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THE MASTERLESS SOCIETY: OBSERVATIONS ON AMERICAN DEMOCRACY BY ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Government
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
James S. Tyrie, Jr.
December 1977

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THE MASTERLESS SOCIETY: OBSERVATIONS ON AMERICAN DEMOCRACY BY ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

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THE MASTERLESS SOCIETY: OBSERVATIONS ON AMERICAN DEMOCRACY BY ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

James S. Tyrie, Jr. December 1977 84 pages

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French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville's views concerning American democracy were examined in order to discern key aspects of democratic thought and practice in America. Tocqueville found certain fundamental premises such as individual freedom and "equality of conditions" at the base of democracy in America. From these basic premises come several paradoxical results, namely the masterless society, economic materialism, and "tyranny of the majority." These paradoxes are controlled by safeguards of associations, the press, and the judiciary within the system. It was found that Tocqueville's detachment and foresight give his thought greater meaning than that of many contemporary social and political thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Revel and others. This high degree of foresight and detachment make it possible for students to discover and rediscover basic facets of American society today.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, a young French political scientist named Alexis de Tocqueville, along with his close friend Gustave de Beaumont, came to America under the pretense of studying the American penal system but left with what for some is the true meaning of American democracy. This visit took place in 1831 and lasted nearly one year. In this relatively short stay, Tocqueville, through his persistent questioning and interviewing, discerned key aspects of democratic thought and practice in America which had been overlooked by many contemporary students of American democracy, both European and American. Even today, Tocqueville's two volume work entitled Democracy in America remains a classic rarely matched in its provocative probing of American society. Two major factors contribute to the uniqueness of Tocqueville's political thought.

First, Tocqueville's detachment from America kept his findings unfettered. He was a traveler in a strange land and as such was able to take a removed viewpoint of the American scene. As a sophisticated European traveler in a strange land, Tocqueville was in a better position to perceive America from a broad cosmopolitan perspective rather than from a narrow parochial viewpoint.

Tocqueville's independence as an observer was enhanced by the fact that he was not only physically detached from America via France but also ideologically detached and free from preferences which would tend to cloud his thought. Unlike many who came to America with preset ideological notions of democracy, Tocqueville was able to hold his preconceptions at a distance while observing. This enabled him to give a somewhat more accurate account of the political and social institutions he observed in the United States. If one compared the writings of Tocqueville with, for example, those of Thomas Paine, one might discover how an absence of blinding ideological preferences in Tocqueville's case adds to his uniqueness as an observer of American institutions.

Thomas Paine was one of the greatest propagandists and political pamphleteers who ever lived. But he was not an astute observer. He came to America from England with preconceived notions of government and the common man. A long history of early hardships had instilled in him a hatred of government and aristocracy, together with an unblemished regard for the common man. Common Sense was a brilliant reflection of what the common man in America was feeling in 1775. But it will never rank high as an explanation of American character or institutions.

In contrast to Paine, Tocqueville seems to have the uncanny ability to shed preconceived notions and impressions of his aristocratic past enabling him to give an accurate and perceptive account of democratic mores in the United States.

It is this ability of Tocqueville to shed his aristocratic groundings that adds to the uniqueness and detachment of his writings.

Tocqueville, more than most political writers and thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was able to give an extraordinarily objective account of democratic institutions in America. As Benjamin F. Wright points out, "Tocqueville saw with amazing clarity, where others saw but hazily if at all, that democracy was on the way, that the broadening of power and privilege was an inevitable stage of human evolution."[1] For a European aristocrat to make this forecast required a large measure of detachment.

A second factor characteristic of Tocqueville's thought was his degree of foresight. Tocqueville seemed to have a remarkable ability to anticipate American trends and issues. Many of the observations that are found in his writings are relevant in today's society as evidenced in the following quote:

> There are, at the present time, two great nations in the world which seem to tend towards the same end, although they started from different points: I allude to the Russians and the Americans. Both of them have grown up unnoticed; and whilst the attention of mankind was directed elsewhere, they have suddenly assumed a most prominent place amongst the nations; and the world learned their existence and their greatness at almost the same time.
>
> All other nations seem to have nearly reached their natural limits, and only to be charged with the

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[1] Benjamin F. Wright, "American Government and Politics of Democracy in America," American Political Science Review 40 (February 1946): 57.

> maintenance of their power; but these are still in the act of growth; . . . The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends, and gives free scope to the unguided exertions and common-sense of the citizens; the Russian centres all the authority of society in a single arm: the principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter servitude. . . .[2]

The contrast is somewhat overdrawn. But one must be reminded that Tocqueville made this observation in 1831. In realizing this fact, a greater appreciation of the brilliance of Tocqueville's predictions can be noted.

Tocqueville possessed the qualities of a good journalist. He interviewed and questioned subjects and kept accurate diaries and notes on his thoughts as his knowledge of democracy and its foundations grew. His foresight was largely the result of his ability to draw implications from what he had carefully observed.[3]

Due to these unusual qualities, students of political science can discover and rediscover through Tocqueville important past, present, and future aspects of American democracy. His detachment and foresight encourage the student of politics to set aside his own personal preconceptions when observing - a basic tenet of social science. The present study was undertaken with these intellectual benefits as major objectives.

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[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), pp. 441-442.

S. Drescher and L. L. Marshall, "American Historians and Tocqueville's Democracy," Journal of American History 55 (December 1968): 517-18.

According to Tocqueville, democracy properly defined contains two basic ingredients, namely individual freedom and equality of conditions. For Tocqueville these two elements flourished with the settlement of the North American continent and became cornerstones of the democratic system in the United States. These two factors, namely - individual freedom and equality of conditions, combined to account for unique circumstances characteristic of that strain of democracy known only to America.

One often hears the terms individual freedom and equality of condition used in conjunction with traditional definitions of democracy. In Tocqueville's time, however, it was unusual to combine the two concepts, particularly in aristocratic circles. The framers of the U.S. Constitution, for example, considered equality of condition to be contrary to the requirements of freedom or "liberty." If a society respected liberty, thought James Madison, it must respect differences in wealth or economic condition.[4] Tocqueville demonstrated substantial detachment from the mores of his class by asserting that, in America at least, the two factors were mutually reinforcing.

Therefore, it is once again the detachment of Tocqueville's thought that makes him an exception. He was not bound by the ideas of the "cultivated classes" of his day as described by Richard Hofstadter:

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[4] James Madison, et. al. The Federalist Papers, paper number 10, ed. by Roy P. Fairfield (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1966), pp. 16-24.

> . . . Nowhere in America or Europe—not even among the great liberated thinkers of the Enlightenment—did democratic ideas appear respectable to the cultivated classes. . . .[5]

A necessary first step in presenting Tocqueville is to describe and analyze certain fundamental premises which he believed to be basic characteristics of American democracy. From these fundamental premises, certain more subtle chains of Tocqueville's thought develop. These more subtle developmental chains are also indicative of Tocqueville's detachment as an interpreter of American society. They constitute subsidiary themes which will also be developed here.

In chapters two and three of this study, Tocqueville's description of the foundations of democracy in America are presented. Chapter two will contain the first foundation stone of Tocquevillian democracy - namely, the condition of individual freedom. Chapter three will develop the second foundation, equality of condition. These two chapters, therefore, will depict the causes or circumstances for the development of a democratic society in America.

Chapters four, five, and six will attempt to portray the paradoxical results of the democratic environment that Americans inherited. In these chapters, the central paradox which Tocqueville sees occuring as a result of certain developmental factors of democracy will be discussed. The paradox lies at the heart of the thesis. Tocqueville believed that new dangers to the fundamental American values of individual freedom and equality of condition arise from the same conditions which helped them to flourish in the first place. [This will be described in terms of the inner contradictions of the "masterless society."]

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[5] Richard Hofstader, The American Political Tradition (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 5.

Chapter six will deal with the safeguards against threats to basic American values inherent in the democratic system. These safeguards, according to Tocqueville, reduce the dangers of what he calls "the new despotism." Associations, the press, and the judiciary will be discussed in this context.

Finally, in chapter seven major conclusions will be presented. These conclusions will center around Tocqueville's outstanding qualities as an observer of American democracy, namely his detachment and foresight. The discussion will use the device of a comparative case study. The ideas of Jean-Francois Revel, a more recent and well-received French observer of American democracy, will be compared to those of Tocqueville.

In this case study, the detachment and foreseight of Tocqueville and Revel will be compared along with differences in their conclusions about American society. The purpose of the case study is to clarify the difference between an observer who can transcend his time for generations and an equally intelligent observer who probably will fail to transcend his time. Revel's book, Without Marx or Jesus,[6] was hailed in 1971 as "the most provocative book of the . . . literary season."

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[6] Jean-Francois Revel, Without Marx or Jesus, trans. J. F. Bernard (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972).

The achievement is impressive but probably terminal. Tocqueville's achievement, it will be argued, is of a different order.

CHAPTER II

FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM

In Tocqueville's view, the conditions prevailing during the infancy of a nation are extremely important in determining its subsequent values and mores. All nations, he observed, "bear some marks of their origin; and the circumstances which accompanied their birth and contributed to their rise affect the whole term of their being."[1]

Tocqueville believed that a combination of several conditions existed in the early years of the United States which contributed to an attitude among its people of respect for individual freedoms.

One such circumstance which existed at the outset of the American experience was an ideal geographical setting. America was a continent apart from the rest of the world bounded on either side by vast oceans. To the north was Canada with its vast stretches of uninhabited provinces. On its southern border was Mexico still in its early stages of development. Neither country posed a very great threat to the existence of the United States as Tocqueville explains:

> . . . Placed in the centre of an immense continent, . . . the Union is almost as much insulated from the world as

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 26.

