The Third *Democracy:* Tocqueville's Views of America after 1840

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Tocqueville's Democracy in America *offered the image of an accomplished and successful democratic regime. Although Tocqueville never wrote a third volume, he continued to be interested in American political events and exchanged a number of important letters with his American friends after 1840. Did Tocqueville change his views on America outlined in the two volumes published in 1835 and 1840? If so, did the evolution of his views of America affect his theory of democracy? The paper answers these questions by examining Tocqueville's unduly neglected correspondence with his American friends. It seeks to reconstruct what Volume Three of* Democracy in America *might have looked like if it had ever been written. In these letters, Tocqueville addressed important topics such as the instability of the market and the immaturity of American democracy, issues that did* not *loom large in the two published volumes. The paper shows that in the last years of his life Tocqueville became very disenchanted with American political life and reassessed some of his previous views of American democracy.*

I, who am half Yankee.

Tocqueville (1986, 185)

A century and a half after his death, the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration for political theorists, sociologists, philosophers, legal scholars, and historians. As one of the most quoted political theorists on both ends of the political spectrum, Tocqueville is celebrated as the theoretician of the modern democratic revolution at the heart of which lies the equality of conditions.

Our fascination with Tocqueville has deep roots and can be explained by the fact that his work, to quote Cheryl Welch (2001, 1), "seems to retain a greater measure of normative and exploratory power—and intellectual provocation—than that of many other nineteenth-century thinkers." As Sheldon Wolin (2001, 564–65) has recently argued, Tocqueville's universal appeal can be accounted for by the acuity with which he grasped and described the key features and dilemmas of modern democracy, the complexity of political culture, the importance of civil society, and the far-reaching consequences of high social mobility. In Wolin's words "To reflect on present day American politics invites reflection on *Democracy in America* and vice versa" (3).

Democracy in America (1835, 1840) offered the image of an accomplished and successful American democracy based on the equality of conditions and the sovereignty of the people. American democracy combined administrative decentralization and political centralization, allowed for self-government, and provided for a judicious separation of powers and a genuine system of checks and balances. Tocqueville contrasted the regular, stable, and effective institutions and mores of America with those existing in Europe at that time that contained relics of an aristocratic past that proved to be a stumbling block against political democracy. Thus, in his interpretation, the Americans had solved one of the oldest and most important questions in political philosophy: What is the best form of government?

The extraordinary success of Tocqueville's masterpiece provided the lenses through which countless generations viewed and interpreted the virtues and limitations of American democracy. It also explains the often idealized image of America that admirers of Tocqueville derived from reading his book. But was Volume Two of *Democracy in America* (1840) his definitive statement on America? Tocqueville lived 19 more years, often despairing that his native country would ever be able to achieve a political regime comparable to the American one. Even if he never wrote a third volume of *Democracy in America* and became more and more involved in French politics, Tocqueville continued to be interested in American political events and exchanged a number of important letters with his American friends, some of whom had been instrumental in providing him with information about the United States while Tocqueville was completing Volume One of *Democracy in America.*

These letters were published in Volume VII of Tocqueville's *Complete Works* (1986) and have not been translated into English to this day. It is revealing that Roger Boesche's otherwise splendid selection from Tocqueville's letters published two decades ago (Tocqueville 1985) contained no single letter from Tocqueville's correspondence with his American friends after 1840. Thus, it is both important and necessary to ask the following set of questions. Did Tocqueville change his views on America outlined in the two volumes published in 1835 and 1840? If so, which of his views did change and why? What were the continuities and discontinuities? How did Tocqueville

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A previous version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, August 27–31, 2003. The authors would like to thank Vincent Ostrom, Jennifer Pitts, John Gould, Lee Sigelman, Sheldon Gellar, and three anonymous reviewers of *APSR* for their comments and suggestions.

come to view the American republic as it edged ever closer to civil war? Perhaps more importantly, did the evolution of his views of America affect his theory of democracy and what were the implications of any "failure" of American democracy?

This essay answers these questions by examining Tocqueville's correspondence with his American friends after 1840 as well as his participation in the constitutional debates of 1848 in France. Our main purpose is to reconstruct from Tocqueville's letters what the message of Volume Three of *Democracy in America* might have been if that book had ever been written. The importance of Tocqueville's letters for understanding his post-1840 views on American democracy has been underestimated or neglected in the academic English-speaking circles. A notable exception, however, is Sheldon Wolin. His *Tocqueville between Two Worlds* (2001) called our attention to the paradoxical fact that after a long silence about American democracy, Tocqueville "suddenly rouses himself to a renewed interest in America, follows its desperate debates over slavery, fears that if the cause of freedom is lost in America, its future in Europe will be lost as well, and, as though in a last effort to resolve a lifetime of ambivalence about democracy, declares himself at the end to be half-Yankee" (562) Given the prominence of Tocqueville's work, the general lack of interest in exploring his later impressions of America is surprising.[1] Even classic books such as Jardin's biography of Tocqueville (1988), Pierson's (1996), and Schleifer's (2000) studies of the writing of *Democracy in America*, have virtually nothing to say about Tocqueville's post-1840 views of America.

Therefore, our goal is to initiate a dialogue that might be of interest not only to political theorists but also to historians and students of American politics in general. The essay is divided in two major parts. It begins by exploring the image of America in France *before* Tocqueville. This preliminary discussion provides the necessary background for interpreting Tocqueville's correspondence with his American friends; it also gives us a better understanding of the nature and originality of Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy placed in its original historical context. As we shall see, Tocqueville came to share some (though not all) of the opinions held by his predecessors who espoused a critical view of America. The discussion of the image of America in France also addresses, if obliquely, the issue of anti-Americanism, a highly relevant topic today when the rhetoric of American exceptionalism and America's hegemony dominate the headlines.[2] If America must remain unique and thinks that it should offer an example to the entire world, then the implications of a potential failure of the American model are as staggering today as they were for Tocqueville two centuries ago.

The second part of our essay examines in detail the main points and concerns about America raised by Tocqueville in his letters to his American friends written after the publication of Volume Two of *Democracy in America*. As we shall see, his warnings against the effects of the instability of the market on the functioning of political institutions and the damaging effects of unbridled materialism sound surprisingly fresh today when economics dominates politics to an unprecedented degree and the relationship between democracy and the market has become a key topic in our public debates. More generally, Tocqueville's remarks invite us to reflect upon the problems and dilemmas faced by an America where, according to many social critics, the vitality (as well as viability) of political and civil life seem to be on the decline.

A methodological caveat is in order here. Reconstructing the possible message of a hypothetical Volume Three of *Democracy in America* is a speculative theoretical attempt that must be taken with the necessary grain of salt. Such an endeavor is likewise subject to the possible criticism that the views expressed in private letters are not those that would have been expressed in public and, thus, that no firm conclusions can be drawn about how Tocqueville might have changed his views on America after the publication of Volume Two of *Democracy in America.* If, it can be argued, in published texts his fears for America were likely to be expressed obliquely, then in personal correspondence there is less reticence about expressing views more openly and, therefore, more harshly. Similarly, it can be contended that Tocqueville might have tailored his comments to suit the views of his individual correspondents. If these methodological reservations are accepted, it would be easy to conclude that the criticisms voiced of America by Tocqueville in his letters after 1840 were not substantially different in either substance or tone from the sense of foreboding that is clearly evident in some parts of Volume Two of *Democracy in America.*

Our response to these challenges is the following. Tocqueville's letters represent an indispensable source of information for any student of his work. This is documented not only by the wide array of topics addressed by Tocqueville's correspondence but also by his request to some of his friends to keep his letters. One might go as far as to argue that in many respects, Tocqueville's letters are as important as his published writings. Tocqueville writes so beautifully that his readers enjoy his letters for both their style and their substance. Much more than the published books, Tocqueville's correspondence demonstrates his strong passion for liberty as well as the seriousness with which he sought to apply his political and philosophical ideas in the public realm. And unlike his published writings, Tocqueville's letters also allow us to trace his hopes, fears, and disillusionment with politics so that, to quote

[1] Among historians, two notable exceptions are Brogan 1991 and Mélonio 1987. It is surprising that the issue of Tocqueville's changing views of America after 1840 was overlooked by important exegeses of Tocqueville such as Eisenstadt 1988 and Masugi 1991. Welch (2001) devotes a footnote to this topic, while other recent interpretations of Tocqueville such as Janara 2002 and Mitchell 2002 gloss over the evolution of Tocqueville's views of America after the publication of Volume Two of *Democracy*.

