

IDH 3931 (2683) Democracy in America

Spring 2019

Time: Monday 10:40-11:30

Location: Hume 0119

Credits: 1

Writing or Math Req: None

Gen Ed: None

Format: Discussion

Instructor: Professor David Hackett

Office: 122 Anderson

Phone: 273-2929

Email: dhackett@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Monday 12:00-2:00pm

Required Text:

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000)

Workload:

- 1) read on average 50 pages a week from the text
- 2) twice write a 1-3 page summary of a reading and help lead the discussion
- 3) write a 10 page reflection paper

Attendance:

Required (One unexcused absence is permitted, after that your final grade will be reduced one third, e.g. B+ to B, for every unexcused absence)

Description

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is one of those classic books to which everyone refers, some read in sections, but nobody appears to read this 800 page, two volume text as a whole. In this course we will together read our way through this epic tome while, along the way, work to place the book into the context of challenges to democracy in this Trump Era.

A particular emphasis will be to compare and contrast Tocqueville's understanding of American democracy with Trump's understanding as revealed through his ongoing actions.

Universally applauded today as a prophetic analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy, Tocqueville's 1830's chronicle was the result of his efforts to see and learn from an American democracy in the making. Having seen the failures of a democratic government in his native France, Tocqueville wanted to study an American democracy that he believed was stable and prosperous in order to gain insights into how it worked. The first volume, the book's more optimistic part, focuses on the structure of government and the preservation of liberty amid conditions of growing equality. The second volume is largely concerned with the effects of a democratic mentality on the ideas and mores of the developing society. Through his wide-ranging observations and analyses Tocqueville offers a concerned

assessment of democracy's prospects, dwelling on the disproportionate power of the legislature as well as overreaching demands for greater equality, individualism, and economic prosperity to the detriment of the whole. At the same time, he spends considerable time underscoring the elements that work against these trends, including an independent judiciary, robust executive branch, local self-government, religion, well-educated women, voluntary associations and freedom of the press.

Assignments:

- 1) each week we will all read a section of the book.
- 2) In addition, each week two students will be assigned responsibility for writing a brief (1-3 page) summary of the critical points in part of that assigned reading. This summary should be emailed to me ahead of class. This written responsibility for each week's reading will be rotated among participants so that each week one or two students will be first among equals in analyzing the reading.
- 3) At the end of the semester, each student will be responsible for preparing a 10 page reflection paper that integrates a particular theme from the reading with their particular understandings.

Class Schedule and Assignments TBD