

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

VOLUME ONE

THE HENRY REEVE TEXT AS REVISED BY FRANCIS BOWEN
NOW FURTHER CORRECTED AND EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION,
EDITORIAL NOTES, AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES BY
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A Note to the Reader

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA speaks to our condition, while we are in the midst of war and even now searching for stable foundations for our own future and the world's, as freshly as when it was written just over a century ago. Then as now, new forces were at work within society on both sides of the Atlantic; our nation, hardly less than the peoples of the older European states, was reappraising its ideals and institutions. What Tocqueville saw and foresaw then about the values and the hazards of the democratic way of life is as pertinent for our enlightenment today as in the 1840's. His unique work has long been out of print and difficult to obtain; it is thirty years since it was last issued in this country. The present is a not inopportune time to bring *Democracy in America* again into circulation — as a guide and inspiration for the task ahead.

There have been two translations of *Democracy in America* into English. One was made by Henry Reeve soon after its publication in Paris, in 1835 and 1840. A retranslation was made, on the basis of Reeve's text, by Francis Bowen in 1862. In preparing this edition, it was decided to use the Bowen text. It was found, however, that it contained many archaisms and a number of omissions from or alterations in Tocqueville's text, footnotes, and appendices. The text and footnotes have been restored to their form in the 14th French edition (as reprinted from the 12th edition, the last which Tocqueville himself corrected). Many retranslations have also been made of passages either unclear or inaccurate in the Bowen text. The text of this edition conforms, therefore, to Tocqueville's meaning, and to the materials which he presented to his readers, more closely than previous editions in English.

It is not inappropriate to present to the twentieth-century reader Tocqueville's original text and notes without further editorial comment. If for no other reason, it would be useful to do so in order to indicate the quality of Tocqueville's scholarship, as the text of the *Democracy* displays the force of his brilliant and incisive mind. For those interested in tracing the evolution of the techniques of social-science investigation, Tocqueville's practice of careful annotation represents a high standard — for his time or for ours. To

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add notes or to reproduce those of earlier editions would only detract from the unique service to scholarship that Tocqueville made at the very beginning of the scientific approach to the study of economic, political, and social problems.¹

Tocqueville's notes often exceeded the limits of annotation. These he placed in a series of appendices. They have been reproduced in full for the first time and will be found in Appendix I in Volume II of this edition.

Some of the changes in translation and other editorial revisions for this edition are indicated in Appendix II. It can be referred to by those concerned to note their character and extent.

The editions of the *Democracy* have been annotated as far as was possible from American bibliographical sources. The reader will get a sense of the wide use the book has had in many countries and in at least ten languages by scanning Appendix III.

For those interested in tracing the sources of comment and appraisal of the *Democracy* referred to in the Introduction, Appendix IV provides a selected bibliography. The separate indexes for each volume (for the first time in this edition) offer a convenient means of checking Tocqueville's ideas and comments in the two parts of the *Democracy*.

P. B.

¹ One or two of Reeve's notes are still interesting examples of differences in political ideology — and terminology — east and west of the English Channel in the 1830's. An example may be given: Reeve's commentary on Tocqueville's discussion of the meaning of the word *individualism* in Book II, Chapter II of the Second Part of the *Democracy* (this edition, Volume II, page 98). It is relevant to the use of terms by Tocqueville and by our contemporary writers. "I adopt the expression of the original [individualism], however strange it may seem to an English ear, partly because it illustrates the remark on the introduction of general terms into democratic language which was made in a preceding chapter, and partly because I know of no English word exactly equivalent to the expression. . . ." For Reeve's comment on the word *equality*, see his note to Book I, Chapter XVI of the Second Part (1840 American edition, Volume II, page 73; this edition, Volume II, page 67).

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Introduction

ON the morning of May 11, 1831 two young men walked down the gangplank of the steamer *President* from Providence, just berthed at Cortlandt Street at the foot of Manhattan. They were remarkable young men but not many of their fellow passengers had remarked upon their landing in America. Thirty-eight days by sailing vessel from Havre to Newport, Rhode Island, and by steamer the rest of the way, they had come on an official mission for their government. At the moment they were tired; they had been so eager to see America that they had hardly slept since first sighting the shores of Long Island, and landing in Newport on May 9. After a brief look around the town on lower Manhattan, they went to bed at four in the afternoon. "The morrow at 8," they were still asleep.

Not for long, however, for they were soon up and out. Picking up the morning's *Mercantile Advertiser*, they found that their arrival was already "news." The item announced that "two young magistrates . . . have arrived . . . sent here by order of the Minister of the Interior, to examine the various prisons in our country, and make a report on their return to France." It was reprinted that day in the *New York Evening Post*, and within a week in papers all the way from Boston to Annapolis.