[2] On this topic, see Mathy 1993 and Roger 2002. For a concise discussion of the history and significance of anti-Americanism, see Ceaser 2003.

Roger Boesche, "when we know the man better, we find him no less political."[3]

Volume VII of Tocqueville's *Complete Works* lists 133 letters in total, of which 28 were written before 1840. Because Tocqueville's correspondents remain substantially the same over the entire period, covering the 28 years from 1831 to 1859, we can assume that he felt no need to adopt new epistolary strategies or to tailor his comments to suit the views of his correspondents. Moreover, if the recipients of his letters remained unchanged, the views expressed by Tocqueville certainly did change over time, the most significant shift occurring in the 1850s. The early letters were usually designed to solicit information, advice, or guidance. It is only in the later exchanges that his deep misgivings and criticisms became evident, and when they did so they became matters of central importance to his correspondence. Finally, Tocqueville's reappraisal of America drew not upon a rereading of his earlier evidence of American life and institutions but upon a close observation of contemporary political and social developments in America that postdated the publication of his earlier account. It was these developments, and not the reassessment of earlier evidence, that led him to the stark conclusion that America no longer held out hope for the friends of liberty.

BEFORE TOCQUEVILLE

A thorough analysis of Tocqueville's assessment of American democracy before and after 1840 requires that we first survey various French attitudes toward America during the Bourbon Restoration (1814–1830) and the early years of the July Monarchy (1830–1835) in order to place Tocqueville's views on American democracy into the larger historical and cultural context to which they belonged. His analysis of America has too often been detached from this background and the time has come for a more historical and contextual interpretation of Tocqueville's writings.

It is worth repeating that Tocqueville was not the first one to write on the nature of American democracy in France.[4] Before it came to be seen as a political model for nineteenth-century Europe, America had previously acquired the almost-mythic image of a country unspoiled by luxury, a land where the main occupation was agriculture and people lived peacefully in austerity, frugality, and virtuous simplicity. Crèvecour's (1957) letters describing the modes of farming and the manners and peculiar customs of the Americans contributed a lot to the dissemination of this pastoral and idyllic image of an American Arcadia.[5] As such, America appeared as a boundless and bountiful continent, a virgin environment, and a territory of adventure and discovery that inspired the traveler's imagination.

Eventually, the ideal of a frugal, simple, pastoral, and virtuous life came to be replaced by the image of a frantic social and economic life in constant transformation, bent on indefinite progress and innovation. This change led to the appearance of a new idea of happiness that was in stark contrast to the older one. Individuals no longer derived their happiness from keeping their desires limited, cultivating their plot of land, and living a simple and frugal life. On the contrary, their happiness was directly related to the rise of their living standards, comfort, and material prosperity as a result of booming commerce and navigation. America eventually came to be regarded as the hallmark of utilitarianism, a country in which everything and everyone were on the move, in constant search for a way of improving the conditions of daily life. The dynamic face of America was seen as an outcome of its democratic institutions and came to be regarded as a possible model for Europe.

What is less known, however, is that in France the idea that the study of the political organization and institutions of the United States might profit those interested in the future of democracy had appeared *before* the publication of the first volume of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. As René Rémond (1962, 340, 650–51) pointed out in his magisterial study of the image of the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century in France, from 1815 to 1830 the majority of French public opinion looked favorably at America and was relatively optimistic with regard to the stability and future of its political institutions.[6] In his important history of the United States published in 1825, Charles-Arnold Scheffer (1796–1853), the secretary of La Fayette and, later, editor of *Commerce*, claimed that the American federation showed the entire world the "true popular government and liberty."[7] The suggestion made by Scheffer was that the republican political experiment that succeeded in America had a universal importance because it paved the way for similar political developments in Europe. The same theme appeared in *Revue américaine*, edited by Armand Carrel from July 1826 to June 1827. The articles published in this journal focused their attention upon the Americas as a whole, with the intention of providing as much information as possible about the constitutions and governments of Latin, Central, and North America.[8]

[3] From Boesche's introduction to Tocqueville 1985, 20.

[4] Two names stand out: Crèvecoeur and La Fayette. The first was a Frenchman who emigrated to the United States and became a farmer in Orange Country, New York. He was the author of *Letters from an American Farmer* (first published in London in 1782), which depicted eighteenth-century American rural life. Because of his support for the American republic, La Fayette was a sort of mythical hero in the United States and enjoyed a prominent political status in postrevolutionary France.

[5] See, for example, Crèvecoeur 1957, 7–8.

[6] For an excellent summary, see Rémond 1962, 650–51. The French Ideologues (Dupont de Nemours, Destutt de Tracy) admired America and it was not a mere coincidence that Thomas Jefferson translated into English Destutt de Tracy's commentary on Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (the book appeared first in English in 1811 and eight years later in French). In turn, Madame de Staël (1818) expressed her appreciation for the American political experiment and equated the government of the United States with the government of reason. For more details, see Madame de Staël 1818, part VI, chap. 7. Also see Rémond (1962, 552, 636–37).

[7] Scheffer as quoted in Rémond 1962, 532.

[8] For more details on references to the American model, see Rémond 1962, 657, n. 11.

Thus, sympathy for America and the idea that the government of the United States might be a model for France came in various nuances and served different political agendas. For example, Armand Carrel described the American constitution as "a model constitution," adding that this was not due to the fact that the Americans possessed an instinctive political genius. "The American constitution," he commented (Carrel 1832) "is not foreign to us; it is the daughter of eighteenth-century French political doctrines, fortunately combined with the most reasonable and tested elements of English institutions." Defenders of America such as Madame de Staël, Birbeck, Barboux, Vinet, Scheffer, and Barbé-Marbois invoked the wisdom of its laws, principles, and institutions.[9] Vinet argued that "this state seems to have solved the problem which consists in reconciling the highest degree of individual liberty and the supreme conditions of security and order."[10] Other French writers claimed that in America power was limited, no one was above the law, and everyone obeyed the laws that were clearly formulated to serve the common good.[11] The American government, it was argued, imposed low taxes, and treated its citizens with respect. "As the hand of Providence, it governs without being felt and almost without being perceived," wrote the author of an article published in *Revue encyclopédique* in August 1819.[12] Other virtues of the American system highlighted by the French included the strong educational system,[13] the abolition of hereditary power, the presence of exceptional political leaders, and civic virtue (linked to a healthy family life and a solid work ethic). Last but not least, the French emphasized the connection between liberty and religion in the United States and pointed to the important role played by religious toleration, liberty of conscience, and freedom of the press in securing individual liberties. Worth noting in all these accounts is the identification of America with liberty and the seminal relation among freedom, reason, and virtue, themes that also appeared in Tocqueville's work a few years later.

Nonetheless, doubts about the proper functioning of American institutions began to appear gradually after 1832 in France, as the United States entered a new stage of its political development with the coming of age of a young generation of politicians who imposed a new political style. The old, positive image came to be replaced by the image of a country with an uncertain future, facing a complex set of problems and challenges, and therefore unable to serve as a political model for Europe. What did the French dislike about American democracy? The question is particularly important in light of our attempt to reevaluate Tocqueville's criticism of American democracy against the background of earlier analyses of America.

