

**POL 460H1S (L0101)/POL 2006H1S (L0101): Studies in Modern Political Theory:
Tocqueville's *Democracy in America***

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00-5:00pm

Description

Despite traditional aristocratic disdain for “the people,” democracy has by now become the only regime able to make any respectable claim to political or moral legitimacy. Democracy’s unchallenged pre-eminence in this regard is based on a widely shared and even intransigent belief in equality – a belief that took hold in the “age of enlightenment” and received radical expression in the American and French Revolutions. In order to evaluate the prospects, ambiguities, and distinctive features of modern democracy, we focus this semester on what has often been called the American political “experiment.” This “experiment” consisted in the theoretical design and practical implementation of a novel and distinctively modern form of republicanism, which was held both to embody and to promote enlightened principles of rationality, science, universalism, and human choice. Roughly half a century after the American Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* explored the ambiguous ramifications of political equality in light of the vanishing aristocratic alternative. While praising the American Founders, Tocqueville also challenged uncritical admirers of the American experiment to question the individualistic and materialistic “soulcraft” implicitly at work in the experience of democratic politics. Tocqueville’s work is a salutary and friendly critique that lays bare democracy’s chief tensions and dilemmas without proposing any radical political solutions of its own.

Text

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

This text is available at the Bob Miller Book Room, 180 Bloor St. West.

Format, Schedule, Requirements, and Marking Scheme

This will be a seminar in which the instructor lectures and initiates discussion and students participate actively. Class participation will count for 15% of the final mark. As part of your participation mark, you will also be required to draw up a question for class discussion. The final half-hour of each session, starting in the third session, will be devoted to discussing these (larger and more synthetic) questions, which are intended to balance the more detailed work we undertake during the first 90 minutes. These questions will be submitted to me by 5pm on the Monday before the seminar, and they will be read aloud in class.

The marking scheme for the undergraduate course will be as follows: one essay of 2000 words will be due on **February 24th** (35% of the final mark), and a second essay of 3000 words on *Democracy in America* will be due on **April 8th** (50% of the final mark). These marks are in addition to the class participation mark (15%). In addition to making an original and well-structured argument, each paper must also engage seriously and substantively with the secondary literature – in the first paper, you will be required to cite and engage with at least two secondary sources, at least one of which must be a book; in the second paper, you will be required to cite at least five secondary sources, at least two of which must be books.

The marking scheme for the graduate course will be different. Graduate students may choose one of the following options:

- (1) one essay of 3000 words on *The Federalist* or the essays of “Brutus” will be due on **Feburary 24th** (35% of the final mark), and a second essay of 4500 words on *Democracy in America* will be due on **April 8th** by noon (50% of the final mark). These marks are in addition to the class participation mark (15%). In addition to making an original and well-structured argument, each paper must also engage seriously and substantively with the secondary literature – in the first paper, you will be required to cite and engage with at least three secondary sources, at least one of which must be a book; in the second paper, you will be required to cite at least six secondary sources, at least two of which must be books.
- (2) One essay of 7500 words, due on **April 8th** by noon (85% of the final mark). This mark will be in addition to the class participation mark (15%). In addition to making an original and well-structured argument, your paper must also engage seriously and substantively with the secondary literature; hence, you will be required to cite at least eight secondary sources, at least two of which must be books.

The papers should be sent to me at Ryan.Balot@utoronto.ca. I will suggest paper topics well in advance of the deadlines, but you should feel free to construct your own topics provided that you discuss the topics with me.

I will penalize tardiness by subtracting 1% per day of lateness. Students are advised to keep rough and draft work and hard copies of their essays and assignments before

turning them in to me. These should be kept at least until the marked assignments have been returned. You are of course responsible for familiarizing yourself with the university's policy on plagiarism.

Bibliography

As you can readily imagine, there are innumerable books and essays on our chosen text; in exploring Tocqueville's writings on democracy, you will undoubtedly discover works that do not appear on the syllabus. Below you will find a substantial bibliography on *Democracy in America*, but note that this bibliography constitutes only a starting-point.

Beiner, Ronald S. *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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Goldstein, Doris S. *Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville's Thought*. New York: Elsevier, 1975.

Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in America*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.

Jardin, André. *Tocqueville: A Biography*. Translated by Lydia Davis with Robert Hemenway. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988.

Kelly, George Armstrong. *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville, and French Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Kessler, Sanford. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion: American Christianity and the Prospects for Freedom*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994.

Koritansky, John C. *Alexis de Tocqueville and the New Science of Politics: An Interpretation of Democracy in America*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1986.

Lamberti, Jean-Claude. *Tocqueville and the Two Democracies*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Lawler, Peter Augustine. *The Restless Mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the Origin and Perpetuation of Human Liberty*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993.

Lawler, Peter Augustine (ed.). *Tocqueville's Political Science: Classic Essays*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992.

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Masugi, Ken (ed.). *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993.

Mitchell, Joshua. *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Pierson, George Wilson. *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938.

Welch, Cheryl. *De Tocqueville*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Winthrop, Delba. "Tocqueville's American Women and 'The True Conception of Democratic Progress.'" *Political Theory* 14.2 (1986) 239-61.

Wolin, Sheldon S. *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Zetterbaum, Marvin. *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.