From New York, Tocqueville and Beaumont traveled as far east as Boston, as far west as Green Bay, as far north as Sault Ste. Marie and Quebec, as far south as New Orleans. By steamer and stage-coach where possible, on horseback through the wilderness regions of the northern, western, and southern frontiers, they traversed over seven thousand miles of this country and Canada before they sailed for France on February 20, 1832. During those nine months they had touched every (present) state east of the Mississippi except Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Florida, Illinois, and Indiana. From Buffalo they had traveled to Quebec and back again to New England and New York. They had stayed long enough in most of them to learn a good deal about the land and the people; the one they found as varied as the other.

Who were these young men and what was their mission? Did it compel their travels? Or were they, like other Europeans of the time, simply curious about a country and a nation strange in all

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aspects — physical, cultural, and political — to the peoples of the older civilizations?

THE AUTHOR AND HIS PURPOSE

Alexis Charles Henri Clerel de Tocqueville was not quite twenty-six when he landed in America; he had been born in Paris on July 29, 1805. The Tocquevilles were a Norman family counting themselves among the *petite noblesse*. Alexis's maternal grandfather, a marquis of the *ancien régime*, and an aunt had been guillotined by the Revolution; his parents had been imprisoned. Only after the fall of Napoleon did his father return to public life; Hervé de Tocqueville served the Bourbon government as a prefect in several departments, was promoted to the court at Versailles and finally elevated to the peerage.

The young Tocqueville was first educated at home under the tutorship of an old family friend and parish priest, the Abbé Lesueur, who had also instructed his father. When he was fifteen, he went to the Lycée at Metz, where his father was stationed as prefect; at eighteen he returned to Paris to take up the study of law. When he was eligible, at twenty-one, he began a career in the magistracy; his father secured him an appointment as *juge auditeur* in the court at Versailles. There he met his fellow-traveler-to-be to America, Gustave de Beaumont, like himself a young French nobleman with liberal interests. The two young officials instantly took to each other. Their first acquaintance ripened into a friendship that lasted throughout their lives and survived Tocqueville's death. Beaumont's devotion to Tocqueville was evidenced in his editing posthumously the *Œuvres Complètes*.

Although Tocqueville never entirely deserted the values of the aristocratic tradition, he was early imbued with liberal ideas. When he was only fifteen, he discovered some of the eighteenth-century French philosophers in his father's library. Already an eager reader, he found among them new ideas which helped to shape his lifelong interest in and support of freedom of inquiry and free trade in ideas. The Catholic faith in which he had been reared under the Abbé Lesueur's tutelage was never completely restored; he remained devoutly religious, but not so much as a practitioner as a believer. From this time on, Tocqueville's mind moved steadily away from the political ideas of the *ancien régime* and toward those of his contemporaries in the French liberal movement.

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Much as he was influenced by the writings and lectures of such men as Royer-Collard and Guizot, he began to explore even wider frontiers of speculation than those they had opened to him on the nature and conditions of stability in society. More and more he turned from the narrow path of the law to the broader field of politics, both in his studies and in his search for a satisfying career. With Beaumont he embarked on a thorough course of independent inquiry into problems of political organization and motivation. Liberalism in its new manifestations in England, where he had already visited, and in America in the midst of the Jacksonian revolution, inevitably enlisted an increasing intellectual interest — and attachment — from two young Frenchmen troubled by the continuing political unrest at home. The Revolution had not yet taken root in firmly established institutions; a balance between the aristocratic and the democratic traditions had not been worked out in practice. France was torn between the two; Tocqueville saw clearly enough that the democratic impulse, if it was to triumph, must create a stable political order to give France the vitality it so much needed at the time.

When the Bourbon dynasty fell in the July Revolution of 1830, Tocqueville and Beaumont found themselves in a quandary. They took the oath of allegiance to the government of Louis Philippe only reluctantly and with many doubts. As judicial officers they remained loyal to their duties, but they felt themselves out of sympathy with the new government.

It was then that the decision to make the voyage to America crystallized into action. Tocqueville had already conceived the purpose of writing about democracy — as the specific for Europe's (and especially France's) travails in bringing to birth a new order to supplant the old, outworn, aristocratic order. He now saw the opportunity to avoid the misgiving felt in his position as an official of a government with which he was not in sympathy and to fulfill his hope of observing democracy in action in America. He would thus at once both escape his moral scruples and equip himself to complete the grand design of examining the nature and working of democracy as it might be applicable in Europe. Beaumont, whose sympathies lay in the same direction, eagerly agreed to accompany Tocqueville.