The concerns expressed in the French press of this period (1832–35) varied from doubts regarding the maintenance of the unity of the country confronted with the problem of slavery to calling into question the existence of a genuine national character or of the American people.[14] The large and expanding territory of the Union also seemed a serious challenge in this regard. The French wondered if the American republic would be able to survive and surmised that it might be replaced by monarchy or a new form of military dictatorship.[15] More importantly, the French began questioning not only the possibility of importing American institutions, but also their own *raison d'être*. It is no small matter that the French came to view with skepticism two of the principles that had previously been considered pillars of American democracy: bicameralism and federalism. American individualism was also regarded as a form of "narrow rationalism" and "Protestant egoism,"[16] and was soon to be identified with the doctrine of the Anglo-Saxon "Yankee." It was described as a form of "solidly organized egoism," "the evil regulated and systematized."[17]

A common theme in the French press of that period was the image of America as a young and immature society. "The government of the United States," claimed Guizot in a famous discourse from 1834, "is a good and beautiful government for the United States, in the circumstances in which this society found itself at the moment of its birth, because it is a society that has just been born, *une société enfant*."[18] The American model came to be questioned even on the left wing of the political spectrum. The most progressive republicans expressed their discontent with a number of aspects of American democracy and made a fundamental distinction between the *moral* aspects of the American democracy and its *political* institutions and principles. What is interesting is that they questioned the moral aspects of American life, while accepting the political model. This dichotomy appeared, for example, in the following fragment of A. Marchais and J. F. Dupont published in *Revue républicaine* in 1834. "From the moral point of view," they wrote, "we do not belong to the American school. From the practical point of view, we belong to the American school . . . in this sense that we invoke the example of America as a practical proof

[9] For more details, see Rémond 1962, 540–43.

[10] Vinet as quoted in Rémond 1962, 549, n. 32. Vinet's *Memoir in Favor of Liberty* was published in 1825.

[11] "Arbitrary power is unknown here; everyone enjoys a liberty moderated by the need to use it," wrote Dumersan in 1822 (as quoted in Rémond 1962, 544).

[12] As quoted in Rémond 1962, 545.

[13] See, for example, the following statement by Dupont de Nemours, dating from 1812: "Concerning education, the United States are more advanced than most other political societies" (as quoted in Rémond 1962, 554, n. 59).

[14] "America," wrote Gustave de Beaumont (1958), in *Marie* "is the land of the free who cannot do without slaves. America is the cradle of equality, and no country in Europe contains so much servitude" (57).

[15] The fact is, however, that doubts about the virtues and qualities of America were voiced even before the moment of independence. As Philippe Roger (2002) has recently shown, the "prehistory" of French anti-Americanism is to be found in the Enlightenment.

[16] Marchais and Dupont (in *Revue républicaine*, April 1834) as quoted in Rémond 1962, 670, n. 17.

[17] Cerise (in *L'Européen*, November 1835) as quoted in Rémond 1962, 670.

[18] Guizot as quoted in Rémond 1962, 664, n. 20.

that demonstrates the application of the republican doctrine of universal suffrage and its consequences."[19]

Finally, the early 1830s saw the emergence of a new topic that had been somewhat muted before: slavery. The idea that the presence of slavery tended to undermine the future of American democracy gained wide currency during this time. In an article published in *Revue britannique* in 1831, Saulnier denounced the hypocrisy of American democracy, which combined "this liberty without any limits on one side, and this abject servitude on the other."[20] The French were struck by the tension between, on the one hand, "this Congress where can constantly be heard the nice words independence, human dignity, imprescriptible rights, and the inviolability of natural rights" and, on the other hand, the miserable condition of the black population.[21] If some critics pointed out that equality remained a mere ideal in a country with extreme forms of inequality, others went further to claim that America had too much equality, and was developing, to use the words of Théodore Jouffroy, "a form of mediocre civilization."[22]

The French also focused on the allegedly uncivilized, mercantile, and materialistic character of American society. Benjamin Saint-Victor, who visited America in the early 1830s, noted: "The main question here (and it's the *alpha* and *omega* of life), is to gain money, and then to use this money to gain ever more.... The entire world does not seem enough to satisfy to their cupidity" (Saint-Victor 1835, 26–27).[23] In the eyes of the hedonistic French, American life was monotonous and coarse because it lacked poetry and *savoir-vivre*. "America," claimed La Mennais, "is struck by the plague of commerce. The outcome is a spirit of calculation that stifles or weakens all generous sentiments."[24] Saint-Victor (1835, 30–31) deplored the restless competition and frantic commercial life that created "this perpetual and boundless movement of all cupid passions, the endpoint of all the worried thoughts of this multitude of people, who constantly turning their heads to the ground, exhaust themselves under the sun in order to build a treasure or to increase without measure the one that they have already amassed."

An interesting critique was advanced by Victor Jacquemont, who visited America in 1826–27, five years before Tocqueville. Educated in the pro-American milieu of the Ideologues that inspired Jefferson, Jacquemont came to America without any preconceived ideas. He was enthusiastic about learning English and refrained from passing superficial judgments about the country. Yet, toward the end of his journey, he could not conceal his dissatisfaction with the American way of life. "I dislike the American mores," he wrote in a seminal, 40-page letter to Victor de Tracy in September 1827; "their aspect, sometimes severe, and then not entirely lacking in nobility, is most often cold, flat, and vulgar" (Jacquemont 1885, 153). Jacquemont referred to the great American leaders as republicans by principle and aristocrats in their mores and concluded that, for all its virtues, the American way of life did not provide a civilized type of liberty.

A similar critique appeared in Stendhal's *On Love* (originally written in 1821), in which he drew a balanced, if ultimately equally unflattering, portrait of daily life in the United States. "All their attention," wrote Stendhal (1975), referring to Americans, "seems to be concentrated on a sensible arrangement of the business of living, and on foreseeing all mishaps" (164). But these efforts come at a high price: "When at last they reach the point of harvesting the fruit of so much care and orderly planning, they find no life left with which to enjoy." Yet, unlike other critics, Stendhal did not see American mores as rude. On the contrary, it was their politeness and rationality that he found problematic and unsatisfying. He acknowledged that America had a free government that "does its citizens no harm, but rather gives them security and tranquility" (163). But in Stendhal's opinion, this was not enough to create true happiness; there is political happiness and true happiness and the two do not always coincide. The spirit of American liberty, concluded Stendhal (163), is "a coarse spirit" that gives the people the illusion of being happy simply because they enjoy security and tranquility. Yet, happiness means much more than being free from the interference of a bad, harmful, and incompetent government.

More importantly, the unflattering picture of American mores led to the calling into question of some of the political principles underlying American democracy. Thus, one commentator claimed that American government was not as cheap as it had previously been argued.[25] Other French observers of American political life deplored its extreme form of partisan politics that triggered violent attacks on one's opponents and overheated electoral campaigns. President Jackson's own political style was also criticized. By reflecting on the recurrent episodes of popular violence such as the popular revolts of September 1834, the French observers of American politics feared that law-abidingness in America was waning and concluded that the American people were impulsive and bellicose. Last but not least, the weakness of the federal government, which had previously been seen as a plus, came to be interpreted as a major weakness. This perception fueled the image of a democracy prone to degenerate into mobocracy, a regime that chronically engendered violence and risked degenerating into popular autocracy.[26] These themes loomed large in Tocqueville's letters from the 1840s and the 1850s, in which he pointed to inadequate trials

[19] Marchais and Dupont as quoted in Rémond 1962, 668.

[20] Saulnier as quoted in Rémond 1962, 737, n. 41.

[21] The words are from a discourse by Lamartine from 1835 as quoted in Rémond 1962, 741, n. 62.

[22] Jouffroy as quoted in Rémond 1962, 721.

[23] Saint-Victor's second letter described American mores in detail. It is worth pointing out that Saint-Victor's letters, written in 1832–33 from America, were published in France in 1835, at the same time as Volume One of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

[24] La Mennais as quoted in Rémond 1962, 763–64, n. 3.

[25] See Saulnier's critique in Rémond 1962, 690–91.

[26] For more details, see Rémond 1962, 698–703; 711–12.

and summary executions, lynching, and flagrant violation of individual rights.

