Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*

**Political Science 931**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
**Fall 2013**

**Instructor:** R. Avramenko  
**Office:** 201e, North Hall  
**Office Hours:** T 10:00–12:00 & by appointment

**Course:** PS 931  
**Location:** White 4269  
**Time:** T 4:00 – 6:30

**Objective:**  
This course will offer students an opportunity to consider carefully Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Our analysis will consider, among other things: the relationship—historical and logical—between aristocracy and democracy; the instability of democracy; the institutional mechanisms that serve as antidotes to these instabilities; the significance of habit in Tocqueville’s thought; the case for American Exceptionalism; the importance of religion for democracy; whether Tocqueville himself recognized the limits of his “institutional” political science; and finally, whether the problem of democracy is, in the final analysis, a psychological problem. The intention is less to defend what Tocqueville says than to begin to comprehend the way in which he thought through democracy and its problems.

**Required Texts:**  

Students are **required** to purchase these particular translations and editions. This is a text-based course and full participation requires that we navigate and explore the text together—that we be on the same page, so to speak.

**Recommended Readings:**  
Pitts, Jennifer. A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France (Princeton, 2006)

Requirements:
Participation: 10%
Book Reviews (3): 30%
Syllabi (Graduate students only, due December 3) 10%
Research Paper (December 23): 50% (60% for undergraduates)

Participation:
The course will proceed as a seminar. This means its effectiveness depends on two things: reading and participation. The grading schema is therefore designed to encourage both. The participation is based on attendance, preparedness, and participation in discussion. Carefully reading the assigned material—which has been kept to a very reasonable level—before each class will go far to ensuring a full participation grade.

Book Reviews:
Through the semester, each student will read (at least) three scholarly books on the thought of Tocqueville and provide the class with a reviews of each. The objective of these reviews is informative and critical. The 3-4 page review will inform the class of a) the general argument the author makes, b) where the book fits in Tocqueville scholarship and/or political theory as a discipline, and c) the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Students will disseminate this review to the class, via e-mail, by 9:00 pm on the Sunday preceding class.

Syllabi:
Near the end of the semester, graduate students will create two syllabi. These syllabi will demonstrate how they would teach a course on Tocqueville and/or Tocquevillian themes. One syllabus shall be for a graduate level class, the other for undergraduate. The syllabi should polished and complete, and ready for inclusion in your teaching portfolio.

Research Paper:
A final paper (20-25 pp) is due as specified in Requirements. The topic is open. Topics will emerge during the semester as students discover issues and themes of particular interest in the thought of Alexis de Tocqueville. All topics should be discussed with me well in advance of the end of the semester. Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day.

Schedule:
Volume I:
September 3: Introduction

September 10:
1. Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Author’s Preface to the 12th Edition, Author’s Introduction
2. Schleifer, The Making of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America (all)

**September 17:**

**September 24:**

**October 1:**

**October 8:**

**October 15:**

**October 22:**

October 29:
1. *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 10 (pp. 363-407), Conclusion

November 5: Henry James, *The American* (class location TBA)

**Volume II:**

November 12:
4. Avramenko’s manuscript, on which he would welcome comments: ““The Grammar of Indifference: Tocqueville and the Language of Democracy”

November 19:

November 26:

December 3:
December 10:


**Honor Code.** This course, as all courses, demands adherence to a certain code of honor. If you plagiarize or cheat, you will receive an F for the course and be asked to leave the program.