Course Description and Aims

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) has long been at the center of debates concerning the past and future of democracy as a political and social regime. In this course we will examine Tocqueville’s assessment of both the promises and pitfalls associated with the rapid spread of democracy throughout the globe. Specifically, the course has three principal objectives, each of which comes with its own set of guiding questions:

1. To understand Tocqueville as a theorist of a global democratic revolution and not merely as a student of Jacksonian America. Tocqueville travelled to America in 1831 with an eye to studying not only the peculiarities of American society but also “democracy itself” a social form that he saw rapidly gaining ground in France and embedding itself throughout Europe and beyond. What is the driving force behind the spread of democracy in modernity? Why does democracy establish itself violently in some countries (France) and more peacefully in others (the United States)? Is the triumph of democracy inevitable, and is there anything to be feared from the transformations it brings about? How should we, as students of politics, take stock of Tocqueville’s insistence that democracy is as much a “social state” as a set of institutional arrangements?

2. To critically rethink, through Tocqueville, the relationship between that global democratic revolution and European imperialism. Is democracy, we will ask, inimical to empire building? Or might democratic societies be troublingly complicit in racial exclusion and colonial domination? What are we to make of Tocqueville’s own role in the French colonial project in Algeria?

3. To critically evaluate the role of Tocqueville in current debates about the fate of democracy today in America and elsewhere. How prevalent are the dangers Tocqueville associated with democratic societies – tyranny of the majority, individualism and democratic despotism – today? Can Tocqueville’s much vaunted analysis of civic association offer us a promising opening at a moment when popular support for many core democratic institutions is dangerously on the wane?
Evaluation

The breakdown of grades in the seminar will be as follows:

20%: Participation and Attendance
20%: Two Response papers (10% each)
10%: Presentation of Final Research Paper
50%: Final Research paper

Participation and Attendance (20%): This is a seminar, so please arrive prepared to actively discuss the assigned readings with your peers. I will occasionally begin our sessions with a short presentation to frame questions and themes for our collective consideration, but generally I will not be lecturing. Your attention needs to be focused at all times on your interlocutors, not on a screen, and for that reason laptops are not permitted in class (unless medically required). It is imperative that you bring the assigned readings with you each week. Readings posted on Blackboard should be printed so that we all have a ready to use hard copy in front of us. As should go without saying, students who miss class repeatedly can expect to have their participation grade lowered. I will distribute a sign-in sheet each week to keep tabs on attendance.

There will also be a Blackboard component to the participation grade. Starting at week 3, on weeks where you are not submitting a response paper (see below), each student will post a contribution to discussions that I will create on Blackboard. The contribution can take the form either of a question you yourself wish to pose about the material or an answer to a question already under debate. Failure to contribute to these discussions will adversely affect your grade.

Response Papers (10% x2): Each student will write two (4-5 page) papers in response to the readings. These response papers should frame the discussion of that week’s seminar by addressing a theoretical or conceptual problem arising from the texts under consideration. Students in these response papers must engage and quote the text closely using Chicago style citation (for a quick guide to Chicago style visit http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. The response papers should be delivered into my mailbox in Morton Hall by 12 noon on the day of class. The first response paper should be related to a set of readings in Part I of the course (see reading schedule below). The second should pertain to readings in Parts II or III.

Final Research Paper (50%): The final research paper will be about 20-25 pages in length and can be devoted to any topic of relevance to the seminar. You must discuss your proposed topic with me in person during office hours before you start writing. Each student will submit a draft research proposal (graded pass/fail) in class on March 10th and a revised proposal based on my feedback on March 24th. By contrast with the brief response papers, the final research paper should move into the secondary literature and engage a problem using your own reading of the theorist(s) in question and the viewpoints of other scholars (including sources not listed in the syllabus). The Final Papers are due in class by noon on April 28th.
Paper Presentation (10%): Each student will present their research work-in-progress on April 21st. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes in length. In it you will explain the problem or puzzle you have been engaged with, indicate your hypothesis or primary claim, and describe the evidence you have been gathering to support that claim.

Summary of key dates for research papers

March 10th – initial draft research proposal due
March 24th – revised research proposal due
April 21st – in class research presentation
April 28th – Final papers due

Course materials

All of the books you will need are available to buy at the campus bookstore. Other readings, marked with an asterisk (*) in the reading schedule below, will be made available on Blackboard in the folder for that week.

**Books to Purchase (Acquire only the editions listed below):**


Course Understandings

**Late Papers**: The deadlines listed in the syllabus should be treated as firm. Late written work will lose a third of a letter grade for each day overdue. If you encounter difficulties with a deadline owing to religious observance, a medical emergency, or a family emergency please get in touch as early as you can. The earlier you get in touch, the easier it will be to make accommodations or alternative arrangements.