All these arguments account for the growing perception that came to dominate French public opinion in the late 1830s that America was, in fact, a degenerating society. The country no longer had the brilliant statesmen that had fought for its independence from England and had been instrumental in drafting its Constitution. It was around this time that the French came to believe that the presence of slavery was going to cause the breakup of the Union.

TOCQUEVILLE'S VIEWS OF AMERICA BEFORE 1840

By the time Tocqueville finished writing Volume One of *Democracy in America*, the viability of the American political model was seriously questioned in France. Serious doubts emerged concerning the possibility of transplanting it onto French soil as well as regarding its own effectiveness. America, it was argued, could not serve as a political model for France.[27]

Tocqueville participated in this French debate. In his published writings as well as in his private correspondence, he advanced a series of arguments that were meant to respond to the ideas of his contemporaries. In 1835, Tocqueville presented a relatively optimistic image of American institutions and constitution. In memorable pages, he described how Americans practiced the art of self-government, how they felt attached to their townships and participated in their administration. More importantly, Tocqueville demonstrated that, contrary to what its critics argued, the sovereignty of the people could be channeled into effective and regular institutions that promote the common interest and the common good. Although the unusually long chapter that concluded Volume One of *Democracy in America* voiced a series of concerns about the probable future of the country, Tocqueville did not suggest that the stability of the country itself was at risk. He foresaw the gradual and inevitable disappearance of the native races and predicted that the destiny of the blacks would be intermingled with that of the white population. "The most dreadful of all the evils that threaten the future of the United States," surmised Tocqueville (2000, 326), "arise from the presence of blacks on its soil." Although in a certain part of the country the legal barrier that separated the two races tended to fall, he was convinced that slavery remained a formidable challenge because the prejudice to which slavery had given birth was unchanged.[28]

The twin issues of race relations and slavery were not the only topics discussed by this chapter. Tocqueville also analyzed the relations between the federal government and the states and noted that the federal power was decreasing at the time he visited the country. He claimed that "Americans have much more to expect and to fear from the state than from the Union.... The federal government... is... by its very nature a weak government" (Tocqueville 2000, 352–53). Furthermore, Tocqueville expressed optimism regarding the survival of the republic in America, by which he meant that form of government based on "the slow and tranquil action of society on itself" (379). Because the institutions of the country were essentially republican and enjoyed "a sort of *consensus universalis*" (382), Tocqueville believed that it would be extremely difficult to found a monarchy or an aristocracy in the United States. In spite of his musings about the tyranny of the majority, Tocqueville's words offered a reassuring confidence in the future of the country, based on his image of America as an accomplished and mature democracy, capable of overcoming its challenges (slavery, territorial expansion, the growth of population), destined to rise to the status of the world's premier power, and expected to serve as a political model for the rest of the world. The idea of an immature and unstable American democracy that loomed large in his later letters did not appear in Volume One.

Published in 1840, Volume Two of *Democracy in America* qualified this optimistic view by introducing a series of new themes and concerns about the democratic individual. Yet Tocqueville's thoughts on the shortcomings of democracy did not call into question the viability of the American political model, which, in his opinion, remained a mature and solid one. He seemed less interested in making predictions about the future of American democracy than in drawing the portrait of the democratic individual living in the age of equality. In spite of his distrust of the bourgeoisie and of his anxieties about the pernicious effects of rampant individualism in modern democratic society, Tocqueville did not question the foundational virtue of the American middle class, the famous "self-interest rightly understood." The vices of individualism, he argued, can be successfully mitigated and combated by religion, free institutions, and local freedoms. Tocqueville (2000) also noted that *l'intérêt bien entendu* "forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted, master of themselves" (502) and concluded that self-interest rightly understood, although preventing some individuals from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity, prevents many more from falling below it.

Two things are worth noting in Tocqueville's analysis in Volume Two of *Democracy in America*. First, he suggested that the Americans were moderate and responsible individuals, who knew well their interests and rights, were capable of controlling their passions, and were not easily swayed by mob flatterers or demagogues. The idea that democracy might chronically engender violence and turmoil or that the market might become uncontrollable precisely because of the growing multiplicity of interests seems rather implausible based on Tocqueville's account that ascribed to Americans common sense, temperance, and moderation. Volume Two of *Democracy in America* dealt surprisingly

[27] The following statement appeared in *Le bonhomme Richard*, published in September 1832: "It is in vain that some try to offer as remedies to our problems these institutions which are shaky and rotten *on* the very next day following their birth" (as quoted in Rémond 1962, 713).

[28] For a comprehensive analysis of this topic, see Mitchell 2002, 132–81.

little with the perils of prosperity and the limits of abundance (one finds more details about these issues in Tocqueville's rich correspondence).[29]

Moreover, Tocqueville had little to say here about the possibility of the economic sphere invading the political realm and corrupting its institutions. Yet, in Volume Two of *Democracy in America*, he discussed the possibility of the rise of an "industrial aristocracy" in democratic America. This new type of manufacturing aristocracy, he argued, would be different from the old one, since its goal would be only to make use of the population rather than to govern the country. "It is one of the hardest [aristocracies] that has appeared on earth," surmised Tocqueville (2000, 532), "but it is at the same time one of the most restrained and least dangerous." All things considered, in Tocqueville's opinion, the possible emergence of an industrial aristocracy was not enough to call into question the image of an accomplished American democracy. For the author of *Democracy in America*, this was to change after 1850, as he became more and more concerned about the consequences of the unbridled spirit of enterprise at the core of the American way of life.[30]

Second, in spite of his dislike of the French rising bourgeoisie of his time, Tocqueville was more or less silent about the limitations of the American middle class. He praised the latter's outstanding spirit of enterprise and showed how democracy favors new developments in industry and multiplies the opportunity for various lucrative enterprises. He wrote *sine ira et studio* about the independent spirit of the (American) middle class, its restlessness, and the multiplicity of its (economic) enterprises, which he saw as a distinctive characteristic of democracy that opens up new vistas and careers to all individuals, regardless of their station in life. To be sure, one will find in Tocqueville's balanced interpretation neither the vitriolic attacks on the boundless cupidity of the Americans that underlay the conservatives critiques of America such as Saint-Victor's *Letters from the United States of America* (1835) nor the profound dislike for the American vulgar mores and the prosaic American way of life expressed by Victor Jacquemont and Stendhal in the 1820s.

TOCQUEVILLE'S VIEWS OF AMERICA AFTER 1840

In spite of Tocqueville's cautionary words about the possibility of the emergence of a new type of soft democratic despotism, Volume Two of *Democracy in America* offered the image of a relatively solid and stable democratic regime that, for all its inherent shortcomings, managed to reconcile successfully the demands for equality, liberty, and justice.

Tocqueville did not publish a sequel to *Democracy in America* or any major statement on American democracy between 1840 and his death in 1859. Fully involved in the French parliamentary politics of his time, Tocqueville's research interests eventually shifted to studying the Old Regime and the origins of the French Revolution.[31] But what happened with Tocqueville's interest in America? Did he ever change his views on American democracy? What were his views of American democracy in the last years of his life as the country elected a new president (Buchanan) and was preparing for the Civil War?

To answer these questions we turn to Tocqueville's correspondence with his American friends after 1840 and we also examine his participation in the constitutional debates of 1848 in France. Due to the indefatigable work of Françoise Mélonio and her collaborators, we now have access to more than 100 letters that Tocqueville sent from October 1840 until his death to a number of his American friends (alas, a few letters written by the American correspondents were lost). Tocqueville's addressees were mostly individuals whom he and Beaumont had met during their voyage to America. The group included Jared Sparks (1789–1866), the president of Harvard University and editor of Washington's and Franklin's papers; Franz Lieber (1800–72), editor of the *Encyclopaedia Americana* and professor at South Caroliniana College; Edward Everett (1794–1865), ambassador to London, Secretary of State, and senator; Theodore Sedgwick (1811–59), who provided Tocqueville with essential information while he was writing Volume One of *Democracy in America*; Charles Sumner (1811–74), a Harvard law professor and Republican senator; and E. L. and E. V. Childe, members of an American family living temporarily in France, with whom Tocqueville had close relations in the 1850s.