Their only question was how to accomplish their purpose. Tocqueville, already thought by his superiors to be indifferent to

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the new government, had been demoted to *juge suppléant* and required to take the oath a second time. Both were already suspect, but they hit on a proposal that succeeded. They petitioned the Minister of Justice for an eighteen months' leave of absence and a commission from the government to study the prison system in America. Prison reform was then in the air in France; the Americans had developed some interesting ideas and practices in their new prisons; it would be useful to the French government to have first-hand information about American procedures.

They were given their commissions, but only after many delays and after overcoming much obstruction and red tape. All the outside pressure that could be mustered by their families and friends had to be exerted before they received official permission to undertake the mission. They had offered, in their original petition, to defray their own expenses; the government now took them quite literally and refused to underwrite the trip to America. Their families came to their rescue and supplied the money.

So at last they were on their way. The record of their preparations, their official and unofficial introductions, their voyage, their experiences in America from their first landing at Newport to their departure from New York City, how *Democracy in America* came to be written, the character of its author, his day-to-day itinerary and experiences, have all been brilliantly portrayed by the foremost American Tocqueville scholar, George Wilson Pierson, in his *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America*.¹ Professor Pierson has not only given us a detailed biography of a book and its author, but an exhaustive study of the voyage of these two young Frenchmen to America. He has placed the romance and the importance of *Democracy in America* in the perspective of its permanent values. Many admirers of the *Democracy* have received new insights into its significance for our time no less than into its design in the mind and the spirit of a young man of twenty-five. For many others who will discover the *Democracy* for the first time, Professor Pierson's

¹ G. W. Pierson: *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York: Oxford; 1938). Reference should be made to Professor Pierson's study not only for the details of Tocqueville's and Beaumont's experiences in America, but for the major events in the former's life in France after his return.

References to bibliographical sources will be indicated as follows. The particular item as numbered in the Bibliography (Appendix IV at end of Vol. II) will be followed by the relevant page reference, separated by a colon, thus (e.g., for page 1 of Pierson's volume indicated in this note): 68:1.

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account of its origins will be read for its own sake, as well as for an adequate appreciation of the author and the book.

Tocqueville and Beaumont visited all the important prisons in this country. Tocqueville especially sought to dig below the surface of new prison practices, such as solitary confinement, in order to discover their effects on the reformation of prisoners. He spent many hours interviewing the inmates in all the prisons he visited and kept meticulous notes on these conversations. He talked with prison officials and others in public and private life to determine what Americans of all types thought about their prisons. On the basis of these official contacts, Tocqueville and Beaumont drafted a comprehensive report² for their government; it was a joint work, but Tocqueville contributed a major share of the research involved. Not only was this report by far the most complete study yet made of American prisons, but it became a major source of French prison-reform activities for many years thereafter.

Tocqueville and Beaumont, having completed their official mission, were now ready to follow their principal purpose in coming to America, the analysis of democracy as a working principle of society and of government. The search for the essence of democracy was undertaken and prosecuted with zeal; Tocqueville had come to America primarily to discover the inner meaning and the actual functioning of democracy in action, in a country which had never known aristocracy. What he found tempered some of his original enthusiasm for the universal applicability of American democratic ideas and practices. If he went home to write the *Democracy* with a more sober view of our institutions than he had had before his visit to America, he did not allow his experiences here to distort his perspective, or to make him less careful in his observations, analyses, and judgments. He found much that was

² *Du Système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis et son application en France* (Paris: H. Fournier; Jeune 1833). It appeared in the United States in the same year, with notes by Francis Lieber (11 D. A. B. 236), under the title, *The Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France* (Philadelphia, Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1833). The second and subsequent French editions appeared in two volumes with additional notes by the authors. The Académie Française awarded the work the Prix Monthyon. It was quickly translated into "German, English, Portuguese, etc., etc." (2nd Paris edition, 1836, I, 1), and was widely reviewed in this country and abroad (*ibid.*, II, 358 ff.). On the influence of the *Penitentiary System*, see 68:54. For American reviews, see 14 *American Quarterly Review* (September 1833) 228; 20 *Christian Examiner and General Review* (July 1836) 376 (by Samuel Atkins Eliot); 37 *North American Review* (July 1833) 117 (by Edward Everett).

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missed altogether or entirely ignored by others of his contemporaries who visited America with the same curiosity about democracy, but often with very different motives in studying it. Even though his criticisms and appraisals, which cumulative observation and wide travel inspired, were not always favorable, Tocqueville never lost sight of his original purpose or deviated from his objective approach.

