor (unless we are from a French or Francophone, nineteenth-century culture) our countryman. How shall we represent his ideas and more generally, “Tocquevillian Analytics” to our contemporaries, our “local” and “global” cultures? That is part of the question that you face as you consider how you might critique Tocqueville’s democratic theory or use Tocqueville’s democratic theory to illuminate a contemporary or historical problem/issue of interest to you in a 20+ page seminar paper (you and I can discuss what length is appropriate to your individual work). What does Tocqueville’s analysis of an unstoppable “democratic revolution” have to say about either a past event of interest to you or a contemporary problem? What aspects of Tocquevillian Analytics (his method of analysis; and/or the logic and hypotheses he suggests; and/or the conclusions that he reaches) seem “right” and what needs “correction?” Theoretical papers, applications of ideas to an historical or contemporary concern, comparisons with other democratic theorists…all general topics such as these are acceptable.

Visual Representation and Exhibit/Presentation of These Ideas
This course offers you the opportunity to represent “Tocqueville,” his times, his methods, his specific insights and your critique of his thinking and conclusions—issues of interest to you—in a traditional seminar research paper and in an exhibition that engages our campus community. From day one we will be talking about how seeing influences our perception of what we read. The visual element is critical to our understanding of the written text. The political theory found in Tocqueville’s emerged from observation and experience as well as reflection. Tocqueville used a “group” writing process in creating Democracy. He focused on the physical environment and created landscape, depending on Beaumont’s drawings and sketches (which we shall see) to understand the American milieu and interpret Democracy. Visual representations of Tocqueville’s “democratic revolution” will
illuminate your research and help communicate your important research findings to a broader audience. Workshops on visual representation are shown on the schedule below.

Grades will be computed as follows:

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

**Tues Sept 13** Overview of the Course; Reading Tocqueville—the importance of language, historical context of Tocqueville's writing

**Thurs Sept 15** 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
  
  Workshop: Google Earth and Tocquevillian Analytics—Tocqueville’s “traveler” seeing from above while staying “grounded”

**Tues Sept 20** 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 chapter in this part, 10-16 and 18-21.
  
  Workshop: Maps and other artifacts that demonstrate Tocqueville’s conjectures, based on the American case.

**Thurs Sept 22** 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

**Tues Sept 27** 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**

**Thurs Sept 29** Topics & Activities

- Workshop: Meet in Weitz Idea Lab to learn more about representation of ideas and artifacts

**Mon Oct 3** Topics & Activities

Topics for discussion following and continuing in class on Oct 2:
Individualism, tyranny, and the concentration of political power
Read: D V 2, Pt. 2, Ch 1–3 and Pt. 4, Ch 1–8

Tues Oct 4  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.

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

Thurs Oct 6  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

Tues Oct 11  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: Social equality and social distance/difference

Thurs Oct 13 To Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: The “democratic peace” hypothesis and the global context
Read: D V 2, Pt. 3, Ch 18–26; Conversations with Tocqueville (C) Ch 1-3

Tues Oct 18 Discussion Topics:
I. “Race” and the Democratic Revolution in America
Read: D V1 pt 2 Ch 10; C, Ch 5

II. Is the Democratic Revolution “Global?”

Thurs Oct 20  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topics: Looking back on Tocqueville’s Method of Analysis
Everyone reads C, Ch 4 and signs up in groups to report on the 8 remaining chapters of Conversations.

***************Updates on Research Designs and Presentation Plans***************

Tues Oct 25  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

**Thurs Oct 27**  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: The political culture of revolution  
Read: (OR)V1 Bk 2 Ch 1–8

**Tues Nov 1**  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: The social culture of revolution  
Read: (OR)V1 Bk 2 Ch 9–12

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

**Thurs Nov 3**  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…?

**Tues Nov 8**  Workshop on Final Projects & papers
**Thurs Nov 10**  Workshop on Final Projects & papers
**Tues Nov 15**  Presentations of our work

***************Final Research due in Class***************