Some of Tocqueville's letters are short and limit themselves to brief comments on political events in both America and Europe. Many deal with the mundane matters of everyday life (planned visits, illnesses and deaths within the family, and other such matters that figure prominently in the correspondence between friends as they get old). A regular topic of inquiry was the economic stability of the country (as Tocqueville owned shares in a number of American railway companies and was worried about them). Other letters, however, belong to the best letters he ever wrote and give us an invaluable opportunity to gaze into his mind and soul, touching as they do upon important issues regarding the evolution of American political institutions and the future of the Union.[32] They raise a whole

[29] See, for example, Tocqueville's correspondence with Royer-Collard, published in Tocqueville 1971.

[30] It is worth pointing out that Tocqueville was also the author of a "*Memoir on Pauperism*," written in early 1835 after his visit to England. In this essay, which was primarily directed at England, Tocqueville addressed the paradox of the then most opulent country, England, having the greatest number of paupers. A defender of private charity, he argued against public charity, which, in his view, had a series of unfortunate unforeseen consequences. Nonetheless, Tocqueville did not detect the same problems in America, which, for him, was the country of the middle class. For more details, see Tocqueville 1997.

[31] For a recent and original analysis of the writing of *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, see Gannett 2003.

[32] For an excellent new collection of Tocqueville's letters, see Tocqueville 2003.

series of new concerns and perspectives on America. References are made to an emerging American imperialism, the excesses of American democracy, the decline of mores and the rise of lawlessness, the revolutionary fervor of American politics, poor political leadership, and the reckless spirit of American capitalism. Lurking behind all of these issues was Tocqueville's growing concern about the issue of slavery and the impending breakup of the Union as the country entered a new turbulent era paving the way for the Civil War.

Tocqueville's growing doubts about the vitality of American democracy were fueled by the political developments that occurred in the late 1840s and during the 1850s such as the Kansas–Nebraska bill, the election of Buchanan as president, and frequent cases of mob violence and lawlessness. These events led him to utter harsh words about the excesses and corruption of American democracy, harsher in any case than what one finds in either of the two volumes of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville's letters of this period show that he called into question the very image of an accomplished and successful American democracy, the conclusion of his two-volume work on the United States. Finally, in the 1850s, amidst growing skepticism about America's political future, Tocqueville came to regard the corruption of American institutions and mores (along with slavery) as a major threat to American democracy. It was in this context that Tocqueville began reflecting on the invasion of the political by the economic sphere as well as on the inevitable shortcomings of market society, two topics that had *not* loomed large in his previous writings.

In his letters, Tocqueville reaffirmed his interest in American politics and administration. During the first half of the 1840s, he remained confident that American political institutions offered the best combination of liberty and security and continued to believe that the future of liberty in the world depended to a significant extent on the preservation of a democratic republic in the United States. Describing himself as "half Yankee,"[33] Tocqueville argued that, in spite of temporary misunderstandings and rivalries between the two countries, France and the United States were two natural allies united by profound ties that needed to be strengthened. The implicit suggestion was that America could serve as a political model for France. "Nothing interests me more than everything that concerns this great and powerful nation [America]," he wrote to N. Niles in 1843 (Tocqueville 1986, 88–89). "I have broken a bit the chain of my relations with the United States lately. I regret it and would like to renew these relations.... One of the foundations of my politics is that, in spite of preconceptions and small quarrels, France and the United States are two allies so natural and so necessary to each other that they should never lose sight of each other for a single moment." Tocqueville's ongoing interest in America is documented by another letter sent to Lieber in September 1844, in which he claimed that America was not only the freest nation in the world, but also that in which the individuals were most protected from the interference of society in their daily lives (93).

That Tocqueville remained convinced that the American model had something to offer to France is also illustrated by reference to his remarks in the powerful constitutional debates that accompanied the birth of the Second Republic in 1848.[34] Those debates encapsulated the revolutionary obsession with unity and equality and repeatedly returned to the hostility of the republicans toward both bicameralism and federalism, each of which had become intimately associated with the cause of counter-revolution. The genius of France, it was frequently stated, was "unitary" and there could be no grounds for dividing up the sovereign will of people by reference to artificial institutional mechanisms designed to thwart its wishes. More specifically, both bicameralism and federalism were associated with aristocratic power and, in the eyes of their opponents, could be easily associated (and therefore discredited) by reference to the English constitution.

Tocqueville opposed these views both in parliamentary debates and in the discussions of the constitutional commission. Recognizing that his views would never secure majority support, he nonetheless persisted in arguing that France had much to learn from the American experience (Tocqueville 1990, 82). All of this was within a perspective that, at this early stage, saw Tocqueville expressing the view that one of the consequences of the 1848 revolution would be to give more liberty to individuals. In particular, Tocqueville opposed the preferred republican model of a single chamber by reference to the American system. There was, he pointed out (82–83), only one democratic republic in the world, America, and that possessed two chambers.

Tocqueville doubted that France could borrow indiscriminately from the American model, but made the curious point that America possessed 30 states "which are in a position similar to ours" and that each of these possessed two chambers. Not a single American, he remarked, wished the system to operate differently. Tocqueville was, in fact, echoing the views of his American friends who also considered bicameralism as one of the main causes of the survival of a democratic republic in the United States. The presence of two chambers, it was argued, offered the best protection not only against mob flatterers and demagogues, but also against the encroachment of the executive power. In a letter sent to Tocqueville in June 1848, his American correspondent J. C. Spencer emphasized all these points and added that the two chambers must also have different modes of election that would allow them to withstand better the whims of public opinion. The senators, elected for a longer time, can resist better the various demands of the masses and learn to form a healthy and sober second thought. "It is this second thought," argued Spencer, "that has saved us from many disasters" (Tocqueville 1986, 122, n. 2). Tocqueville agreed with this view. In

[33] Letter to E. V. Childe, December 12, 1856, in Tocqueville 1986, 185.

[34] See especially Tocqueville 1990, 55–166. For a discussion of Tocqueville's role, see Lamberti 1984.

a letter to Everett from March 1849, Tocqueville defended bicameralism as a pillar of constitutionalism.

Moreover, in the 1848 debates Tocqueville denied that the two chamber model used in America was an English invention. States such as Pennsylvania and Massachusetts had begun life with one chamber: "Public reason" had demonstrated the necessity of two. This example, Tocqueville remarked, is striking. Likewise, he disputed the claim that a two-chamber system automatically institutionalized aristocratic power, arguing that France required "as in America, the two chambers represent in a similar manner and through similar means, the same interests and the same classes of people." He then outlined the three advantages of such a system—it prevented executive power from abuse, it strengthened the executive in its relations to parliament, and it prevented "legislative intemperance"—commenting that "two chambers do not prevent revolutions but they prevent the bad government which leads to revolutions" (Tocqueville 1990, 83).

Tocqueville's next reference to the American model was in the context of the heated debate that surrounded the election and powers of the president. First, Tocqueville opposed the principle of reelection at the end of a President's mandate. This, he acknowledged, was what existed in America, and even there it posed an increasing problem, but fortunately the American President possessed "little power." In France, by contrast, a President would undoubtedly abuse his power in order to secure election (Tocqueville 1990, 99, 106–7). Next, Tocqueville recommended the American system of electoral colleges as the best means of securing the election of the French president.

On all these issues (and many more), Tocqueville was defeated by the majority republican party, intent on reliving the days of the Convention. For Tocqueville it was a deeply troubling experience, and one that left him convinced that France would again fall prey to political instability. He did not believe that the American model could be copied without due consideration of France's own particularities, but he did believe that politicians in France should have the wisdom to learn from the experience and rules of a constitution that he did not hesitate to refer to as "a work of art." This, as we shall see, was all the more remarkable given that he himself was having growing doubts about the direction in which America itself was moving.