> if its frontier were girt by the ocean. Canada contains only a million inhabitants, and its population is divided into two inimical nations. . . . To the South, the Union has a point of contact with the empire of Mexico; . . . for a long while to come the uncivilized state of the Mexican community, the depravity of its morals, and its extreme poverty, will prevent that country from ranking high amongst nations. As for the Powers of Europe, they are too distant to be formidable.[2]

Today, of course, nuclear capabilities eliminate the geographical barriers to war. But for approximately a century and a half, America developed in an environment of comparative safety. There was no need for constant military preparedness, nor for a large military establishment that goes with it. As Tocqueville stated:

> The Americans have no neighbors, and consequently they have no great wars, or financial crises, or inroads, . . . nor great armies, nor great generals; and they have nothing to fear from a scourge which is more formidable to republics than all these evils combined, namely, military glory. . . .[3]

In this climate of safety, the new nation concentrated on individual-economic rather than collective-military effort. The result, Tocqueville believed, was a greater respect for individual freedom.

Tocqueville's conception of the foundations of freedom was unlike those of leading European thinkers such as Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke in important ways. Tocqueville's different approach to this problem largely reflected uniquely favorable American conditions.

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[2] Ibid., p. 171

[3] Ibid., p. 293.

Whereas the Europeans had to resort to the purely philosophical devices of "states of nature" and "social contracts" to explain or justify the extent of freedom, Tocqueville had only to observe the actual environment of America. Europeans, in short, could not remember a time in their history when they had enjoyed the amount of physical and political "elbow room" which Americans took for granted.

Locke, Hobbes, or Rousseau could only conceive of freedom in some mythical or abstract "state of nature." Tocqueville's different approach resulted partly from an independent cast of mind which enabled him to detach himself both from European and American perspectives. More importantly, however, was the fact that the conditions relating to freedom were different - and more favorable - in Tocqueville's America. A different approach, therefore, was the natural result.

A second major circumstance which fostered the growth of individual freedom was the religious heritage of the early settlers. The common bonds of an English-Puritan heritage increased toleration and trust in one's fellow man. Marvin Meyers, aptly summarizes Tocqueville's view as follows:

> . . . The English-Puritan heritage . . . brought special gifts which altered importantly the course of democratic development: especially, the values of individual liberty, local freedom and morality grounded in religious belief.[4]

Marvin Meyers, "The Basic Democrat," Political Science Quarterly 72 (March 1957): 57.

Therefore, the most vital element of the heritage of freedom brought by the colonists, as Tocqueville observes, is religion. Tired of religious persecution, religious sects migrated to America where religious toleration was practiced. This religious toleration of early American origins strengthened societal feelings toward individual freedom. Tocqueville believed that religion was "the companion of liberty in all its battles and its triumphs; . . . The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom."[5]

Tocqueville in viewing religion as a necessary and vital companion of freedom recognizes that the separation between church and state is absolutely necessary. But why is separation of church and state so vital in a democratic society?

Separation of church and state is necessary in order to maintain a balance between the two spheres of power. As Sanford Kessler notes, when religion combines itself with government "it partakes of a secular power to which it has no claim and necessarily weakens the authority which is rightfully its own."[6] In addition to this fact, religion cannot cope with the temporal things of man. As long as it remains in its closely defined realm of power and jurisdiction, religion can enjoy immortality in the hearts of mankind, "But when religion clings to the interests of the world, it becomes almost as fragile a thing as the powers of the earth."[7]

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[5] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:43.

[6] Sanford Kessler, "Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy," The Journal of Politics 39 (February 1977):125.

Through this passage, one can detect Tocqueville's experiences with his native France where religion and government were one and the same. In his book entitled The Old Regime and the French Revolution, Tocqueville states that in the national affairs of France there existed a reciprocal relationship between church and state. The state "insisted on obedience to the ecclesiastical authorities" while the "Church saw to it that the King's authority was respected."[8] One can see how a lack of separation between church and state can lead to a further infringement upon individual freedom.

J. S. Schapiro notes that according to Tocqueville, in countries where separation of church and state is nonexistent, "persecution for religious opinions would spread to persecution for political and economic opinions, thereby endangering . . . liberty for all."[9] In America, no such religious persecution existed and as a result individual freedom and liberty prevailed.

Another circumstance, closely related to religion and highly favorable to the development of freedom, was that of higher moral values. Tocqueville believed that Americans practiced one of the highest degrees of morality in the world. This morality was reflected in the mores and norms of society as well as in individual action. Early common law was interpreted in such a way that there was strict moral accountability for the individual with societal sanctions for noncompliance.

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[7] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:316.

[8] Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1955) p. 152.

[9] J. S. Schapiro, "Alexis de Tocqueville, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in France," Political Science Quarterly 57 (December 1942):558.

The high degree of morality provided for by religion was necessary in the absence of political control according to Tocqueville.[10] High morality must fill the void created when government is decentralized in a democratic society. Tocqueville in illustrating the link between morality and individual freedom asks the following question in relating this point: "How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie be not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed?"[11]

In addition to other favorable circumstances, freedom in America was greatly enhanced by the widespread practice of local self-government. Local self-government encouraged a high level of participation. This, in turn, meant a degree of freedom and liberty known only in textbooks on political theory. For example, citizens themselves assumed responsibility for public safety, thus minimizing the need for a national standing army or even a sizeable local police force which might become oppressive.[12]

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[10] Kessler, "Tocqueville on Civil Religion and Liberal Democracy," p. 142.

[11] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:312.

George Pierson, Tocqueville in America abridged by Dudley C. Lunt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938 reprint ed., Gloucester Mass.: Peter Smith, 1969), p. 106.

The "do it yourself" approach extended to other public functions as well. The result was less dependence on government authority and therefore less danger of its abuse. "It's really an incredible thing," observed Tocqueville, "to see how this people keeps itself in order through the single conviction that its only safeguard against itself lies in itself."[13]

According to Tocqueville, local democracy exists in its most basic form in the New England township. This is the ideal of a participatory democracy. Laws cannot be passed arbitrarily or in conflict with the interests or liberties of the people because it is the people that make all the laws affecting themselves. Tocqueville observes that the New Englander

> . . . practices the art of government in the small sphere within his reach; he accustoms himself to those forms which can alone insure the steady progress of liberty; he imbibes their spirit; he acquires a taste for order, . . . and collects clear practical notions on the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.[14]

In a New England town meeting, everyone is deemed to be the "sole judge of his own private interests."[15] Because of this, "society has no right to control a man's actions, unless they are prejudicial to the common weal, or unless the common weal demands his co-operation."[16]

This was the spirit of the New England township which pervaded American government in its early beginnings. Adherence to the principles of local self-government instilled in Americans feelings of individual freedom as well as a sense of participation in local affairs of government.

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[13] Ibid., pp. 106-107.

[14] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:67-68.

[15] Ibid., p. 64.

[16] Ibid.

Many contemporary social scientists are quick to point out that the kind of local self-government admired by Tocqueville no longer exists in America. Richard and Doris Taub, for example, have stated that ". . . Tocqueville himself saw that having important decisions to make improved the political process in small towns. Yet today there are few important decisions for small towns to make."[17]

Political scientist Robert Dahl has pointed to similar problems. Dahl observes that participation in local government has greatly declined since Tocqueville's time. Dahl refutes the belief that Tocqueville held when he states that ". . . the local governments have disappointed the hopes of democratic ideologues . . . who believed that the true centers of American democracy would be the local governments . . ."[18] According to Dahl, evidence suggested by voter participation in Presidential elections as compared to state and local elections proves that citizen participation on the local level has never been as high as some have suggested.[19]

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[17] Richard and Doris Taub, American Society in Tocqueville's Time and Today (Chicago:Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1974), p. 78.

[18] Robert Dahl, Pluralist Democracy in the United States (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1967), p. 194.

[19] Ibid., pp. 194-196.

If Tocqueville erred in predicting future trends in local participation in government, what redeeming strengths do local governments still possess? Dahl points out several strengths of local governments that still exist today.

He observes that local institutions provide valuable training grounds for political leaders, establish bases for opposition parties, and help foster the overall pluralistic system.[20] These factors seem to support Tocqueville's premises of the importance of local government in American democracy.

On balance, however, the importance of local government has surely declined in contemporary society. Nor does it seem to be the peculiar guardian of freedom that Tocqueville believed it was.

It is nevertheless true, as Tocqueville observed, that for over a century Americans felt little need for big government. Instead, they stressed the ideal of individual freedom earned through self-reliance. The effect of local self-government on American mores, therefore, has proved to be more lasting than the operational importance of the institution itself.

In viewing the "original conditions" of the American experience as vital to its future development in general, and to its emphasis on individual freedom in particular, Tocqueville anticipated by over a century leading trends in historical interpretation of the American experience.

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[20] Ibid., pp. 186-188.

Most prominent among the trendsetters of the 1950's, for example, was Louis Hartz's work, The Liberal Tradition in America.[21] Hartz, in agreement with Tocqueville, believes that American institutions today grew out of the "original conditions" prevailing when settlers arrived. The "original conditions" that Hartz observes were primarily the freedom from "feudal and clerical oppressions of the Old World."[22] Freedom from these oppressions caused Americans to be "born free" in the sense of not having to overthrow an authoritarian feudal system on their own continent.

Thus, a philosophy of Lockian liberalism, emphasizing the "naturel rights" of individuals to life, liberty, and property, became the dominant ideology in America. Hartz observed that this "natural liberalism" was built in to the American democratic system. He states that it was " . . . the secret root from which have sprung many of the most puzzling of American cultural phenomena."[23] This is very similar to Tocqueville's interpretation made more than a century ago.

The Tocqueville-Hartz view of American freedom as an escape from the bonds of European society is not terribly original in itself. Most Americans of Tocqueville's day probably shared the same view. Yet, Americans would insist that they had earned this freedom by their actions. Believing freedom to be their just reward, they had a relatively complacent optimism about its future.

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[21] Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955).

[22] Ibid., p. 3.

[23] Ibid., p. 9.

Tocqueville, on the other hand, beleived that Americans had largely been given their freedom by fortunate circumstances. Luck is never a sure or a lasting thing. For that reason, Tocqueville was not taken in by the facile view that the simple exercise of nineteenth century freedom automatically assured its continued growth.

