

# Tocqueville's democracy in america assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The two volumes of *Democracy in America*, written by Alexis de Tocqueville, stand as objective evaluations of the American democracy and society. In 1835 Tocqueville published his first volume which cast a positive light on how a modern democracy should operate; five years later, in 1840, the second volume was published to illustrate the dangers of despotism, and overly powerful centralized governments. Tocqueville pursued his evaluation amidst a shift in French government from an aristocracy toward a more democratized nation.

During his work within the courts of Versailles, Tocqueville developed a sense of strong liberalism as he knew that the aristocracy was bound to vanish. The shifting form of France's government precipitated into a revolution, and Tocqueville saw a great opportunity and responsibility to analyze what lessons other democracies had learned so he could be part of leading France and other nations into governments that were modeled from the strengths of democracy while avoiding the weaknesses.

He traveled to the United States to examine the fine details of how each cog of the machine worked, to reveal the inadequacies, to project future problems, and to gather information about the struggles America faced throughout the development of our society. After his time in America, Tocqueville continued his studies in England in an effort to learn the intricacies of the British government. His efforts would be forever immortalized in the two volumes of *Democracy in America*.

One of the chief weaknesses that Tocqueville observed about the American system was the potential for a highly individualized public brought about

through equality. He directly linked individualism with equality, and drew the conclusion that as the people become more equal, their drive toward individualism and materialism grows. This condition, Tocqueville asserted, would eventually lead to despotism because more people would focus on themselves rather than their community, and civic duties. Herein lies an important point that remains very relevant in our society today: Materialism creates a vacuum in our system.

As we are continually trying to further our personal status, or wealth, we ignore our political freedom. Tocqueville pointed out that aristocracies are capable of overcoming this since they effectively force citizens to realize the importance of a community. As a contributory factor, he saw that in a very free and equal society, citizens (specifically the majority) wielded far too much power over their elected officials, and this would allow for tyranny. He highlighted this particular weakness in the American House of Representatives, and the Executive Branch.

According to Tocqueville's observations, these branches do not have the flexibility to make independent decisions because if they oppose the will of the public, they may risk their reelection, and would blindly submit to the will of the people. Tocqueville did, however, realize elements that would keep these risks in check. At the time, the Senate was still an appointed office, and he felt that their term was great enough to cause change, and their expertise was on par with their position. In addition he praised the role of the Supreme Court and their ability for judicial review.

He felt that their independence offered a blanket of protection against the potential tyranny of the majority. In the end, Tocqueville's observations reveal the imperfection of our governmental system, while at the same time pointing toward our advancements. In his world of revolution, and political upheaval, Democracy in America would have provided an important blueprint for a country in its infancy of democratic rule. For us, the objectivity is a rewarding opportunity to see our culture through the lens of an outsider.