After 1848 Tocqueville's confidence in the vitality of American institutions was going to be challenged by subsequent political developments that brought to the fore more than ever before the corruption of American democracy. True, his own political experience in France made him prone to pessimism, as his own country demonstrated once more that the French nation lacked a political tradition of moderation and practical sense. Tocqueville's own tendency to discouragement and his declining health also played a certain role in deepening his sense of isolation that constantly frightened him. "I would have liked to shake off for good my tendency to discouragement," confessed Tocqueville in an important letter to Madame Swetchine from January 1856 (Tocqueville 2002, 272). "I have had this ailment, however, for most of my life.... I have worked hard to get rid of it for some years, and I have certainly decreased its intensity.... You cannot imagine, Madame, how painful and often cruel it is for me to live in this kind of moral isolation, to feel excluded from the intellectual community of my times and my country. To be alone in the desert often strikes me as being less painful than being alone among men." Although Tocqueville's pessimism and tendency to political spleen can be explained to a certain degree by his own physical and spiritual constitution (he was a truly restless mind in constant search for certainty and intellectual companionship), political developments in America and France contributed to his disillusionment and to his acute sense of distance from his contemporaries.[35]

In short, Tocqueville's views of American democracy did not change independently of other events in the last decade of his life. Consumed by a permanent revolutionary fervor, the French proved to be incapable of changing the constitution through peaceful parliamentary reform. They were also unable to conceive long-term political plans that would reconcile the immediate goals of all political actors with the interests of the country at large.[36] In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Tocqueville continued to believe in the practical sense of the Americans, as displayed by the country's strong tradition of self-government, and expressed again and again his hope that, in spite of its problems, American democracy would survive and prosper.[37] Yet the tone of Tocqueville's letters on America became more severe and pessimistic as he approached the end of his life and saw the future of liberty threatened and compromised in both France and the United States.

He expressed serious concerns regarding the emergent American imperialism, which he described as a sign of the bad health of American democracy. For Tocqueville, the idea of conquering new territories to be annexed to the already existing ones was absurd because, in his view, the country had already acquired a vast territory. Stressing again his American credentials as "half American citizen," Tocqueville (1986) wrote to Sedgwick on December 4, 1852: "As one of your compatriots, I have not seen without apprehension this spirit of conquest and even a bit of rapine, which has been on display among you for several years. It is not a sign of good health for a people which already has more territories than it can fill" (146–47). A related problem in Tocqueville's eyes was the growing immigration to America that brought into the country a

[35] For a statement of Tocqueville's (2003) sense of moral isolation, also see his letter to Madame Swetchine of October 20, 1856 (1218).

[36] See, for example, Tocqueville's letter of February 15, 1850, to Everett (as well as Everett's response) in Tocqueville 1986, 133–34.

[37] In an important letter of April 1857 to E. V. Childe, Tocqueville (1986, 193) wrote about the American people in the following terms: "Like all sovereigns, it naturally loves courtesans and flatterers, but I have enough confidence in its practical sense to believe that in times of crises it would better place its trust. At least, I hope so, because I passionately desire that the great experience of *self-government* that is currently going on in America succeeds. It it fails, political liberty on earth would be finished for ever."

considerable number of individuals who did not belong to the English race and had a different political culture.[38]

A week later, on December 11, 1852, Tocqueville wrote to Sparks that American democracy had to fear nothing but from its own excesses. He also argued that an immoderate spirit of adventure, risk, and conquest would endanger the stability of democratic institutions. The American democracy, wrote Tocqueville (1986, 148–149), "has nothing more to fear than from itself, from the abuse of democracy, the spirit of adventure and conquest, from the sense and exaggerated pride in its strength, and from the impetuosity of youth." The solution recommended by Tocqueville was moderation: "I cannot recommend the virtues of moderation enough. Nations, as much as individuals, have need of it" (149). What is remarkable in these passages is Tocqueville's emphasis on the *excesses of democracy*, a theme that was in stark contrast with the earlier image of an accomplished and stable American democracy, more or less immune to chronic turmoil and violence. In 1852, Tocqueville realized much better than in 1835 or 1840 that it is in the very nature of democracy itself, even in the most advanced democratic regime in the world, to tend to transgress its limits and to subvert its own foundations.

To be sure, the cacophonic spectacle of American political life in the early 1850s only fueled his increasing skepticism and provided numerous examples of the growing corruption of its democratic institutions. The image of a law-abiding and tranquil citizenry that Tocqueville presented in Volume One of *Democracy* seemed a relic of the past or, at best, a mere theoretical ideal. In a letter to Sedgwick from September 19, 1855, Tocqueville (1986) denounced "the violent, intolerant, and lawless spirit" (163) manifested in some parts of the country. He reiterated the same concern two years later, in a letter to Lieber from October 9, 1857, in which he deplored the acts of personal revenge and violence that tended to subvert the authority of the law and the judicial system in America. The point is illustrative of Tocqueville's concern with the rapid degradation of mores that he had previously described as the pillar of American democracy. Tocqueville (215) suggested that if political parties offered the spectacle of a ruthless and rude competition for power, punctuated by uncivilized electoral campaigns and unacceptable attacks on one's political opponents, it was because political mores and habits had become violent and rude.

This conclusion allowed Tocqueville to make a rather surprising claim that cannot be found in *Democracy in America*. The deterioration of mores, he argued, fostered a certain form of revolutionary fervor and the country seemed to be heading toward revolution. "What is certain," Tocqueville (1986) wrote in 1856 (echoing the image of America in Europe at that time), "is that in Europe the idea that you are approaching rapidly the time of revolution gains wide acceptance and spreads very quickly" (183). Tocqueville stopped short of endorsing this prevailing opinion. Yet certain doubts had already entered his mind, and they seemed strong enough to call into question some of his previously held opinions about the stability of American democracy.

Furthermore, confronted with the spectacle of a democracy that tended to transgress its limits and to engender chronic violence, Tocqueville came to rethink what made America original. In 1835, Tocqueville had stressed self-government and the successful alliance between the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion. In 1840, he had emphasized the Cartesianism, individualism, and religious beliefs of Americans and had shown how self-interest rightly understood underlay their actions. In the later letters, the story was somewhat different, as religion no longer played a major role in his account of American democracy and was conspicuously absent from his correspondence with his American friends.[39] Although Tocqueville earlier believed that religion properly practiced could provide the foundation for sound mores and a virtuous form of materialism in an age of individualism and skepticism, by the 1850s this belief seems to have waned. Put simply, in a situation where he sees growing evidence of "popular disorder," Tocqueville no longer makes mention of America's originality in combining liberty and religion.[40]

Rather, Tocqueville now claimed that America's particularity lay in combining a certain degree of primitivism with the most advanced elements of civilization. This primitivism was manifested by the extreme forms of the spirit of adventure and risk fostered by the growing abundance and the limitless opportunities for gain, the same elements that Tocqueville had previously considered as the causes of Americans' restlessness. In an important letter to Sedgwick from October 14, 1856, Tocqueville (1986) expressed his concern regarding "this race of anxious gamblers to which your prosperity, in a land that is half empty, has given birth, a race which combines the passions and instincts of the savage with the tastes, needs, vigour and vices of civilized men. The world, I think, has never seen anything like it before. Who can say where this might lead if ever they gain the upper hand in your affairs?" (182–183). What is particularly striking in this passage is the suggestion that the endless quest for increased comfort and material prosperity is the most important cause of these excesses. Far from softening human nature, as Tocqueville argued in Volume Two of *Democracy in America*, abundance fosters, in fact, an excessive spirit of enterprise, adventure, and risk by arousing boundless desires and fueling an unbridled materialism. Also

[38] See, for example, Tocqueville's letter of August 6, 1854, to Beaumont, in Tocqueville 1967, 228–29. Also see Tocqueville's letter of October 14, 1856, to Sedgwick, in Tocqueville 1986, 182.