CHAPTER III

EQUALITY OF CONDITIONS

Juxtaposed with individual freedom, another fundamental condition of American life appears as the basis of American democracy - equality of condition. "Equality of conditions" is the basic theme in Tocqueville's analysis of American society. As he states, "The more I advanced in the study of American society, the more I perceived that the equality of conditions is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived . . ."[1]

By individual freedom, Tocqueville meant freedom from religious, social, and political persecution (see Chapter I). Each individual member of society was free to do whatever he pleased as long as it did not infringe upon the rights of others.[2] "Equality of conditions," on the other hand, was a recognition by Tocqueville of the sameness of American society or a type of social egalitarianism. Individual freedom focuses on individual differences in society while "equality of conditions," as Tocqueville referred to it, deals with the blurring of those differences in society as a whole. According to one scholar, Tocqueville provided the important insight that ". . . as conditions become more equal, Americans seemed more and more to take pride not in their individuality, in their personal liberties, in their freedom, but rather in their sameness. . . ."[3]

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 64.

Several factors contributed to the "general equality of conditions" in America during its early formation. The first of these factors centered around the abundance of natural resources. The expansiveness of the territory meant an abundance of free land in which every member of society had a stake.

> The chief circumstance which has favored the establishment . . . of a democratic republic in the United States is the nature of the territory which the Americans inhabit. Their ancestors gave them the love of equality and freedom, but God himself gave them the means of remaining equal and free, by placing them upon a boundless continent . . ."[4]

In Europe, a scarcity of land led to a division of society controlled by landed interests. Complicating the situation was the fact that there was no room for expansion. Consequently, the landed interests owned a monopoly of property rights and hence control of society.

J. S. Schapiro, an astute observer of Tocqueville, characterizes this era:

> . . . The fact that America was a virgin continent, rich in natural resources with land free for the asking,

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[3] Richard D. Heffner, Introduction to Democracy in America, by Alexis de Tocqueville, ed. and abridged by Richard D. Heffner (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1956), p. 11.

[4] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:294-295.

> prevented bitter class conflicts from arising that, in Europe, had proved so inimical to the progress of democracy. . . . Unlike Europe, America had no such obstacle to equality as a landed aristocracy . . .[5]

Americans, therefore, could "choose to be proprietors of land, not tenants" observed Harriet Martineau, another European observer of the United States.[6] Acquisition of land by a majority of the people became the rule in America rather than the exception as it was in Europe.

Along with an abundance of land due to the expansiveness of the continent, Americans enjoyed a high degree of mobility within the country. Americans were not tied down to particular areas within America. As Robert Dahl points out, "Large landed estates existed, . . . particularly in the South; but it was extremely difficult to keep free white farm labor from leaving."[7] Unlike Europeans, Americans enjoyed a sense of freedom in that they could always move and start over again if they became dissatisfied with their present situation. This provided a means of maintaining "equality of conditions." When the dominant ruling voice of a community became too overbearing, one could always know that he would be accepted in other communities.

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[5] J. S. Schapiro, "Alexis de Tocqueville, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in France," Political Science Quarterly 57 (December 1942):554.

[6] Harriet Martineau, Society in America, ed. S. M. Lipset (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1962), p. 179.

[7] Robert Dahl, Pluralist Democracy in the United States (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1967), p. 60.

Tocqueville believed that the abundance of land aided mobility when he stated, "It is difficult to describe the rapacity with which the American rushes forward to secure the immense booty which fortune proffers to him. . . . Before him lies a boundless continent, and he urges onwards . . ."[8]

In addition to an abundance of natural resources, there were legal developments which helped foster "equality of conditions." The early colonists were fearful of any situation which might cause a return to the injustices that had been perpetrated upon them before coming to America. A long history of the landed aristocracy had darkened the past history of England and France. The colonists had seen most of the land in Europe controlled by Kings or Nobles in feudalistic states. They had experienced the laws of primogeniture, which gave the eldest son the right to receive his father's estate, and of entail, which limited the inheritance of property in a way such that it could never legally be transferred to heirs outside the family. These laws were associated in their minds with the privileges of landed aristocracy.

Therefore, they repealed the laws of primogeniture and entail and established their own inheritance laws controlling the divisions of the estate of the deceased person. These laws were aimed at keeping the landed interests from perpetuating family wealth along with its ensuing power. As Tocqueville observed:

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[8] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:298-299.

> When the equal partition of property is established by law, the intimate connection is destroyed between family feeling and the preservation of the paternal estate; the property ceases to represent the family; for as it must inevitably be divided after one or two generations, it has evidently a constant tendency to diminish, and must in the end be completely dispersed. . . .[9]

Tocqueville saw in the laws of inheritance a chance for government to redistribute wealth to a more equal extent thereby increasing "equality of conditions" by replacing a large landed interest with a group of small property holders each owning a proportionate share of the total.

One Tocqueville scholar puts forth the notion that Tocqueville was given a false account of the types and consequences of the inheritance laws of America by one of his informants.[10] Pierson points out that in primogeniture, ". . . only the property of those dying intestate [without a will] had been made subject to distribution among the heirs prescribed in a ratio by law. . . ."[11] He goes on to say that even with the abolition of entail large estates were still in existence.

Tocqueville may have been misinformed about some specifics, but this does not undermine his point that the general thrust of the inheritance laws was to inhibit, if not completely prevent, the development of a landed aristocracy in America.

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[9] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:49.

[10] George Pierson, Tocqueville in America abridged by Dudley C. Lunt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938; reprint ed., Gloucester Mass.: Peter Smith, 1969), p. 85.

[11] Ibid.

A more valid point may be that inheritance laws in America were more a reflection of equal conditions prevailing in America than a substantial cause of these conditions. Richard Hofstadter suggests that Jefferson and others had little resistance in the passage of legislation eliminating aristocratic inheritance laws in Virginia due to a general consensus of society favoring Jefferson's position on the issue.[12]

Jefferson and others, however, did not believe their fights against aristocratic inheritance laws were purely "sham" battles. Their successes in legal reform probably reinforced as well as reflected a climate unfriendly to great aristocratic families on the European scale.

Another area of law which promoted "equality of conditions" was the principle of popular sovereignty. According to Tocqueville, during the American revolution, ". . . the doctrine of sovereignty of the people, which had been nurtured in the townships and municipalities, took possession of the State: every class was enlisted in its cause; battles were fought, and victories obtained for it, until it became the law of laws."[13]

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[12] Richard Hofstader, The American Political Tradition (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 20-21.

[13] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:56.

How does "equality of conditions" foster popular sovereignty and vice versa? According to Tocqueville, ". . . every individual possesses an equal share of power, and participates alike in the government of the State."[14] In addition, "Every individual is, therefore, supposed to be as well informed, as virtuous, and as strong as any of his fellow-citizens."[15]

The effects of this equal sharing of power by individuals creates an atmosphere of what Tocqueville calls "public spirit." This "public spirit" is at the basis of democracy, for it involves every citizen in the decision making processes.

In addition to their land, their laws, and the idea of popular sovereignty, Americans are the beneficiaries of a wide diffusion of knowledge. Tocqueville observes that "Education has been lavishly and profusely bestowed. . . ."[16] This wide diffusion of knowledge equalized the intellect of the population thus further promoting "equality of conditions." New villages which spring from the forest almost overnight, observes Tocqueville, are not intellectually isolated. The villagers, he was surprised to note, were literate and had access to the larger nation through books and newspapers.[17]

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[14] Ibid., p. 63.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Alexis de Tocqueville, Journey to America, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1959), p. 333.

[17] Ibid., pp. 333-334.

In addition to the geographical diffusion of education throughout America, Tocqueville notes that the level of instruction is the same for all.

> . . . I do not believe that there is a country in the world where . . . there are so few uninstructed and at the same time so few learned individuals. Primary instruction is within the reach of everybody; superior instruction is scarcely to be obtained by any. . . .[18]

Not only is education readily obtainable by all, it is equally administered on the same level thus adding to the "equality of conditions."

Existing side by side with the wide diffusion of knowledge, Tocqueville observed, was a widespread availability of social amenities. The amenities of a society are usually located in close proximity to the larger towns and cities of a country. In America, however, Tocqueville found amenities in the farthest reaches of civilization. An excerpt from his account, A Fortnight in the Wilds, illustrates the point:

> . . . When you leave the main roads you force your way down barely trodden paths. Finally, you see a field cleared, a cabin made from half-shaped tree trunks . . . You think that you have at last reached the home of the American peasant. Mistake. You make your way into this cabin that seems the asylum of all wretchedness but the owner . . . is dressed in the same clothes as yours and he speaks the language of towns. On his rough table are books and newspapers . . .[19]

Social niceties were as widespread as knowledge, both increaseing "equality of conditions" in American society.

According to Tocqueville, physical, legal, and intellectual factors combine to create an environment favorable to the leveling of social classes. He states that:

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[18] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:52.

[19] Tocqueville, Journey to America, p. 334.

> . . . In America, even more than in Europe, there is one society only. It may be rich or poor, humble or brilliant, trading or agricultural, but it is made up everywhere of the same elements; it has been leveled out by an egalitarian civilisation. . . .[20]

Tocqueville observed that in aristocratic societies, where rank is determined by birth, strangers approach one another with a reserved position. However, in America where status differences are not recognized, strangers ". . . find neither peril nor advantage in the free interchange of their thoughts . . ."[21] In an entry in his diary on a visit to an American prison, Tocqueville stated that ". . . The plutocrat and the lowly worker shake hands in the street."[22]

Each member of society recognizes his fellow man in an equal capacity. There are no outward, physical appearances which distinguish one man from another. For the most part, each wore the same clothes and spoke the same language.[23]

In describing lack of social distances in America, Tocqueville compares France and America. In France ". . . Birth still puts an almost insurmountable barrier between men. . . ." and ". . . the profession a man exercises still . . . places him socially."[24] In America, however, birth "does not in the least place a man socially . . ." and "class structure by professions is almost unknown . . . ."[25] Tocqueville points to these two factors as evidence of the lack of social distances in America. These factors make possible the "intermarriage of families" and according to Tocqueville this is the "great touchstone" of social uniformity in America.[26]

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[20] Ibid., p. 333.