Tocqueville's intellectual standards and methods of research were stricter than those of most of his contemporaries. His references and citations, complete in the footnotes presented in this edition,³ are evidence of his wide search in original sources. The range and variety of the printed sources which he used indicate how much care he took to obtain the most authentic books and documents.⁴ The extent of his travels suggests that he was not satisfied with second-hand information about the places, the con-

³ Many notes, references, or citations were altogether suppressed in the first Bowen edition and in subsequent issues of this text. The editions using the Reeve text contained more, but not all, of Tocqueville's citations.

Tocqueville noted in his *Introduction* one reason why he himself did not cite sources for some materials provided him by his American friends (I, 15-16). The following excerpt from a letter by Joseph Story suggests that Tocqueville's frequent failure to cite Story specifically had much to do with the latter's irritation at Tocqueville's apparent neglect of his aid. The same may have been the feeling of other of Tocqueville's American friends, for the same reason.

"I do not wonder that you are struck with the barrenness of foreign treatises on Constitutional Law; and especially as applied to forms of government like ours. Europeans know little on the subject. It is surprising how little they read of what has been written here. The work of de Tocqueville has had great reputation abroad, partly founded on their ignorance that he has borrowed the greater part of his reflections from American works, and little from his own observations. The main body of his materials will be found in the *Federalist*, and in Story's *Commentaries on the Constitution*; *sic vos non vobis*. You know ten times as much as he does of the actual workings of our system and of its true theory." Letter to Francis Lieber, May 9, 1840. Quoted in W. W. Story: *Life and Letters of Joseph Story*, 329 (Boston: Little, Brown; 1851). See also 68:730; 44:(II)351.

In recently discovered worksheets for the *Democracy*, Tocqueville specifically noted his indebtedness to Story and others. "I have consulted the three most highly esteemed commentaries, that is to say, the *Federalist*, the work of the three principal drafters of the federal Constitution, the commentaries of Chancellor Kent, and those of Judge Story." See 54:7.

⁴ See 68:727n. for a list of sources utilized by Tocqueville. See ch. 59 as a whole as to "the materials for Tocqueville's work." His footnote references indicate that he had many materials forwarded to him in France after his return; e.g., I, 377, n. 48. Several American friends sent Tocqueville, at his request, notes and memoranda on particular aspects of American institutions.

ditions, or the institutions of which he wrote. On his various expeditions he wrote extensive daily notes, and included many details of his experiences in letters to his family and friends at home, which would be available to him on his return. After each interview with a prominent American he drew up a précis for future reference.⁵ From others he requested and received memoranda on particular aspects of our institutions about which he desired more detailed data than were available in printed sources. Altogether, Tocqueville adhered to far more scholarly standards than many of his successors, to say nothing of those who were writing of America or of political, social, and economic institutions a century ago.⁶

On returning to France — earlier than they had anticipated, because their leaves had been curtailed by the government — Tocqueville and Beaumont viewed the changing political scene and found it little to their liking. They were not received by the Minister of Justice, despite repeated requests for an opportunity to submit their report. Less than two months after their return Beaumont was dismissed from his judicial post for refusing to argue a case without merit but with scandalous political implications; he was deliberately required to support the government's position by a regime bent on embarrassing him. On the day his dismissal was announced, Tocqueville resigned his office in a letter of restrained but bitter criticism of the government.

Both were relieved by the end of their official careers. They could now devote themselves to their real interest — reflection and writing. Politics as a career attracted Tocqueville, but never absorbed his entire energies in the years following his return to

⁵ See 68: Appendix B, for a list of Beaumont's and Tocqueville's American acquaintances.

⁶ No extended comparison of the *Democracy* with contemporary works of other foreign observers can be made here. Bibliographies and some critical materials will be found in: T. W. Evans: *European Impressions of America from early time to the present* (unpublished MS., Madison, Library School of the University of Wisconsin, 1930); H. Meyer: *Nord Amerika in Urteil des deutscher Schrift bis zu Mitte des 19 Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Friedrichsen de Guyter; 1929); F. Monaghan: *French Travellers in the United States, 1765-1932* (New York: New York Public Library; 1933); A. W. Nevins: *American Social History as recorded by British travellers* (New York: Holt; 1923); C. W. Plympton: *Select Bibliography on Travel in North America* (Albany: New York State Library; 1897); H. T. Tuckerman: *America and Her Commentators; with a critical sketch of travel in the United States* (New York: Scribner's; 1864); P. W. Wheeler: *America through British Eyes; a study of the attitude of the Edinburgh Review toward the United States of America from 1802 to 1861* (Rock Hill, S. C.: the author; 1935).