ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE AND THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

My aim in writing [my] book was . . . to teach democracy to know itself.—Alexis de Tocqueville

With its piercing observations, uncanny predictions, and judicious judgments about all things American and democratic, Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America has come to be regarded by many as both “the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written in America.” But Democracy in America is much more than a book about politics, and contains nothing less than a comprehensive investigation of the effects of democracy on the human soul. This course will examine the lessons we still have to learn from Tocqueville about our country, our regime, and ourselves.

A unique aspect of this course is that our exploration of the themes and content of Tocqueville’s masterpiece will be enhanced by the inclusion of four scholars and/or public intellectuals who will help us to understand Tocqueville and his continuing relevance in contemporary life. Students will have the opportunity to interact with our speakers in both formal and informal ways. This has been made possible by the generosity of those who support The Tocqueville Program at Furman University.

GUEST LECTURES: (All lectures are scheduled for Wednesdays at 4:30 pm, Watkins Room, Trone Student Center. Student attendance is required)

- January 29: Lecture by Yuval Levin, Ethics and Public Policy Center, “Like the Leaves of Sybil: Burke and Tocqueville on Tradition in the Democratic Age”
- February 12: Lecture by John Koritansky, Hiram College, “Tocqueville on Civil Religion in America”
- February 26: Lecture by Christine Henderson, The Liberty Fund, “Progress and Paradox in Tocqueville’s Memoir on Pauperism”
- April 2: Lecture by Wilfred McClay, University of Oklahoma, “The Tocquevillean Moment . . . and Ours”

SOMewhat Tentative Course Schedule:

Tuesday, January 14: Introduction and Course Overview.

PART I: DEMOCRACY, EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

Thursday, January 16: Democracy in America, Volume I: Author’s Introduction, I.i.3-4, pp. 1-15; 45-55; II.ii.1, 479-482; and Charles Loyseau, selection from A Treatise on Orders (Moodle).
PART II: RELIGION AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE AMERICAN FOUNDING

America’s Religious Founding

Tuesday, January 21: *Democracy in America*, I.i.2, pp. 27-45; and I.i.5, pp. 56-58; 61-65; 66 [bottom]-67; 74 [last paragraph]-75; 82-93; *Mayflower Compact* and John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (Moodle).

America’s Enlightenment Founding

Thursday, January 23: *Declaration of Independence*, *Constitution of the United States of America*, and *Federalist Papers*, nos. 1, 9, 10, and 51 (Moodle).


Wednesday, January 29: Lecture by Yuval Levin, *Ethics and Public Policy Center*, “Like the Leaves of Sybil: Burke and Tocqueville on Tradition in the Democratic Age” (4:30 pm, Watkins Room, Attendance Required)


Friday, January 31: Reflection Paper I (1 page maximum) due by noon to Johns 111E.

PART III: THE POWER OF THE MAJORITY

Public Spirit, Rights, Democratic Agitation, and Tyranny


Principal Causes Maintaining the Democratic Republic in the United States

Thursday, February 6: *Democracy in America*, I.ii.9, pp. 264-302.

An American Civil Religion?


Thursday, February 13: John Koritansky Class Visit. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* IV.8 (Moodle); and *Democracy in America*, Table of Contents for both volumes, v-xv.

**Friday, February 14:** Reflection Paper II (1 page maximum) due by noon to Johns 111E.

**PART IV: RACE, CIVIL RELIGION AND CIVIL WAR IN AMERICA**

The Present and Probable Future of Race in America

Tuesday, February 18: *Democracy in America*, I.ii.10, pp. 302-348;

**Race and Civil War**


**Wednesday, February 26:** Lecture by Christine Henderson, The Liberty Fund, “Progress and Paradox in Tocqueville’s *Memoir on Pauperism*” (4:30 pm, Watkins Room, Attendance Required)

Thursday, February 27: Christine Henderson Class Visit: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (Moodle).

Tuesday, March 4: Review, Unfinished Business, Individual meetings.

**Thursday, March 6:** Mid-Term Exam.

**Spring Break**

**PART V: THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY ON THE MIND**

Philosophic Method and General Beliefs

Tuesday, March 18: *Democracy in America*, Notice to Vol. II and II.i.1-4, pp. 399-416.

Thursday, March 20: No Class. Tessitore lecture at Christopher Newport University.

**Influence of Democracy on Religion**

Tuesday, March 25: *Democracy in America*, II.i.5-7, pp. 417-428; and Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over Soul” (Moodle).
Influence of Democracy on Science, Literature and Art


Friday, March 29: Reflection Paper III (1 page maximum) due by noon to Johns 111E.