[21] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 2: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 179.

[22] Pierson, Tocqueville in America, p. 76.

[23] Tocqueville, Journey to America, p. 334.

An example taken from Tocqueville's diary on America will further illustrate his point on the lack of social distances:

> The greatest equality seems to reign, even among those who occupy very different positions in society. The authorities seem extraordinarily approachable.
>
> The thirteenth day of May Mr. Morse, judge at Cherry Valley, presented us to the governor of New-York, who was staying at a boarding house and who received us in the parlor without any ceremony whatever. Mr. Morse assured us that anyone could at any time do as we had done.[27]

Even the social distance between men and women is less in America, explains Tocqueville.

> . . . the social changes which bring nearer to the same level the father and son, the master and servant, and superiors and inferiors . . . will raise woman and make her more and more the equal of man. . . .[28]

Tocqueville demonstrated both detachment and foresight in his treatment of the racial issue in America. He did not avoid it or gloss over it, as many writers on American democracy were to do during and after his time. Instead, he described it as the dilemma of American democracy, much as Gunar Myrdal would do more than one hundred years later.[29]

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[24] Ibid., p. 259.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Pierson, Tocqueville in America, pp. 40-41.

[28] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:221.

Tocqueville observed that blacks in America were the exception to all his generalizations about democratic society and its effects. One scholar has accurately summarized Tocqueville's observation as follows:

> . . . Only those groups, such as the American Negroes, . . . were regarded as somehow outside humanity . . . and they could be treated far more harshly than any group in the old aristocratic society since they were without any status and rights of status at all. . . .[30]

Blacks clearly did not enjoy the "equality of conditions" that whites did. The same factors that led white members of society toward equality worked in reverse as far as blacks were concerned.

The fact that there was an abundance of land had little meaning for slaves who could not own property. In fact, the abundance of land led to a demand for more slaves. Instead of land creating more equal conditions among blacks, it created a need for more of them to work as slaves in the fields of a plantation-owning aristocracy.

Widespread diffusion of knowledge, so important for whites, was denied to black slaves. Southern slave codes allowed no one "to teach a slave to read or write, employ him in setting type in an printing office, or give him books or pamphlets."[31] Diffusion of knowledge contributed nothing in the way of social uplifting or intellectual equalization as far as blacks were concerned. This provided a situation comparable to aristocratic nations in which certain men in society were greatly superior in knowledge than others, thus enabling them to dominate society through this superior intellect.[32]

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[29] Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1962).

[30] Jack Lively, The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 75.

Mobility, in a geographical sense, for slaves did not exist. Slave codes stated that if a slave was found a certain distance away from home without a traveling pass he was considered a runaway.[33]

Due to the caste system, blacks were marked for life. Tocqueville's view was echoed by the twentieth century black writer, James Baldwin, who wrote: "You were born where you were born and faced the future you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus expected to be set forever."[34]

Because blacks were born unequal, they had no reason to be attached to the democratic ethic as did white Americans.

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[31] Kenneth Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Alfred A. Knoff Inc., 1956), p. 208.

[32] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:53.

[33] Stampp, The Peculiar Institution, p. 213.

[34] James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p. 39.

Tocqueville states that "If liberty be refused to the negroes of the South, they will in the end seize it for themselves by force . . . ."[35] According to Tocqueville, slavery was the greatest threat to American stability.

Tocqueville's statement anticipated the warning made by James Baldwin one hundred and twenty years later in his book, The Fire Next Time. The black ghetto violence of the 1960's can be placed in better perspective by reference to Tocqueville's observations more than a century before.

Tocqueville also probed the psychological dimensions of black inequality. "Having been told from infancy that his race is naturally inferior to that of the whites, he assents to the proposition and is ashamed of his own nature. . . ."[36] The United States Supreme Court in 1954 described the effects of racial segregation in much the same way, and used this reasoning to invalidate this practice in public education.[37]

In viewing slavery as the single most important threat to the future stability of the nation, Tocqueville displays his gift of foresight and his detachment from contemporary intellectual trends. One student points out the fact that "Unlike Tocqueville, they [contemporaries] sensed the immediate, personal tragedy of bondage and prejudice. . . ." without observing the overall long-range effects of slavery.[38]

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[35] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:387.

[36] Ibid., p. 340.

[37] Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 438 (1954).

Richard and Doris Taub point out that Tocqueville viewed the slavery situation in America as one that would lead to "racial war" or "racial amalgamation." According to Tocqueville, as blacks begin to obtain greater rights, the former is more likely than the latter.[39] Although at times, throughout American history, "racial war" has seemed inevitable, tensions have eased as the situation of blacks has improved to one more closely approximating the "equality of conditions" that Tocqueville once envisioned.

Tocqueville's concept of "equality of conditions" as crucial to later American development has been borrowed again and again by later students of the American character. As we noted in Chapter I, Louis Hartz was deeply indebted to Tocqueville in developing his notion that Americans were "born free." The same is true of Hartz's assertion that Americans were "born equal." Hartz is indebted to Tocqueville's observations, not Jefferson's self evident truths, in developing his idea. Before he begins his book, Hartz tries to capture its central theme by a memorable quotation from his French predecessor: "The great advantage of the Americans is, that they have arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution; and that they are born equal, instead of becoming so."[40]

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[38] R. W. Resh, "Alexis de Tocqueville and the Negro: Democracy in America Reconsidered," Journal of Negro History 48 (October 1963): 259.

[39] Richard and Doris Taub, American Society in Tocqueville's Time and Today (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1974), p. 556.

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[40] Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955), p. I.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASTERLESS SOCIETY

Individuals existing free and equal in society have a feeling of independence of one another. This independence according to Tocqueville ". . . tends powerfully to divide men - to lead them to mistrust the judgment of others, and to seek the light of truth nowhere but in their own understandings. . . ."[1] Yet at the same time, men existing in democratic societies feel a dependence on society as a whole. They sense a need for common unity of beliefs so that they might prosper from the others' opinions.[2]

This dual paradox, namely of feeling independence of mind yet dependent on society for support, places individuals in a dilemma. One student of Tocqueville states that the ". . . fundamental source of paradox lies in the double potentiality of the democratic situation: toward radical independence; toward submergence in brotherhood. . . ."[3] Men existing in circumstances characterized by "equality of conditions" feel superior to their fellow man and yet must depend on him for support and government. In illustrating this point, Tocqueville states that "The same equality which renders him independent . . . exposes him alone and unprotected to the influence of the greater number. . . ."[4]

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 2: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 7.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

[3] Marvin Meyers. "The Basic Democrat," Political Science Quarterly 72 (March 1957): 56.

The absence of class attachments adds to the paradoxical situation in which members of democracy find themselves. In a society devoid of class attachments there are no links or supports between the members. This adds to the independent feeling of individuals. They do not depend on a leadership class. According to Tocqueville, "The nearer the citizens are drawn to the common level of an equal and similar condition, the less prone does each man become to place implicit faith in a certain man or a certain class of men. . . ."[5]

Erick Fromm in his recent book, Escape from Freedom[6], suggests many of the same things as Tocqueville, his predecessor, suggested more than one hundred years earlier. Fromm suggests that in contrasting the Middle Ages with capitalistic society, the individual in the Middle Ages "was chained to his role in social order. . . ."[7] But even though he was "chained" to a particular station in life, he was not by himself and

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[4] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1941).

[7] Ibid., p. 41.

"thus life had a meaning which left no place, and no need, for doubt. . . ."[8]

In the contemporary capitalistic-egalitarian societies, observes Fromm, man has lost his class attachments. But he has also lost his feeling of individual worth, his purpose, and his overall place within society. Men "were more free, but they were also more alone. . . ."[9]

Tocqueville then views individuals in democracy living free and equal, yet existing under conditions of a paradoxical nature. The question that can now be raised is where do these paradoxes lead men?

These mixed results of "equality of conditions" and individual freedom can only lead men in democracies in one direction and that is what Tocqueville calls the "tyranny of the majority." The "tyranny of the majority" is each individual's solution to the dilemma in which he finds himself. Men existing free and equal in society enjoy independence from class attachment and subordination. Yet because they depend on the approval of their peers, they come to feel that they can do little to change or influence society. Therefore, they give in to the rule of the majority. As one student of Tocqueville states, ". . . in an equalitarian society, no one individual counts for very much . . . Each feels the helplessness of trying single handed to assert himself in anyway against a society composed of a mass of individuals all equal to himself. . . ."[10]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 48.

According to Tocqueville, several factors accounted for public acceptance of the dominance of majority opinion in America. The first such factor was the law of the land. "The very essence of democratic government consists in the absolute sovereignty of the majority . . . Most of the American Constitutions have sought to increase this natural strength of the majority . . ."[11]

Along with the laws, custom provided a supportive base for the majority dominance according to Tocqueville.[12] Custom, Tocqueville observed, often prescribed that the people's representatives faithfully follow the prior instructions of their constituents. In contemporary terms, the Burkean "trustee" concept of the independent minded legislator gives way completely to the "instructed delegate" concept of the representative "who automatically mirrors the will of a majority of his constituents."[13]

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[10] Harold Stoke, "De Tocqueville's Appraisal of Democracy Then and Now," South Atlantic Quarterly 36 (January 1937), p. 19.

[11] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 258.

[12] Ibid., p. 259.

[13] Milton C. Cummings and David Wise, Democracy Under Pressure, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), p. 448.

Tocqueville states, "Custom . . . has done even more than law . . . it frequently happens that electors, who choose a delegate, point out a certain line of conduct to him, and impose upon him a certain number of positive obligations which he is pledged to fulfil. . . ."[14] Hence, the elected "leaders" are as powerless in the face of majority opinion as is the isolated individual. The fact and feeling of powerlessness in a society where old European masters have been superceded constitutes for Tocqueville the central paradox of American society.