**Academic Integrity**: Anyone found to have been plagiarizing or otherwise acting academically dishonest will receive an automatic F grade for the class and be reported to the Honor Council. In case you are in any doubt about what the William and Mary Honor Code entails you can read the full statement of it here:
Office hours: Make a habit of attending office hours. It is required that you attend at least once in order to discuss your final paper topics. My office is Morton 5D. If you are unable to make it to my regular office hours (2-5 pm on Wednesdays) e-mail me to see if we can find a mutually convenient time to meet.

E-mail: To keep e-mail traffic at a manageable level, I’ll ask you to limit your e-mail inquiries to logistical and administrative issues. I check my email fairly regularly, and I will try to respond to your messages within 24 hours. If you have substantive questions on the content of the course, please do attend my office hours and I’ll happily go over them with you in person then.

Reading Schedule

Week 1, January 15th: Introduction: Tocqueville, Suspended Between Two Worlds

“Author’s Introduction,” Democracy in America pp. 9-20

Week 2, January 20th: MLK Day, NO CLASS

PART I: THE GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

“I admit that I saw in America more than America; it was the shape of democracy itself which I sought, its inclinations, character, prejudices and passions; I wanted to understand it so as least to know what we have to fear or hope therefrom.”

-Tocqueville, Democracy in America, volume 1

“A new political science is needed for a world itself quite new.”

-Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Volume 1

Week 3, January 27th: Tocqueville’s Triadic Entanglements: Liberty/ Equality/ Democracy

Required:
Democracy in America Volume One Part I: Ch. 1-4; Ch 5 pp. 61-70

Week 4, February 3rd: What Tocqueville fears I: Majority Tyranny
Required:
Democracy in America Volume One Part II: Ch 1; Ch 4; Ch 5 pp. 196-201; Ch 6-9; Conclusion

Recommended:
Sheldon Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life, Ch 12

Week 5, February 10th: What Tocqueville Fears II: The Problem of Individualism
Required:
Democracy in America Volume Two Preface; Part I: Ch. 1-2; Ch 5; Ch 8; Ch 20; Part II: Ch 1-9; Ch 15; Ch 20; Part III: Ch 1; Ch 5-13; Ch 18; Ch 21

Recommended:
Dana Villa, Public Freedom, Ch 3

Week 6, February 17th: What Tocqueville Fears III: Democratic Despotism
Required:
Democracy in America Volume Two Part IV: Ch 1-8

Recommended:

Week 7, February 24th: The Rise of Democracy in France
Required:
The Ancien Regime and the Revolution [selected chapters]

Recommended:
Sheldon Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds, Ch 24-25
Richard Herr, Tocqueville and the Old Regime

Week 8, March 3rd Spring break, NO CLASS

PART II: RACE, COLONIZATION AND EMPIRE

Week 9, March 10th: Race and the Democratic Social State [first draft of research proposal due]

Required:
Democracy in America, Volume One Part I Ch 10

Recommended:

Week 10, March 17th: de Beaumont’s “emphatic attention to the condition of the Negroes”

Required:
Gustave de Beaumont, Marie or, Slavery in the United States

Recommended:

Week 11, March 24th: Tocqueville in Algeria [revised research proposal due]

Required: Tocqueville, Writings on Empire and Slavery
“Some Ideas about what Prevents the French from Having Good Colonies”
“First Letter on Algeria”
“Second Letter on Algeria”
“Essay on Algeria”
“First Report on Algeria”
“Second Report on Algeria”

Recommended:
Pitts, J “Tocqueville and the Algeria Question” In A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France (Princeton UP 2005): pp. 204-239

**PART III: TOCQUEVILLE AND DEMOCRACY TODAY**

**Week 12, March 31st:** Do we live under Democratic Despotism?
Required:
- Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* [selected chapters]*
- Dana Villa, *Public Freedom* [selected chapters]*

**Week 13, April 7th:** Tocquevillian remedies?
Required:
- Ben Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* [selected chapters]*
- Ben Berger, *Attention Deficit Democracy: The Paradox of Civic Engagement* [selected chapters]*

**Week 14, April 14th:** Democracy’s Frontiers
Required:
- Ewa Atanassow and Richard Boyd eds. *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy* [selected chapters]*
- Aurelian Craiutu and Sheldon Gellar eds. *Conversations with Tocqueville: The Global Democratic Revolution in the Twenty First Century* [selected chapters]*

**CONCLUSION**

**Week 15: April 21st**
- In class research presentations

**Week 16: April 28th**
- Final Research Papers due

The Professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the semester. Please be sure to retain copies of all written work until final grades have been assigned.

*Have a wonderful summer!*