PART VI: THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY ON SENTIMENTS

Individualism, Associations, and Self-Interest Well Understood

Tuesday, April 1: *Democracy in America*, II.ii.1, pp. 479-482 (review); II.ii.2-6, pp. 479-495; II.ii.8-9, pp. 500-506; and Wilfred McClay, “The Tocquevillean Moment . . . and Ours” (Moodle).

Wednesday, April 2: Lecture by Wilfred McClay, University of Oklahoma, “The Tocquevillean Moment . . . and Ours,” (4:30 pm, Watkins Room, Attendance Required)

Material Well-Being and the Democratic Soul


Tuesday, April 8: Pascal, *Pensées*, selections (Moodle).

Thursday, April 10: No Class (Friday class schedule because of Furman Engaged)

Friday, April 11: Reflection Paper IV(1 page maximum) due by noon to Johns 111E.

PART VII: THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY ON MORES

Family and the Relation Between the Sexes

Tuesday, April 15: *Democracy in America*, II.iii.1-2, pp. 535-541; II.iii.8-12, pp.558-576.

Agitation, Honor, Ambition, and Revolution

Thursday, April 17: *Democracy in America*, II.iii.17-19, pp. 587-604; II.iii.21, pp. 606-617.

Friday, April 18: Final Paper Proposal (1 page maximum) due by noon to Johns 111E.

PART VIII: THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY ON POLITICAL SOCIETY

Freedom and Servitude: A New Kind of Despotism?

Tuesday, April 22: *Democracy in America*, II.iv.1-4, pp. 639-650; II.iv.6-8, pp. 661-676.

Tuesday, April 29: Conclusion

Friday, May 2: Final Paper (8-11 pages) due by 12:00 noon to Johns 111E.

Monday, May 5 at 8:30 am: Scheduled Final Exam

REQUIRED TEXTS:


All other texts are accessible in PDF or Word on the course Moodle site. Please print them and bring them to class; binding them together in a large notebook is strongly suggested.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

• Regular attendance and active participation in class
• Attendance at the four public lectures synchronized with the course
• One-page reflection papers (part of participation grade)
• Midterm and End-of-course Examinations
• One 8-11 page Final Paper
• Optional Oral presentations to begin class discussions (typically in teams of two)

GRADING:

There are four major grades for this course: Participation (this is a composite of class attendance, class participation, assistance with speakers, questions at public lectures, oral presentations at the beginning of class, and one-page reflection papers), Midterm Exam, End-of-course Exam, and Final Paper. Each is worth 25% and provides the base grade for the course. However, I reserve the right to raise the base grade up one level (as explained under attendance below) in cases where a slow start is marked by steady improvement.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class participation begins with a C for regular attendance. Students with more than two unexcused cuts adversely affect their composite participation grade. Beginning with the third unexcused absence, each missed class is penalized one-third of a letter grade (A- becomes B+, B+ becomes B, etc.). I should be informed in advance of excused cuts whenever possible. Those due to illness require a note from the infirmary or relevant doctor. Conversely, steady improvement in the course can raise the quality of a student’s final grade by moving it up a notch where it is warranted (B+ can become A-, etc.).

If a student arrives after attendance is taken, s/he is likely to have been marked absent. It is your responsibility to remind me at the end of the class that you were in fact present.
OFFICE HOURS:

• Johns Hall 111E; Telephone extension: 3331
• Officially: M-TU-TH: 4:00-5:00. I am, however, in my office a lot and you are always welcome to come by. If I am busy at the moment, we will schedule a mutually convenient time to meet.

DISABILITIES:

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services (294-2320), located behind and below Earl Infirmary in Room 002. After this meeting, please set up a meeting with me. It is in your interest to attend to this EARLY in the term.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Honesty, respect, and personal responsibility are principles that guide academic life at Furman, in and out of the classroom. Academic misconduct in any form (plagiarism, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and other efforts to gain an unfair academic advantage) threatens the values of the campus community and will have severe consequences, such as failure in the course, and/or suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, it is your responsibility to consult with me so that we can dispel any and all ambiguity. Given the severity of the consequences, it is crucial that you fully understand what is expected of you in this regard. If you have any doubts, just ask! You should also be familiar with the information available at www.furman.edu/main/integrity.htm. A copy of Furman’s policy on academic dishonesty can also be found at this site.