Another factor which strengthened the majority as the dominant ruling voice in America was what Tocqueville calls its' "moral authority."[15] This he claimed was ". . . partly based upon the notion that there is more intelligence and more wisdom in a great number of men than in a single individual . . ."[16] This leads to the conclusion that ". . . the quantity of legislators is more important than their quality. . . ."[17] Along with these beliefs, the maxim that "the King could do no wrong" was the implication given to the power of government for public acceptance of laws which were unpopular.[18]

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[14] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:259.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

Therefore, not only was majority opinion fostered by laws and customs, it was also looked up to by the people as a primary source of moral authority in America. Tocqueville summarizes his feelings of the influence of the majority on the public in the following way:

> . . . The majority . . . exercises a prodigious actual authority, and a moral influence which is scarcely less preponderant; no obstacles exist which can impede or so much as retard its progress, or which can induce it to heed the complaints of those whom it crushes upon its path. This state of things is fatal in itself and dangerous for the future.[19]

As the majority gains power, it can disregard the feelings and freedoms of smaller groups in society to facilitate its own advances. This, according to Tocqueville, is where the real danger lies. When the majority reaches this stage, individuals are clearly subject to a type of tyrannical rule. It makes no difference whether the tyrant be in one or many men. Tocqueville states: ". . . I can never willingly invest any number of my fellow-creatures with that unlimited authority which I should refuse to any one of them."[20]

Tocqueville did not share the faith of the American founders that freedom can be protected by "mixed governments."[21] He attacked such forms as "mere chimeras" for ". . . in all communities some principle of action may be discovered which preponderates over the others. . . ."[22] The "one principle of action" in America was the omnipotent majority. Only where divisions of government are, to some degree, free from control by the majority can a mixed government function as a democratic institution.

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[19] Ibid., p. 260.

[20] Ibid., pp. 263-264.

[21] Ibid., p. 264.

> If . . . a legislative power could be so constituted as to represent the majority without necessarily being the slave of its passions; an executive, so as to retain a certain degree of uncontrolled authority; and a judiciary, so as to remain independent of the two other powers; a government would be formed which would still be democratic without incurring any risk of tyrannical abuse.[23]

Tocqueville seems to agree that mixed forms of government will work, but not in the American social and political setting.

As individuals in a democratic society fall prey to this majority opinion, they begin to give up hope of ever rising above their fellow man and are all reduced to a level of mediocrity. "I confess that I apprehend much less for democratic society from the boldness than from the mediocrity of desires. . . ."[24]

Individuals who take an active, questioning role in the affairs of government see the toils of their work shatter from pressures of the majority. Tocqueville feared that this would only add to the power of the majority.

> . . . As the conditions of men become equal amongst a people, individuals seem of less importance, and

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 265.

[24] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:259.

> society of greater dimensions; or rather, every citizen, being assimilated to all the rest, is lost in the crowd, and nothing stands conspicuous but the great and imposing image of the people at large. This lofty opinion of the privileges of society, and a very humble notion of the rights of individuals; they are ready to admit that the interests of the former are everything, and those of the latter nothing. . . .[25]

Many theorists have restated in a contemporary context Tocqueville's concern that individuals will become lost in a mass egalitarian society. David Riesman in The Lonely Crowd[26], for example, distinguishes between what he calls "tradition directed," "inner directed," and "other directed" men. The "tradition directed" man adheres to traditional behavioral norms established by custom. In later stages of character development, the "inner directed" man relies on personal values derived from childhood for guidance in life while the "other directed" man relies on societal guidance.

Riesman believes that the twentieth century American trend is toward the "other directed" man who is shaped and molded by society. The group in society which an individual identifies with becomes the "measure of all things."[27]

William Whyte, in his book The Organization Man, paints a similar picture. Whyte believes that among the basic tenets on which this new ethic of American society rests are "a belief in the group as the source of creativity . . . and . . . a belief in 'belongingness' as the ultimate need of the individual . . .[28] Whyte, like Tocqueville, states that ". . . Man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he collaborates with others does he become worth while . . .[29]

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[25] Ibid., p. 304.

[26] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University, Press, 1961).

[27] Ibid., p. 82.

Seymour Martin Lipset in Culture and Social Character states that Tocqueville observed this trend more than one hundred years before Reisman and others observed it in the 1950's.[30] Tocqueville's keen powers of observation - seeing "other directedness" in early nineteenth century America which prided itself on its individualism - are clearly indicative of a high degree of foresight and detachment. In illuminating a side of the American character which would not receive serious theoretical attention until the 1950's, Tocqueville forecasts the concerns of a great number of twentieth century theorists.

Tocqueville, for example, anticipates some of the more radical criticisms of contemporary society by Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse states that a one-dimensional society has inflicted itself upon man and has reduced his conceptual thinking to standardized categories. Man no longer questions life but rather accepts his role and conforms because it is expedient to the technological way of life.

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[28] William H. Whyte Jr., The Organization Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1957), p. 7.

[29] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[30] Seymour Martin Lipset, "A Changing American Character?" in Lipset and Leo Lowenthal, eds., Culture and Social Character (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 136-171.

> A comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. Indeed, what could be more rational than the suppression of individuality in the mechanization of socially necessary but painful performances . . .[31]

Although Marcuse blames modern technology for much of the problem, he notes the effects of egalitarian mediocrity in much the same fashion as Tocqueville did in his earlier observations.

Tocqueville, in formulating problems which would be re-examined by a seminal thinker of the radical left in the 1960's, again evidences a degree of foresight rare for his times.

Tocqueville began by calling the possible outgrowth of unchecked democracy the "tyranny of the majority" for lack of a better term, and he attempted to further describe it in his later writings in terms of a "new despotism." How is this "new despotism" different and more dangerous than the "old despotism"?

The old form of despotism was evidenced in the power of a single ruler or a small group of leaders. On the other hand, the "new despotism" is a much broader and more encompassing form of absolute and unlimited authority. Tocqueville compares the "old despotism" with the "new despotims" as follows:

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[31] Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 3.

> The authority of a king is purely physical, and it controls the actions of the subject without subduing his private will; but the majority possesses a power which is physical and moral at the same time; it acts upon the will as well as upon the actions of men . . .[32]

This "new despotism" touches not just freedom of the body or freedom from physical restraints, but it threatens the free and inquiring mind. To Tocqueville, freedom of thought was the most basic freedom while physical freedom was secondary.

This "new despotism" is more dangerous than the old forms because it attempts to control thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. It is a broader and more pervasive form of despotism because it is enforced by the mass of people, not just by a few rulers. Every individual in society is involved in this "new despotism" through the agency of majority opinion. Thought and will are suppressed by the overbearing ruling force.

The era of Senator Joseph McCarthy could be compared to the "new despotism" that Tocqueville spoke of. McCarthy was the embodiment of trends in America which Tocqueville feared the most. He was the agent of a "new despotism" of mass conformity.

The McCarthy movement was clearly a mass movement. Some of its strongest support came from blue collar workers. Neither class nor educational background was the basis for acceptance of the doctrines of McCarthyism. William F. Buckley described the movement as a timely instrument of mass conformity. "McCarthyism," he wrote, "is a movement around which men of good will and stern morality can close ranks."[33]

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[32] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:267.

McCarthy's charge of being "un-American" is a charge of nonconformity or being different from mass opinion. However, one student of this era points out that ". . . it is putting the matter the wrong way about to say that McCarthyism sought to impose conformity. It had no such positive goal as this; but seeking tumult, it victimized nonconformists and thus induced a large measure of conformity and orthodoxy."[34]

This victimization of nonconformists respected no barriers. Distinguished men such as George C. Marshall and Owen Lattimore who rose high above mediocrity were disgraced and pilloried by McCarthy as "traitors."

Tocqueville seems to have feared such a fate as McCarthyism for democracy. It was a "new despotism" which at one time realized no barriers to hinder its complete dominance of American society. The McCarthy era was enforced by the masses and not just by a few rulers. It was a time in American history where the will of the overbearing majority suppressed individual thought and freedom.

Tocqueville believes that the old words "despotism" and "tyranny" are inadequate to describe this new form of unlimited power which exists in a country where all men are free and equal and "living apart . . . as a stranger to the fate of all the rest. . . ."[35] The American is physically close to his fellow-citizens, but he does not see them. He touches them, but he does not feel them. In short, "he exists but in himself and for himself alone . . ."[36] Having a few interpersonal loyalties to guide him he accepts the "immense and tutelary power" of public opinion which is like a parent that perpetuates childhood.[37] Under these conditions, asks Tocqueville, ". . . what remains, but to spare them [members of society] all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?"[38]

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[33] William F. Buckley Jr., Quoted in Senator Joe McCarthy, by Richard Haworth Rovere (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1959), p. 22.

[34] Ibid., p. 50.

The authority of this society reduces mankind to an unquestioning mass. Tocqueville states that ". . . it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd."[39]

From all outward appearances, the country might seem to be free and democratic but inwardly, this type of despotic control would be worse than any that the world had ever witnessed.

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[35] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:332.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 333.

As one student of Tocqueville points out ". . . Unlike some of his liberal contemporaries, who believed that the gradual development of equality meant the gradual but final destruction of the possibility of tyranny on earth, Tocqueville understood that the democratic principle could lead to a despotism never before experienced."[40]

Tocqueville's thinking went beyond that of the American founding fathers, who feared despotism in the form of a politically organized majority. They believed that such a majority could be clearly identified, usually in terms of economic interest, and checked by a balanced government.[41]

Tocqueville's concern, however, was with more pervasive social and cultural forces. As one scholar has observed, he believed that ". . . the potential tyrant was the entire society itself, acting in concert without the need of oppressive laws . . ."[42]

By formulating such a far-reaching critique of American democracy, Tocqueville was clearly ahead of his time. He anticipated John Dewey's "lost individual" living in a collective society with nothing but individualistic purposes.[43]

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[40] Marvin Zetterbaum, Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 54.

[41] M. J. Horwitz, "Tocqueville and the Tyranny of the Majority," Review of Politics 28 (July, 1966), p. 301.

