

# Summary of democracy in america by alexis de tocqueville

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## Alexis de Tocqueville's " Democracy in America"

Tocqueville's observations that are no longer relevant to American society

In Tocqueville's observations on American society, he established the role of Puritans in setting up the America's democratic ideals of equality.

Tocqueville writes, " Puritanism was not merely a religious doctrine, but it corresponded in many points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories" (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 37). The author states that the Puritans strove for equality due to their equality in education, social class, and religious ideals. However, in modern America some of the descendants of the American founders are religiously intolerant. Because America's founders were Christian, many attribute America to be a Christian state. Thus, some people are hesitant to embrace people of other religions that are not Christian despite the freedoms written in the American constitution.

Tocqueville also observes that many of American legislation of the time had been borrowed from the Books of the Law in the Bible. The author points out that this incorporation of religious texts in laws of the land was as a result of the need to maintain orderly conduct and good morals in the community.

This observation is irrelevant in modern America as laws are not based on the Bible. Bills are created within the national assemblies of the state and Congress and are made into law after much debate, voting and approval.

In his book, Tocqueville observes that American legislation is biased towards the rich. He writes, " The civil and criminal procedure of the Americans has only two means of action-committal and bail" (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 50).

American legislation has over the years undergone continuous improvements and amendments. Today, many measures are taken to ensure

the burden of proof is provided before conviction. On hearing a case, a judge has the privilege to set terms or amount of bail. Thus, a poor defendant is not limited in their legal options and justice is observed.

Tocqueville's observations related to the freedom of the press

In his comments on the American press, Tocqueville views the American press being less powerful than the French Press. Tocqueville attributes this to the fact that in America, when the press critiques existing laws, the act is seen as commonplace and not revolutionary by the populace. Thus, the American people are not moved to act against legislation that may be harmful to them. Currently, American media have the power to shape the thoughts and opinions of many people and thus the media is a powerful section of American society.

Tocqueville blames the American populace of stubbornly sticking to their chosen opinions. The current American generation has no such luxury as many people are zombies to the American media. This zombification of the public can be blamed on the numerous studies conducted in the early 1900s on the best techniques mass media can use to influence people. Media influence can also be blamed on the emergence of the internet and social media. The Internet and Social Media have helped breed a generation of individuals who are more likely to adopt the opinions of others.

In the book “ Democracy in America”, Tocqueville also blames the lack of press power on the decentralization of American Press. He points out that although decentralization has some benefits, it usually results in poor journalism. Modern American media remain largely consolidated.

Consolidation ensures a large unified voice in pushing a unified opinion to

the public. However, this consolidation of modern American media may result in tyranny as some sections of the modern media may be in partnership or share common interests with those they report on. For this reason, the American public should also play a role in shaping the level of influence mass media will have on them.

#### Reference

De Tocqueville, A. (2004). *Democracy in America*. New York: Library of America. Retrieved from [Accessed on 21 Jan 2015]