[39] It is worth pointing out that in an important letter to Corcelle from July 29, 1857, in which Tocqueville (2003) spoke admiringly of England, he praised that country's "perfect accord between religious and political morality" (1253). A similar reference to the seminal relationship between religion and liberty in England can be found in Tocqueville's (2003) letter to Kergolay from August 4, 1857 (1256; translated in Tocqueville 1985, 355–57).

[40] For a recent analysis of Tocqueville's views of religion, see Antoine 2003.

implicit in this passage is the idea that the market can hardly be controlled once free reign is given to individual ambitions and interests. The inevitable outcome of this development is the perversion of the political that is gradually invaded by the economic and turns into an arena for a chaotic display of personal ambitions, rivalries, and interests.

Tocqueville did not draw, however, the conclusion that this was the stage of an advanced democracy. On the contrary, he came to believe that this was the symptom of a young and immature democracy that, like a child unable to control his emotions and passions, takes the liberty of indulging in its own whims and desires without considering their pernicious long-term effects. In taking up the issue of the alleged immaturity of American democracy—a more or less new theme in his writings—Tocqueville only returned, in fact, to the metaphor of Guizot, who in 1834 had referred to America as a young and inexperienced society. Tocqueville's reference to Hobbes's *puer robustus* in a letter to Sedgwick from August 29, 1856, is revealing in this regard. "What is certain," Tocqueville (1986) wrote, "is that, for some years now, you have strangely abused the advantages given to you by God which allow you to commit great errors with impunity. Viewed from this side of the ocean, you have become the *puer robustus* of Hobbes. By being so, you distress all the friends of democratic liberty and delight all of its opponents" (177). America, Tocqueville wrote in 1856, risked disappointing the hopes of millions of people for a better future, because it offered in reality the disquieting spectacle of an unstable regime led by incompetent and dishonest leaders,[41] relying on corrupt institutions, and incapable of controlling the excesses of the spirit of enterprise and adventure.

In a series of letters, Tocqueville also raised the issue of the physical composition of America. In the letters he wrote to Sedgwick in 1854, he spoke of the lack of public life in Germany, attributing this to the historic absence of free institutions in that country. America, Tocqueville went on, was annually receiving around 140,000 German immigrants. How could they possibly be assimilated into American life?[42] Two years later, again in a letter to Sedgwick, he took up this theme once more, this time sensing the future breakup of the Union. The large number of immigrants now present in American society made it impossible to talk of the nature of America. "Unfortunately," Tocqueville (1986, 177) commented, "each new day brings to you so many foreign elements that soon you will no longer be yourselves."

These concerns for America's future, however, paled into insignificance by the side of those he voiced concerning slavery. Here we must remember that upon his election as a member of the Chamber of Deputies in 1839, one of the principal responsibilities allotted to Tocqueville had been that of drafting a law abolishing slavery in the French colonies. The report that he prepared was subsequently translated and published in America, leading him to hope that it might have some useful impact, especially in the South. In the context of this report he wrote to Sparks, on October 13, 1840, that "slavery has on your soil roots that are more profound and more enduring than anywhere else" (Tocqueville 1986, 83). It was a source of great sadness to him that America had incorporated slavery into itself in the way that it had. In his view, it was because these roots were so deep that slavery would survive longer in America than elsewhere. Indeed, he predicted that neither he nor Sparks would see its end.

Tocqueville's profound concern about the impact of slavery continued long after his retirement from active politics. This was made abundantly clear when, in 1856, he published an open letter in *The Liberty Bell*. Describing himself as "the persevering enemy of despotism everywhere," Tocqueville (1986) indicated in the strongest terms that he was "pained and astonished" by the fact that "the freest people in the world is, at the present time, almost the only one among civilized and Christian nations which yet maintains personal servitude" (163–64). Slavery, he went on, retarded America's progress, gave support to her detractors, and threatened the future of the Union. As a man, and not just as "an old and sincere friend of America," he was moved by "the spectacle of man's degradation by man" and hoped to see the day when the law would grant equal civil liberty to all (163–64). Less than a year later, Tocqueville struck a different tone. The election of Buchanan as President significantly increased his fears that slavery would be extended. Such a possibility, he indicated, could only be viewed as "one of the greatest crimes that men can commit against the general cause of humanity" (189–90).

It was this theme that came to dominate the remaining letters he wrote to his American friends prior to his untimely death in April 1859. For example, although he appeared to agree with Sedgwick that the greatest danger facing the Northern states was political corruption, the entire prospect of the extension of slavery filled him with horror and despair. Distancing himself from the abolitionist position[43] (being fearful of the consequences of a policy that he described as "premature and dangerous"), he believed that the extension of slavery would constitute "a crime against humanity" (Tocqueville 1986, 194–95). He could not accept that a great people had no right to express an opinion about the extension of what Tocqueville did not hesitate to describe as "the most horrible of all social evils" (195). Fortunately, he commented, he himself did not have to face the terrible dilemmas that such action would entail for the Union.

[41] Writes Tocqueville (1986), "The greatest plague of America, after slavery, is the government of the country by the least honest, if not the least capable part of the nation" (192–93).

[42] See Tocqueville 1986, 156–59.

[43] An analysis of Tocqueville's position on colonization, abolition, and emancipation goes beyond the scope of this article. In 1835, Tocqueville became a member of the *French Society for the Abolition of Slavery* and later called for the abolition of slavery in the French West Indies. Yet, unlike radical French abolitionists, he argued that the state ought to give the former slave masters some form of indemnification. For more details on this issue, see Tocqueville 2001.

Increasingly, however, Tocqueville felt that the Union was in danger. An equivalent level of political agitation and passion would have been such, he recognized, as to lead to civil war in Europe. That same year he identified the cause of the Union with "that of liberty across the world" (Tocqueville 1986, 206). To the end, he continued to hope that slavery would be vanquished. Nevertheless, it is hard not to conclude that the debate about the possible extension of slavery added to the mounting political pessimism that characterized the final decade of Tocqueville's life.

CONCLUSION

If Tocqueville's ideas have become extremely influential today among academics and elected politicians, it is also true that the richness of his writings has sometimes generated a certain tendency to over praise his work that turned the Frenchman into a form of intellectual guru. Reacting against this trend, a number of perceptive critics of Tocqueville have raised a series of important questions regarding the accuracy of his analysis of American democracy.

For example, in his essay "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal and Hartz," Smith (1993) argued that "the Tocquevillian story is deceptive because it is too narrow" (549).[44] In Smith's opinion, the relevance of Tocqueville's interpretation is limited by the fact that he used "categories derived from the hierarchy of political and social statutes men have held in Europe" (549). As such, concluded Smith, Tocqueville's analysis, at the heart of which lies the concept of the equality of conditions, fails to give due consideration "to the inegalitarian ideologies and conditions that have shaped the participants and the substance of American politics just as deeply" (549).

The examination of Tocqueville's (often neglected) correspondence with his American friends after 1840 tells a different story, however, and one that is in some ways more poignant than the account offered by the two volumes of *Democracy in America.* The Frenchman did not overlook the issue of slavery and he was not oblivious to the fact that the equality of conditions extended only to a part of the population. The perceptive letters sent to his American friends clearly show that Tocqueville's image of American life was neither "deceptive" nor too narrow. It is both ironic and telling that toward the end of his life, Tocqueville reached a set of conclusions about American democracy that differed from those he drew in Volumes One and Two of *Democracy in America.* Twenty years earlier, he had seen "in America more than America" (Tocqueville 2000, 13), the image of democracy itself, and wanted to find lessons there from which everyone in his native country could profit. Tocqueville was fully convinced that the future of democracy and freedom in the world depended on the success of the democratic experiment in the United States. He also believed that the development and progress of American democracy responded to a secret design of Providence. Tocqueville's subtle and elegant analysis of American mores and institutions sought to convince his compatriots that American democracy was stable and orderly and represented a great step forward for the cause of justice in the entire world.