[42] Ibid.

[43] John Dewey, "The Lost Individual" in Individualism, Old and New (New York, Capricorn Books, 1962).

As noted earlier in this chapter, he anticipated the qualitative critique of mass society in America by a number of liberal and radical writers of the 1950's and 1960's. As one scholar has noted, Tocqueville emphasized that the very virtues of American democracy posed the lasting danger of "passage . . . toward a soft totalitarianism peopled by shapeless hollow men. . . ."[44]

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[44] Marvin Meyers, "The Basic Democrat," p. 56.

CHAPTER V

ECONOMIC MATERIALISM: OUTGROWTH OF THE MASTERLESS SOCIETY

In addition to "tyranny of the majority," Tocqueville foresees another possible evolutionary development arising from American democracy. This danger though somewhat more subtle is nevertheless a major concern for Tocqueville because it takes him full swing from "equality of conditions" in society to "inequality of conditions."

Tocqueville sees in the typical American a driving desire for self-betterment. He views it as a type of restlessness or a constant process of reaching for the attainment of higher goals. Tocqueville in explaining this point states that America is in a constant state of change and this serves ". . . to keep the minds of the citizens in a perpetual state of feverish agitation, which . . . invigorates their exertions, and keeps them in a state of excitement above the ordinary level of mankind. . . ."[1]

This constant state of change and excitement which drives the ambitions of Americans on and on is the result of several factors which account for this unique state of mind.

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 432.

"Equality of conditions" serves to elevate men to a common level of individual freedom, opportunity, and mobility and thus motivates them to seek greater accomplishments. Man's desire for well-being and material comforts takes on a "special force" when it is "linked with individualism and equality of conditions" as it is in America.[2] These conditions, while increasing freedom, destroy the stabilizing social ties of the past. Americans feel an urgent need to attach themselves to something, usually something material.

According to Tocqueville, the American "clutches everything, he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications."[3] Tocqueville's illustrations are remarkable in that they apply with equal clarity to Americans in his day or in ours.

In the United States, observes Tocqueville, a man will build a house in which to spend his old age. But before the roof is on, he will sell it for a profit. He will till his field, but will be off on some other venture before the crops are gathered. He is likely to become restless in any single profession, and will shift from one to another.[4]

If his private activities leave him any leisure time, he will plunge into politics. His restlessness is quite literal in the sense that he does not know how to relax. If at the end of a year of unceasing work, observes Tocqueville, ". . . he finds he has a few days' vacation, . . . he will travel fifteen hundred miles in a few days, to shake off his happiness. . . ."[5]

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[2] Marvin Zetterbaum, Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), pp. 62-63.

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 2: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 144.

[4] Ibid., pp. 144-145.

Frenzied activity ceases only with death, but even this is an inappropriate resting period for the active American. "Death at length overtakes him," notes Tocqueville, "but it is before he is weary of his bootless chase of that complete felicity which is forever on the wing."[6]

Americans find themselves in a situation of psychological uncertainty characterized by a restless and persistent need of obtaining as much as they can in the way of material things in as little time as possible.

Equality of conditions not only drives men to a state of restless materialistic gratification but also leads them to choose one profession over another.

> . . . Thus democracy not only swells the number of workingmen, but it leads men to prefer one kind of labor to another; and whilst it diverts them from agriculture, it encourages their taste for commerce and manufactures.[7]

Tocqueville states that to Americans agriculture is a means of physical gratification but it is too slow and "only suited to those who have already large, superfluous wealth" or those who "only seek a bare subsistance."[8]

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 163.

Men in democracies strongly prefer the professions of commerce "not only for the sake of the profit" but as a means of satisfying their "love of the constant excitement occasioned by that pursuit."[9]

George Pierson, an astute observer of Tocqueville, notes that upon his arrival in New York Tocqueville was amazed at the "money-chasing proclivities" of Americans.[10] Pierson suggests that Tocqueville found that Americans placed "no absolute value in political institutions."[11] They were too busy to engage very actively in politics or government since their primary concern was the accumulation of material wealth. The particular form of constitution was useful to them only in the degree to which it fostered these "money-chasing" desires.

Tocqueville believed that the restless quest for material betterment was a sign of mental stress produced by equal conditions. Men in democracy obtain a new identity. It is an identity of commerce and physical gratification. Instability, fear, and a sense of worthlessness can accompany this identity.

The American is placed in situations involving continual stress. Tocqueville states than an individual seeking material wealth as his primary goal in life "is always in a hurry" for there is "but a limited time . . . to reach it, to grasp it, and to enjoy it."[12] In addition to things which the individual possesses, "he every instant fancies a thousand others," states Tocqueville, "which death will prevent him from trying if he does not try them soon."[13] These thoughts keep the individual in a constant state of stress filled with "anxiety, fear, and regret," and "keeps his mind in ceaseless trepidation which leads him perpetually to change his plan and his abode. . . ."[14]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 165.

[10] George Pierson, Tocqueville in America abridged by Dudley C. Lunt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938 reprint ed., Gloucester Mass.: Peter Smith, 1969) p. 433.

[11] Ibid.

In addition to psychological stress for individuals, Tocqueville envisioned the serious danger of a new aristocracy "engendered by manufactures."[15]

As men in democratic countries begin to place more and more of their efforts in commerce, they become more specialized and engage in the same repetitive tasks day after day. As he becomes more specialized, the individual becomes tied to a single occupational station in life and his versatility and driving ambition becomes a thing of the past. According to Tocqueville, as the worker becomes more and more involved in a particular task ". . . a theory of manufactures more powerful than manners and laws binds him to a craft, and frequently to a spot, which he cannot leave: it assigns to him a certain place in society beyond which he cannot go . . ."[16]

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[12] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:145.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 168.

Paradoxically, the great "equality of conditions" which gave Americans increased individual freedom, opportunity, and mobility could produce a new and more harsh aristocracy. The new leaders of commerce would not believe in the supports provided workers in older non-democratic societies.

Tocqueville believes that as the division of labor increases, workers become "more weak, more narrow-minded, and more dependent."[17] What was once a society of free and independent individuals could become a society dependent on someone in the higher economic strata for support and livelihood.

As the "art advances, the artisan recedes" states Tocqueville.[18] Creativity and craftsmanship will slowly erode from the minds of the workers further removing them from a feeling of purpose in society.

On the other hand, the masters of manufactures are continually improving their positions in life. Not only materially but intellectually.

> . . . Thus at the very time at which the science of manufactures lowers the class of workmen, it raises the class of masters.
>
> Whereas the workman concentrates his faculties more and more upon the study of a single detail, the master surveys a more extensive whole, and the mind of the

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[16] Ibid., p. 169.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

> latter is enlarged in proportion as that of the former is narrowed . . . What is this but aristocracy?[19]

Tocqueville predicts that this form of aristocracy will be different from the old forms in a number of ways. For example, the new aristocracy will not have the stability over time which older aristocracies possessed. Although poor workers have little chance of improving their status, the new masters of trade can always lose their wealth and their position along with it. Tocqueville observes that while "The poor have few means of escaping from their condition and becoming rich; . . . the rich are constantly becoming poor, or they give up business when they have realized a fortune. . . ."[20] Thus, nothing is certain or fixed among the upper classes as it was in the old form in which men remained at one and only one status in society for life.

Because the new aristocracy is unstable, it fails to develop a creed which binds its members together. According to Tocqueville, ". . . these rich individuals have no feelings or purposes in common, no mutual traditions or mutual hopes; there are therefore members, but no body."[21]

In traditional aristocracies, a common commitment to a set of beliefs or traditions created a social environment favorable to the development of a leadership class. The art of governing society was nurtured and respected in this environment. In the new American aristocracy, however, ". . . the object is not to govern the population, but to use it."[22]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

Lacking a tradition of leadership in the broad social sense, the new aristocracy feels "no real bond between them and the poor. . . ."[23] They feel no sense of responsibility in caring for the needs of the deprived classes as was the case in traditional aristocracies. Tocqueville states that traditional aristocracy "was either bound by law, or thought itself bound by usage, to come to the relief of its serving-men, and to succor their distresses."[24]

The paradoxical nature of the original state of freedom and equality in America is evident when Tocqueville speaks of the rise of manufactures under these conditions. Enormous energy propelled by insecure status soon finds its outlet in commercial ventures culminating in manufactures. Manufactures are based on the exploitation of workers for personal gain, the antithesis of the original blessings of freedom and equality. Tocqueville is aware of the paradox when he states that ". . . the manufacturing aristocracy of our age first impoverishes and debases the men who serve it, and then abandons them to be supported by the charity of the public."[25]

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[22] Ibid., p. 171.

[23] Ibid., p. 170.

[24] Ibid., p. 171

[25] Ibid.

In his forecast of the consequences of the rise of large scale industry in the United States, Tocqueville anticipates by a decade the thinking of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. In a section of The Communist Manifesto entitled "Manufacture" Marx and Engels elaborate a view strikingly similar to that of Tocqueville.

> . . . manufacture developed as a set-off against independent craftsmanship. When the merchant capitalist sweeps the independent artisan into his net, he, as merchant-entrepreneur, brings under one roof a considerable number of independent craftsmen . . . On this foundation, a system is built up, necessitating more and more specialised labour, until manufacture is transformed into a unified mechanism . . . superintended by workers each of whom makes no more than a minute part of the article which his predecessor was wont to make as a whole, and who thus becomes . . . a tool in the process. . . .[26]

At this point, however, Marx and Tocqueville part company. Tocqueville is more concerned with the technological impact on the individual's mind than he is with "economic exploitation" in the purely material sense.[27]

In addition, while Marx and Engels view a revolutionary overthrow as a cure, Tocqueville sees no such revolution on the horizon. Basing his conception of the American future on the character traits he has so carefully observed, Tocqueville proves to be far more accurate than Marx in his analysis.

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[26] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto, ed. D. Ryazanoff (pseud.), trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1930; reprint ed., New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1963), pp. 74-75.

[27] Andrew Hacker, Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), p. 487.

