

Rhetorical strategies of alexis de tocqueville's democracy in america essay sampl...

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Ever since he was born, Tocqueville had been exposed to politics and government. His father was the mayor of Verneuil, which was where much of Tocqueville's childhood was spent. As he grew up he took courses in law, which eventually aided him in writing *Democracy in America*. While on official business to view the American penal system, Tocqueville got his first taste of democracy. When the twenty eight year old de Tocqueville returned to France he began writing *Democracy in America*. While composing it, Tocqueville has a specific audience and purpose in mind. In the 1830's the government in France was very unstable. Tocqueville's intentions for his book, *Democracy in America*, were to convince the French aristocracy that a democracy would be a superior form of government to a monarchy for the people of France. If this idea was exposed to and accepted by the aristocracy then it would eventually be accepted by the lower classes, and hopefully bring about permanent reform.

Achieving this purpose would be a difficult task and would require a very convincing work, which in would turn take a determined author. We can see how Tocqueville endeavors to achieve his goal by his use of rhetoric and persuasion, which, in *Democracy in America*, go hand in hand. Rhetorical strategies used by Tocqueville include a clear writing style, powerful comparison and contrasting, and expression of logical opinions, which foster deductive reasoning on the part of the reader.

Throughout writing *Democracy in America* Tocqueville kept the audience he is writing to, foremost in his mind. Tocqueville is addressing the French aristocracy and is introducing as well as explaining the benefits of a

democracy within his book. As he wrote Tocqueville understood that the aristocracy in France would have most likely never even heard of life in a democracy, much less seen and experienced it. Since Tocqueville is trying to convince the upper class in France to like and eventually turn to this form of government, extra effort must be put on making the content of his book as clear and explicit as possible. Near the beginning of chapter six Tocqueville states: “ The first characteristic of judicial power in all nations is the duty of arbitration. But rights must be contested ... The second characteristic of judicial power is that it pronounces on special cases... The third characteristic of the judicial power...” Through concise explanations of the American government, Tocqueville creates the possibility for the acceptance of a democracy in France, the achievement of his books purpose.

The monarchy of France and the democracy in America have differences as well as similarities. Tocqueville sheds light on various facets of the two governments by comparing and contrasting them. The passage that stands out the most in utilizing this technique is out of the section entitled: “ Origin of the Anglo-Americans, and the Importance of this Origin in Relation to their Future Condition.” Tocqueville explains that when the English reached the New World that he English colonies were ruled in three primary styles: direct rule with power transferred from the king to a governor of his choice who ruled in the king’s name, another possibility was that land bought from the crown could be resold, or the king allowed the new colonists to govern themselves with the understanding that they did not contradict the laws of the mother country. The settlers of the New World were given the

opportunity to employ the basic principle of self-government, a freedom that almost all colonies of other nations were completely devoid. The people of Europe had never known that kind of freedom.

If that were not enough, the colonies of other nations are also compared to America's democracy. Tocqueville explains that the vestiges of a democracy were "applicable not only to the English, but to the French, the Spaniards, and all the Europeans who successively established themselves in the New World. All these European colonies contained the elements, if not the development, of a complete democracy." By doing this Tocqueville is illustrating how a new government will naturally incline towards a democracy. This comparison attains a powerful sense of logical appeal within Democracy in America.

By comparing and contrasting the two different types of governments Tocqueville generates his own opinions about democracy and how well of a government it is. This allows the reader to formulate his or her own ideas about democracy. These assertions are based off of Tocqueville's opinions, which are well educated and logical (just like a French aristocrat should be). These logic-appealing opinions are successively more agreeable. Once you agree with someone you generally begin to trust what he or she says with less and less skepticism. To make things easier Tocqueville was a member of the audience he is writing to, he easily found an appropriate angle to take on his arguments. "I am therefore of the opinion that social power superior to all others must always be placed somewhere; but I think that liberty is endangered when this power finds no obstacle which can

retard its course and give it time to moderate its own vehemence.” This quote from chapter fifteen is clearly an opinion that Tocqueville wants the reader to agree with. Using this strategy, Tocqueville makes his argument that a democracy is the best government, more believable.

By writing *Democracy in America* Alexis de Tocqueville was trying to persuade the French aristocracy to shape a democracy in France. Utilizing the various rhetorical strategies of opinion and compare and contrasting along with strict adherence to purpose and audience Tocqueville is able to write an inspired analysis of America’s democracy. Readers of *Democracy in America* formulate their own (almost always positive) opinions about a democracy, which is a useful tool for persuasion. Surely due to Tocqueville’s expert technique in the use of rhetoric and persuasion, most scholars believe *Democracy in America* to be the most intensive study of the American government ever completed.