For all his nuanced and sometimes critical portrait of the democratic individual, it can be argued that Tocqueville did not radically change his views in Volume Two of *Democracy in America* (compared to Volume One), although his focus eventually shifted from what was distinctively American to what was democratic in general. This is not meant to understate the originality of Volume Two of *Democracy*, in which he expressed uneasiness about the mediocrity of democratic life, bent on commerce and imbued with utilitarian values, and wanted instead to see more individuals capable of conceiving loftier plans than to gain money and to make their lives more comfortable. As illustrated by the last book of Volume Two of *Democracy in America*, in the late 1830s Tocqueville (2000) believed that the greatest dangers to democracy were not anarchy and the ensuing collapse of political and social order, but a new form of "democratic" despotism, one that strikes the mind rather than the body and transforms all citizens into a mass of docile individuals in perpetual need for an enlightened tutor who relieves them "entirely of the trouble of thinking and the pain of living" (663). The great importance that he attached to the topic of democratic despotism is conveyed by a letter to Royer-Collard in which Tocqueville wrote: "It is true that I am now at the most difficult and delicate place in the whole work.... I sense that I am treating here the most important idea of our time."[45] To be sure, the main idea of Tocqueville's analysis in the last book of Volume Two of *Democracy in America* is that democratic despotism is the inevitable companion of centralization and the outcome of the multiplication of the functions and agencies of government demanded by the growing equality of conditions.

Yet the final image of American mores and institutions presented in Volume Two offered a few significant reasons for optimism, in stark contrast to the more negative assessments of American democracy offered in his post-1840 correspondence. In his book, Tocqueville offered four important conclusions that are worth restating. First, the instincts and passions of democracy ought to be constantly moderated and held in check because democracy goes hand in hand with materialism, tyranny of the majority, rampant individualism, and centralization. Second, this task of moderating and purifying democracy can be successfully accomplished by a regime such as the American one.[46] Third, Tocqueville believed that "political

[44] For a more comprehensive treatment of this topic, see Smith 1997.

[45] See Tocqueville 1971, 67. The letter is also quoted in Schleifer 2000, 212.

[46] In his notes, Tocqueville wrote: "Use democracy to moderate democracy. It is the only path to salvation that is open to us. To discern the feelings, the ideas, the laws which, without being hostile to the principle of democracy, can nonetheless correct its troublesome tendencies" (quoted in Schleifer 2000, 234).

liberty is the greatest remedy for nearly all the evils with which equality menaces man."[47] Fourth, he argued that because "there is only Democracy (by this word I understand self-government) which can lessen and make bearable the inevitable evils of a democratic social state . . . it is necessary with all one's might to hasten to give enlightenment and liberty to people who have already such a social state."[48] These points show that Tocqueville arrived at the conclusion that soft (bureaucratic) despotism and centralization of power posed much greater threats to democracy than unruly legislative assemblies, power-driven individuals, or the process of industrialization.

How can one explain, then, that a decade and a half later, Tocqueville came to doubt some of these conclusions and claimed that the hopes pinned on American democracy and freedom had been severely compromised? Volume Three of *Democracy in America*, if it had ever been written, would have mirrored his disenchantment and skepticism and would have called into question some of the most significant ideas of his widely acclaimed book that, according to Tocqueville's critics, presented an unduly embellished image of America. The high stakes and implications of a possible failure of the American model for Tocquevillle are unambiguously illustrated by a letter sent to Lieber on September 1, 1856, in which he expressed in memorable words his disenchantment with American political life. "I have passionately desired to see a free Europe," wrote Tocqueville (1986, 179)

> and I realize now that the cause of true liberty is more compromised today than it was during the epoch when I was born. I see around me nations whose souls seem to weaken as their prosperity and physical force grow, nations which remain, to borrow Hobbes's phrase, robust children who deserve only to be treated by means of the stick and the carrot. Your America itself, to which once turned the dream of all those who lacked the reality of liberty, has for some time in my view given little satisfaction to these friends.

The implicit assumption is that America should remain exceptional and must continue to offer a hopeful example to all those who lack liberty. The reference to the cause of "true liberty" being discredited by political developments in Europe shows the magnitude of Tocqueville's disappointment and disillusionment in his last years of his life. It is well known that he wrote *Democracy in America* for French readers in the hope that they would profit from the lessons taught by the American democracy. The unflattering remark in the passage above about America's alleged failure to fulfill the dream of all the friends of liberty suggests the extent to which Tocqueville was still seeing in America more than America. What is so striking, however, in the letters written in the decade following his retreat from political life is a growing and generalized pessimism that touches all aspects of his political thinking. Tocqueville expressed a series of doubts about American political life and mores that were strikingly similar to the doubts of his predecessors.

His letters to his American colleagues were at once perceptive and despairing about the character of the Second Empire as well.[49] All of those, he commented, "who had received a liberal education and who have involved themselves either directly or indirectly in public affairs understand and clearly see that, in the name of the sovereignty of the nation, all public liberties have been destroyed, that the appearance of a popular election has served to establish a despotism which is more absolute than any of those which have appeared before in France" (Tocqueville 1986, 144). As he neared the end of his time, there appeared little cause for optimism that the cause of liberty would triumph and now not even the inspiration derived from America remained.[50]

The degree of Tocqueville's disenchantment can only be explained by the magnitude of his hopes. When writing Volume One of *Democracy in America*, he swam against the current of French public opinion as America lost its previous Arcadian image and was regarded in France as a decaying society. Tocqueville revealed to his compatriots a different image, that of a healthy and prosperous society, which, according to one of his critics, Victorien Sardou, was an idealized or "sweetened" version of America, "*l'Amérique en sucre.*"[51] By drawing upon his case study, Tocqueville suggested that democracy should and could be moderated and channeled into regular institutions that promote the common good and successfully reconcile the demands for equality and liberty. The American model, he argued, showed that this aim could be achieved thorough a combination of healthy and stable mores, federalism, self-interest rightly understood (that softens the negative effects of extreme individualism), religion, and the art of association. Twenty years later, he feared, however, that he might have been mistaken and that his critics might have been right after all. In Tocqueville's (1986) opinion, American public and political life was dominated by individuals "who lacked moderation, sometimes probity, above all education" (227) and resembled mere political adventurers, violent, gross, and devoid of principles. The institutions in place were able to do relatively little to stave off

[47] Tocqueville as quoted in Schleifer 2000, 232–33.

[48] Tocqueville as quoted in Schleifer 2000, 200, 233.

[49] It is interesting to note that in spite of his disillusionment about French politics in the late 1850s, Tocqueville (2003, 1266) refused to believe that despotism was the normal and definitive state of French society. The dismal state of affairs in French politics under Napoleon III did not affect Tocqueville's strong belief in political liberty. For more evidence regarding his passion for liberty and his views on French society, see Tocqueville's important letter to Beaumont from February 27, 1858 (1292–96). An English translation can be found in Tocqueville 1985, 365–70.

[50] Tocqueville similarly came to express some doubts about the one other country that had attracted French liberals of his generation: England. Writing at the time of the Crimean war, he commented on the extent to which England suffered from "the weakness and incapacity of its government" (Tocqueville 1986, 163). Yet in some of his letters to Corcelle, Beaumont, and Kergolay written in 1857, Tocqueville expressed greater appreciation for England, its political culture, and its tradition of self-government. For more details, see Tocqueville 2003, 1255; 1260.

[51] Sardou as quoted in Roger 2002, 88.

this growing corruption. As such, American politics appeared to Tocqueville more and more as an arena for brute instincts and appetites, a point that, oddly enough, had been made by Cerise, one of Tocqueville's reviewers, in 1835.

What a disappointment must have felt the man who once claimed to have perceived in America more than America and who, in the last years of his life, saw the cause of freedom compromised not only in Europe but in the United States as well! We should be grateful, then, to the vagaries of French political life (which absorbed his energies and occupied his attention in the last two decades of his life) that Tocqueville never came to write Volume Three of *Democracy in America*. Reading the correspondence with his American friends after 1840 gives us a bitter taste of what the message of that volume might have been.

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