His description of the American worker's likely response to the industrial age provides one more illustration of his remarkable foresight:

> . . . The workman conceives a more lofty opinion of his rights, of his future, of himself; he is filled with new ambition . . . desires . . . [and] . . . wants . . . he views with longing eyes the profits of his employer; and in order to share them, he strives to dispose of his labor at a higher rate, and he generally succeeds at length in the attempt. . . .[28]

As Andrew Hacker has stated: "Workers may envy the comforts of the well-to-do, but the abiding aspiration is to ascend to that favored status. . . ." which the well-to-do enjoy.[29] Any desire for a Marxist style revolution is completely displaced by the restless desire to achieve material success.

Tocqueville's analysis of the consequences of a new aristocracy in manufacturing also anticipates by more than a half century the criticisms voiced by articulate populist and progressive thinkers in the United States. For example, a populist editorial appearing in Farmer's Alliance in 1891 echoes themes voiced by Tocqueville. "The plutocracy of to-day," it observes, "is the logical result of individual freedom which we have always considered the pride of our system. . . . Individual enterprise was allowed unlimited scope."[30] As a final result, monopoly capitalism is created by individualism where "the corporation has absorbed the community."[31]

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[28] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:199.

[29] Andrew Hacker, Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science, p. 488.

[30] Quoted in Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1966), p. 19.

W. J. Ghent, a progressive reformer, also reiterated the thoughts of Tocqueville over half a century earlier: "The more the great combinations increase their power, the greater is the subordination of the small concerns. . . . The petty tradesmen and producers are thus an economically dependent class; and their dependence increases with the years. . . ."[32] Ghent calls this the "new feudalism," a concept very similar to Tocqueville's new aristocracy "engendered by manufactures."

The subordination of individual thought and the chronic insecurity of the individual seem to be the two dangers of rising industrialism which concerned Tocqueville the most. One Tocqueville scholar has said that the most important insight arising from Tocqueville's analysis of industrialization was not that a new economic elite would be created but rather "it was undermining the psychological and political basis of liberty" based on the individual's independence from the state and his fellow-man.[33]

The problem of economic materialism and its effects on individual freedom has in recent years been the subject of debate by many different contemporary schools of thought. One such example is the "Chicago school" once led by Friedrick

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[31] Ibid.

[32] W. J. Ghent, "The Benevolent Feudalism," in Free Government in the Making, ed. Alpheus T. Mason (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 579.

[33] Seymour Drescher, "Tocqueville's Two Democracies," Journal of the History of Ideas 25 (April 1964):208.

Hayek and now championed by economist Milton Friedman. The Hayek-Friedman school has provided the intellectual contours of much that is described as American "conservatism."

Friedman asserts that government is the only basic threat to freedom in America. Economic individualism, in the form of free competition, is the salvation from the state and hence the salvation of liberty.

Tocqueville, on the other hand, is a conservative with European, not American, perspectives. He avoids the simplistic American conservative view that the maintenance of freedom requires only that government be minimized and "free enterprise" maximized. Tocqueville's perceptions are at a deeper level. They reveal the paradox that Friedman's radical individualism _itself_ creates a number of social, political, as well as economic threats to freedom.

Excessive individualism, not government, notes Tocqueville, lies at the root of those facets of the American character which endanger liberty in America. Individualism, Tocqueville feared, would lead to a new aristocracy in manufactures. That danger, he concludes, should be watched as carefully as the dangers posed by government:

> . . . the friends of democracy should keep their eyes anxiously fixed in this direction; for if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrate into the world, it may be predicted that this is the channel by which they will enter.[34]

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[34] Tocqueville, _Democracy in America_, 2:171.

CHAPTER VI

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE "NEW DESPOTISM"

Tocqueville foresees many dangers as having a bearing on the possible fate of democracy. Among these dangers are the "new despotism" characterized by the tyrannical control by the majority in society, the psychological uncertainties of the individual brought about by the "equality of conditions," and, paradoxically, a new form of inequality of conditions resulting from man's quest for material gratifications. Fortunately, these dangers are reduced by certain safeguards which also exist in the American democratic system.

The safeguards envisioned by Tocqueville are more than just institutions of man's invention. They are rooted in traditional customs and values of the American people. They are the social result of the unique American experience.

The first such safeguard is what Tocqueville calls associations. Individuals existing in democracy feel a sense of powerlessness since each has an equal voice in the affairs of society, and each feels dependent upon society as a whole for his support. This feeling of dependence on society for acceptance leads men in democracies to form voluntary associations.

Yet, associations serve to reduce the vast distance between the solitary individual and the all-encompassing society represented by the state.[1] The associations which the individual enters become extensions of his creativity.[2] Through associations he can express his independent will and at the same time gain social acceptance by members of his peer group.

Tocqueville believed that associations were strong bulwarks against tyranny by majority in that they combined minority forces into collective organized groups. These groups of opinion in which the members of society participate become centers of problem-solving. Tocqueville was struck by the tendency of Americans to meet their smallest problems by forming an association to deal with it. For example, if a "stopage occurs in a throughfare, and the circulation of the public is hindered, the neighbors immediately constitute a deliberative body . . ." which disposes of the problem without appealing to a higher authority.[3] Individuals, therefore, almost automatically take the initiative and form associations to achieve their immediate common goals.

Tocqueville speaks of two broad classes of associations, political and civil. He defines an association as a social tool which ". . . unites the efforts of minds which have a tendency to diverge in one single channel, and urges them vigorously towards one single end . . ."[4] The differences he sees between political and civil associations are found in the purposes for which they are formed.

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[1] Seymour Drescher, Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1968), p. 46.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 1: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonigal Press, 1900), p. 191.

Tocqueville states that both political and civil associations are held together by the common opinions of their members. However, in political associations the distinguishing feature is ". . . the application of the representative system . . ." in which delegates are chosen to form ". . . a government within the Government. . . ."[5] Tocqueville claims that while political associations "strike us [more] forcibly," civil associations are just as important, if not more important, as a safeguard of individual freedom.[6] They help mold individual opinion on a variety of different issues in cases where the individual, on his own, might simply feel helpless and confused.

In viewing associations in a positive aspect, Tocqueville differs from other noted thinkers of his time who warned against factions, parties, and other interest groups in society.[7] He believes instead that associations fill the void created by the absence of an aristocracy.

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[4] Ibid., p. 192.

[5] Ibid., pp. 192-193.

[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 2: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 118.

[7] Marvin Zetterbaum, Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), pp. 95-96.

> . . . In aristocratic societies men do not need to combine in order to act, because they are strongly held together. Every wealthy individual and powerful citizen constitutes the head of a permanent and compulsory association . . . Amongst democratic nations, on the contrary, all the citizens are independent and feeble; they can do hardly anything by themselves . . . if they never acquired the habit of forming associations . . . civilization itself would be endangered. . . .[8]

Tocqueville, therefore, views associations in America as essential to protect civilization itself. He states that "people amongst which individuals should lose the power of achieving great things single-handed, without acquiring the means of producing them by united exertions, would soon relapse into barbarism."[9]

The importance of Tocqueville's observations have been confirmed by many recent political scientists who have put great emphasis on interest groups, or associations, as Tocqueville called them, in the articulation of individual opinions and economic interests. One such political scientist, David Truman, suggests that a balance among interest groups prevents any one group from dominating the rest in a sort of rough equity relationship. He states that ". . . multiple memberships in potential groups based on widely held and accepted interests . . . serve as a balance wheel in a going political system like that of the United States. . . ."[10]

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith joins David Truman in reaffirming Tocqueville's thesis that associations serve to protect individuals from larger forms of tyranny in society. Galbraith acknowledges the dangers to freedom inherent in vast concentrations of economic power held by producers, or, as Tocqueville would say, the new aristocracy in manufactures. These very concentrations, however, produce "countervailing" economic associations which afford their members protection.

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[8] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:115.

[9] Ibid.

[10] David B. Truman, The Governmental Process (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 514.

Strong producers generate a trend toward strong buyers associations in retailing, labor unions among workers, and agricultural interest groups among farmers. All these different associations, concludes Galbraith, form a network of "countervailing power" offering protection against Tocqueville's much feared manufacturing aristocracy.[11]

Tocqueville did recognize some important weaknesses of associations. For example, they are not always easy to organize. He notes that ". . . the same social condition which renders associations so necessary to democratic nations, renders their formation more difficult amongst those nations than amongst all others. . . ."[12] In democracies, associations must have a large number of members to exert any influence, and it is often hard to get people involved on any one issue. Tocqueville's observation forecasts problems faced by small relatively unorganized groups competing with those which are large and well organized.

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[11] John Kenneth Galbraith, American Capitalism (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1956) p. 111.

[12] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:116.

A second problem of associations as seen by Tocqueville was the same, probably exaggerated, one seen by James Madison and others of the federalist period, i.e., their mischief-making and possible anarchic tendencies. Tocqueville states his view as follows: "It cannot be denied that the unrestrained liberty of association for political purposes is the last degree of liberty which a people is fit for. If it does not throw them into anarchy, it perpetually brings them, as it were, to the verge of it. . . ."[13] Tocqueville concedes that at times it might be necessary to restrain the right of association if tranquility could not be maintained.[14]

Tocqueville, however, felt that the general impact of associations was positive. They acted as "a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority" over the individual.[15] They competed with centers of power found in the hands of wealthy individuals or aristocracies. One scholar restates Tocqueville's view that associations serve as a means of reestablishing ". . . a social pluralism that would prevent the over-concentration of authority. . . ."[16]

Another safeguard which Tocqueville believes protects members of democracy from the overbearance of societal authority is the press. The press is the vehicle through which individual members of society can seek a common purpose with members of the public at large. In so doing, the newspaper performs the same function which associations perform. First, it suggests "the same purpose to a great number of persons . . ."[17] But it also furnishes "means for executing in common the designs which they [individuals] may have singly conceived . . ."[18]

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[13] Ibid., p. 127.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:195.

[16] Jack Lively, The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 127.

