The Political Theory of Alexis de Tocqueville
ABOUT THE COURSE

Political Theory of Alexis de Tocqueville

WINTER 2018

POSC 352

Prof: Barbara Allen

Tues Thurs 10:10–11:55

Office hours M–T Sign up on Moodle

Weitz 230

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 Year’s 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) overthrowing 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’état 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 VIII. 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 Phillippe 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 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 Phillippe’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;
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 experience 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 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. 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-nineteenth 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

*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.

So, buy

EITHER*

Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America / De la Démocratie en Amérique*


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:


Designated below as “D”

Or


AND Also Buy


226-80529-8 Designated below as “OR”

You may find helpful:


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:

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Last modified: Wednesday, 12 December 2018, 5:36 PM
Alexis Charles-Henri-Maurice Clérel de Tocqueville

Announcements

ABOUT THE COURSE

CONTAINS INFORMATION ABOUT THE COURSE AND GRADING

Discussion Topics of Interest to You

Post questions for peers and working groups here.

Announcements

The Bi-Lingual Definitive Historico-Critical Edition of Democracy in America

Uploaded 14/02/17, 12:04


Uploaded 7/01/19, 12:00

Here is a pdf version that is easily searched, so you can use as an aid to your reading.

Additional Reading Jan 15

Sign Up to present on one set of additional readings

Discussion Leader

Sign Up to Lead our Discussion on One of These Dates

Can Tocqueville Go Where Tocqueville Did Not Go?

Sign Up to present on one article applying Tocqueville to a new setting

Initial Thoughts on Your Research Topic

Turn in your ideas here

Seminar Research Topic Proposal

Turn in your topic proposal HERE. The proposal includes: Title, statement of research question, explanation of method and approach, description of data or information used as a basis for explicating your thesis, bibliography of works to be used in writing your research paper.

Literature Review

Turn in your 3-5 page literature review for your seminar paper here. Include proper citations and a bibliography.
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Research Paper Draft

Turn in your draft for your research paper HERE. This draft should included: Statement of thesis and introduction to the topic/problem/puzzle/question/issue; REVISED literature review; explication of the thesis; discussion and conclusion/conjectures re the who cares question; complete citations; bibliography.

NO LATE DRAFTS

Final Research Paper

Hand in your FINAL 20–25 Page Seminar Paper HERE. This paper is due 5:00 pm SATURDAY March 16. NO LATE PAPERS for this assignment.

Michael Happ’s Tocqueville Tour

Links to Examples from Discussion of News and Facts

Methods of framing and reporting news influence public understanding. The post-factual world and claims of fake news have influenced journalistic style in some cases.

Active Listening and Depth Interviews

Uploaded 26/01/17, 12:48

Lit Review Slides

Uploaded 2/02/17, 12:03

Power Point on Lit Review

Democratic Despotism Intimate Association and Family

Uploaded 14/02/17, 12:01

Summary Power Point Federalism in Democracy in America

Uploaded 9/02/17, 09:33

Robert E. Lane Political Ideology Appendices A–C

Uploaded 20/01/17, 09:14

Self Editing Handout

Uploaded 2/02/17, 14:54

URLs to Recent Stories of Interest

Old Regime in Outline

Uploaded 23/02/17, 12:08

A PowerPoint that Outlines: Lit Review, Method, Writing and Argument Style, Main Thesis and Propositions, Evidence, Internal Summaries, and Conclusions in Tocqueville’s Old Regime and Revolution

6 January – 12 January

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

Tues Jan 8  Overview of the Course; Reading Tocqueville—the importance of language, historical context of Tocqueville's writing


Thurs 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
13 January – 19 January

Tues Jan 15 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 V2 Pt 1
Set 1: Chs 10–12; Set 2: Chs 13–16; Set 3: Chs 18–21.

Workshop: Maps and other artifacts supporting Tocqueville's conjectures from the American case.

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

Thurs 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

20 January – 26 January

Tuesday January 22 Field Trip to Guthrie Theater to see Lauren Yee's "The Great Leap." Bus leaves campus 5:45 pm; play starts 7:30 pm

Tues Jan 22 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics: Individualism, tyranny, and the concentration of political power

Read: D V2, Pt. 2, Ch 1–3 and Pt. 4, Ch 1–8

Thurs Jan 24 Topics & Activities

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

Read: D V2, Pt. 2, Ch 1, 2 (review) 10–13, 16–20 and Pt. 3, Ch 13–17.

27 January – 2 February

Tues Jan 29 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:

I. 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

II. How to write a literature review

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

Thurs Jan 31 Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:

Reviewing the dilemmas of democracy and reconsidering solutions I: self-interest properly understood, voluntary association, religion, federalism....

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

3 February – 9 February
Tues Feb 5  Topics & Activities

Discussion Topics:
Reviewing Dilemmas and Solutions II: Institutional and Normative solutions to residual problems of majorit
and minority tyranny: self-interest properly understood, voluntary association, religion, federalism

D V1, Pt. 2 Ch 2, 8 and 9 (review); V 2, Pt. 1, Ch 1–8 (review), 10 (review); Pt. 2, Ch 1–9 (review) an
focus on 10–17, which are also a review.

Thurs Feb 7 Topics & Activities

Discussion Leader Group 1

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 o
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.

10 February – 16 February

Mon Feb 11 MID TERM BREAK
Field Trip Penumbra Theater to see Ifa Bayeza’s "Benevolence," Bus leaves campus 5:45 pm; pla
starts at 7:30 pm

Tues Feb 12 Topics & Activities

Discussion Leader Group 2

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. Ch 2.

David Clinton, “Why Did M. Tocqueville Change His Mind? Civic Virtue and Internationa

****Literature Review Draft Due in Class****

Thurs Feb 14  Topics & Activities

Discussion Leader Group 3

Discussion Topic: “Race” and the Democratic Revolution; Is the
Revolution Global?

Read: D V1 pt 2 Ch 10 and

Alexis de Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria (1841)," Writings on Empire and Slavery, ed

Barbara Allen, "Racial Equality and Social Equality: Understanding Tocqueville'

Barbara Allen, “The Undertow of Race Prejudice in the Current of Democrati
Transformation: Tocqueville on the ‘Three Races of North America,’” Tocqueville’s
Voyages Ch 9.

17 February – 23 February

Tues Feb 19  Topics & Activities

Discussion Topic: Another view of methods: archives, and experience, plus an in-dept
analysis of democratization and centralized authority
Read: Old Regime and the Revolution (OR)V1 Bk 1

Thurs Feb 21  Topics & Activities
I. Discussion Topic: The political culture of revolution
Read: (OR)V1 Bk 2 Ch 1–8
II. Workshop Presentations: Can Tocqueville Go Where Tocqueville Did Not Go?
   “Tocqueville and Democracy in Japan,” Reiji Matsumoto, V, Ch 15.

24 February – 2 March
Tues Feb 26  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: The social culture of revolution
Read: (OR)V1 Bk 2 Ch 9–12

Thurs Feb 28  Topics & Activities
Discussion Topic: I. Revisiting the centralization thesis and its meaning for the democratic revolution hypothesis
   Review Democracy V 2, Pt 4 Ch 1–8 THEN
   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...?
*****Research Paper Draft Due in Class*****

3 March – 9 March
Tues Mar 5  Mini Conference Paper Workshop

Thurs Mar 7  Individual Conferences and Viz Workshops

10 March – 16 March
Tues Mar 12 Exhibit Work Class and Common Time
***** Final Research Paper due 5:00 pm Saturday March 16 *****