The press and associations, in fact, support and depend on each other. As Tocqueville states, ". . . newspapers make associations, and associations make newspapers . . ."[19] As the conditions of men become more equal, notes Tocqueville, ". . . the number of newspapers increased in proportion to that of associations. . . ."[20]

Newspapers also play a vital role in promoting the cause of individual freedom through an informed public. They serve as a means of uniting thought among individuals in society. Tocqueville states this point as follows: "The more we consider the independence of the press in its principal consequences, the more are we convinced that it is the chief, and so to speak, the constitutive element of freedom in the modern world. . . ."[21]

In analyzing the relative power of the press in carrying out its prime objective of informing and uniting individuals within society, several developments since Tocqueville's time are instructive.

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[17] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:119.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 120.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:193.

In the era of McCarthyism, the role of the press was largely one of uncritical reporting of facts which were in many cases unsubstantiated. The press was so bombarded with sensational charges and claims of "un-American activities" that they scarcely had time to assess them. One newsman pointed out that McCarthy's approach "made it, on the one hand, practically impossible for the press to deny him publicity—and, on the other, impossible for it to provide its readers any comprehensible accounting of the ratio of truth to falsehood in what he was saying."[22]

In a much less passive role, however, elements of the press during the Watergate era engaged in courageous investigative reporting. This type of reporting characterized by questioning, seeking out flaws, corruption, and abuses of power, more closely corresponds with the protective role which Tocqueville expected newspapers to play.

The Nixon-Agnew attacks on the press can be seen as examples of leaders urging the majority to enforce conformity on society. The persistent attacks on the press at this time can be seen as evidence that the press was acting in much the same way as Tocqueville envisioned it should. From these observations, it appears that the press, although quite sporadic, continues to play a vital part in safeguarding society against the "tyranny of the majority" which Tocqueville feared.

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[22] Richard Halworth Rovere, Senator Joe McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), pp. 139-140.

A third safeguard Tocqueville observes in democracy is found within the judicial system of the United States. Tocqueville held lawyers in America in the highest esteem and believed that they were the class in American society which more closely approximated his ideal of aristocracy than any other.

> Men who have more especially devoted themselves to legal pursuits derive from those occupations certain habits of order, a taste for formalities, and a kind of instinctive regard for the regular connection of ideas, which naturally render them very hostile to the revolutionary spirit and the unreflecting passions of the multitude.[23]

Lawyers, therefore, add stability to the system in their manners and customs and high regard for formalities. Lawyers do not intend ". . . to overthrow the institutions of democracy, but they constantly endeavor to give it an impulse which diverts it from its real [tyrannical] tendency . . . ."[24]

Although the judicial system will never "volunteer its assistance to the oppressed," it will come to the aid of even "the humblest of those who solicit it," states Tocqueville.[25] This is one of the strongest bulwarks of individual freedom in the United States. In summarizing the power of the judiciary, Tocqueville notes the following:

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[23] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1:277-278.

[24] Ibid., p. 280.

[25] Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2:339.

> . . . The strength of the courts of law has ever been the greatest security which can be offered to personal independence; but this is more especially the case in democratic ages: private rights and interests are in constant danger, if the judicial power does not grow more extensive and more strong to keep pace with the growing equality of conditions."[26]

One student of Tocqueville points out that in the beginning lawyers were not highly regarded among the people. Respect came only after better schools, case decisions, and notable commentaries developed.[27] Tocqueville would surely have applauded this development.

These three safeguards, namely associations, the press, and the judiciary, for the most part have continued to be, as Tocqueville envisioned, powerful means of combating a despotic society. History has proven, however, that each of these factors is in a constant state of flux and, therefore, when one factor becomes recessive the other factors must become more dominant, much in the same fashion as the balance of the three branches of government.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] George E. Probst, The Happy Republic: A Reader in Tocqueville's America (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 478.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has emphasized two outstanding qualities of Alexis de Tocqueville as an observer and theorist. First, an attempt was made to show Tocqueville's relative detachment from existing mores and trends of his day. Second, examples of foresight, based on a careful analysis of the American character, were examined.

To place these qualities in a clear context, Tocqueville will be compared with a highly-acclaimed contemporary observer of American society, Jean-Francois Revel. Like Tocqueville, Revel is a Frenchman viewing the United States from a Western European perspective. Moreover, like Tocqueville, he is primarily a social and political analyst possessing both journalistic skill and intelligence.

The contrast with Tocqueville lies in the qualities of intellectual detachment from prevailing cultural trends, and the foresight which results in part from it. Even though Revel has the advantage of writing about one hundred and forty years after Tocqueville, his observations have already begun to fade in importance compared to his predecessor.

In the concluding chapter, a comparative case study of Jean-Francois Revel's book, Without Marx or Jesus, and

Tocqueville's thought over one hundred years earlier will be employed.

Revel's book, Without Marx or Jesus, was highly acclaimed when it appeared in the early 1970's. Revel presents the view that a "new revolution" led by radical dissenters will soon take place in the United States.[1] He sees this revolutionary dissent in not one but a multiplicity of groups throughout the nation. These dissenting groups share "a radically new approach to moral values; the black revolt, the feminist attack on masculine domination; . . . the growing demand for equality . . ." to name a few.[2] These social issues will converge to form the basis for the revolution. According to Revel, "The moral revolution, the cultural revolution, and the political revolution are but a single revolution. . . ."[3] Therefore, the "total social fact" of dissent has thrust America into a revolution according to Revel.[4]

Revel's conclusions about the American future were similar to those being drawn by other best-selling authors of the last 1960's and early 1970's who projected radical dissent against the Vietnam war into a full-scale countercultural revolution.[5]

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[1] Jean-Francois Revel, Without Marx or Jesus (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 176.

[3] Ibid., pp. 177-178.

[4] Ibid., p. 19.

Revel's book was not detached from, but was a leading example of, fashionable literary-political trends found in the New York Review of Books and the sensationally successful countercultural stage production, Hair.

By the beginning 1978, however, the liberated new world foreseen by Revel and others in the very near future had not come to pass. George McGovern's nomination by the Democratic party in 1972 provided concrete hope for, and an early test of, Revel's conception of the future direction of American politics.

This was because the McGovern movement was based largely on issues designed to appeal to antiwar, racial, and feminist dissent in America. McGovern, running against a vulnerable Republican incumbent, suffered the worst defeat of any Democratic candidate in recent history.

Events since the 1972 election have further deflated Revel's thesis of a new American revolution. Time magazine recently reported that leading prophets of the New Left, such as Jerry Rubin, Sam Brown, and Tom Hayden, have returned to more conventional lifestyles and have chosen to work through the system. The movement for a countercultural revolution, the article concludes, ". . . arose out of moral outrage and indignation, and grew larger precisely because it was so formless. When the production ran out of moral energy, it collapsed like a small dying star. . . ."[6]

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[5] Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Charles Riech, The Greening of America (New York: Random House, 1970); Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969).

By the end of 1977, the editors of Newsweek were wondering not when Revel's revolution would come but, rather, "Is America Turning Right?"[7] Americans, the article reports, are "Angered at everything from higher taxes and excessive regulation to reverse discrimination and moral permissiveness, more and more people are calling themselves conservatives. . . ."[8] This movement to a neo-conservative ideology is evident in students ". . . who are often a leading indicator of the national mood . . ."[9] Instead of advocating revolutionary activism ". . . young people are again concerned with getting good grades and finding a job in a very tight labor market. . . ."[10]

The main reason why Revel's forecast of a counter-cultural revolution failed to materialize probably lies in a somewhat superficial analysis of the American character.

Specifically, he failed to recognize two deeply ingrained traits perceived by Tocqueville one hundred and forty years before. The first is the intense materialism of Americans who have lost the older guidelines of status. The second is the need for conformity in a nation where men are "born equal" and find it unpopular to flaunt those things which separate them from the mass.

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[6] Lance Morrow, "An Elegy for the New Left," Time, August 15, 1977, p. 67.

[7] David Gelman, "Is America Turning Right?", Newsweek November 7, 1977, p. 34.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 35.

[10] Ibid.

Tocqueville anticipates, while Revel ignores, the movements toward radical conformity which often arise in America. The McCarthy movement, the Wallace movement, and the Nixon phenomenon, are all incomprehensible from Revel's perspective. Tocqueville, however, feared such movements as manifestations of "the tyranny of the majority."

Revel seems to have sensed the American infatuation with change and mistaken it for a revolutionary movement. Tocqueville's study of the American character led him to conclude, more accurately, that Americans love change but hate revolutions.

First, according to Tocqueville, "revolutions . . . threaten the tenure of property . . ." and Americans hold their property in the highest esteem.[11] Since property ownership is widespread, a successful revolution could unfavorably upset the distribution of property and mean a possible loss to each member of society.

A second reason why revolution is improbable in the United States is the commercial basis of America democracy. Tocqueville made the following statement regarding this point:

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[11] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve Vol. 2: The World's Great Classics (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), p. 266.

> . . . I know of nothing more opposite to revolutionary manners than commercial manners. Commerce is naturally adverse to all the violent passions; it loves to temporize, takes delight in compromise, and studiously avoids irritation. . . .[12]

Tocqueville concludes that Americans "love change, but they dread revolutions."[13] Even though they are in a constant state of change and excitement ". . . they check and calm themselves when public excitement begins to grow alarming . . ." for ". . . they dread a revolution as the worst of misfortunes . . ."[14]

Tocqueville probably gives more insight into a rapidly changing and troubled American society than do writers of the Revel genre even though the latter have had the advantage of one hundred and forty years hindsight. To say even this much is an impressive tribute to Tocqueville's detachment and foresight.

One major shortcoming in Tocqueville's writings on American democracy is that he does not offer any solutions or blueprints for the future. He offers us only his observations of American society. Nevertheless, these observations remain extremely valuable in that they prevent miscalculations of the Revel/McGovern type. More importantly, they continue to provide an extremely useful starting point for serious students of American politics and society.

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[12] Ibid., p. 267.

[13] Ibid., p. 269.

[14] Ibid.

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