Tocqueville’s America

Alexis Charles Henri Clerel de Tocqueville (1805-1859)

- French politician and writer who visited America in 1831 (with Beaumont) to study penal system
- Nine months → NYC, Boston, Ohio, Michigan Territory, Mississippi River, New Orleans, Alabama, DC
- Wanted to prepare France for transition from monarchial past to democratic future
- Other Europeans visited America
  - Frances Trollope (Great Britain) → Domestic Manners of Americans (1834)
  - Gustave de Beaumont (France) → Marie, or Slavery in the United States (1835)
  - Charles Dickens (Great Britain) → American Notes (1842)

Democracy in America (1835 & 1840)

- “The whole society seems to have turned into one middle class.”
  ➢ There were fewer distinctions between the rich and the poor in America than in Europe
- “A man builds his house…and sells it before the roof is on.”
  ➢ Americans were restless, and in particular they were moving westward
- “The whole society is a factory.”
  ➢ Almost all Americans worked for a living, many of the jobs outside the home
- “A sort of equality reigns around the domestic hearth.”
  ➢ Since more men worked outside the home, women’s control over household affairs increased
- “[There is] no country in the world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over...men.”
  ➢ Tocqueville witnessed the success of the evangelists of the Second Great Awakening
- “Americans of all ages…are forever joining associations.”
  ➢ Americans joined groups which supported charities, reforms, and self-improvement
- “[The Indians] have no longer a country, and soon will not be a people.”
  ➢ He saw old, sick, and wounded Choctaws forced across Mississippi River during mid-winter
- “I know of no country...where the love of money has taken a stronger hold on the affections of men.”
  ➢ Americans were relentless in their pursuit of wealth
- “The citizens subject to the law are protected by it; they…cease to be free when they become wicked.”
  ➢ The American judiciary protected the innocent but dealt firmly (even harshly) with the guilty
Transcendentalism

- Philosophical, literary, and social movement of the 1830s and 1840s
- European Romanticism ≠ American Transcendentalism (≠ the Enlightenment)
- Truth "transcends" (= goes beyond; rises above) the senses
  - Truth = in nature and via personal emotion, imagination, and intuition
  - Truth ≠ through reasoning, doctrine, or mere observation
- Stressed ideals of optimism, freedom, self-reliance; ran counter to authority, tradition, institutions
- Felt that inspiration and aspiration were at the heart of all achievement
- Exalted the dignity of the individual; emphasized living a simple life (in touch with nature)
- Believed personal morality, defined by the individual, was superior to laws of the gov’t
- Advocated various humanitarian reforms (e.g. treatment of disabled, women’s rights, abolitionism)
- Rooted in the Unitarian Church (liberal Christianity esp. strong in NE among wealthy & well-educated)
- Former Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson → “The American Scholar” speech (Harvard, 1837)
  - Man of action, of nature, of risk and endeavor
  - Should break from European modes of thought and strive to open new frontiers of knowledge
  - Pursue new intellectual paths as boldly as patriots had sought political independence
- Margaret Fuller → editor of The Dial, magazine of the Transcendentalists

Literature

- Leading Transcendentalist writers
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) → see above
  - Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
    - Lived at Walden Pond on Emerson’s land (near Concord) as a retreat from civilization
    - Walden (1854) capsuled his love of nature (= “the masterpiece of Transcendentalism”)
    - On the Duty of Civil Disobedience (1849): “That gov’t is best which governs least”
    - Emerson visited Thoreau in jail: “Why are you here?” Reply: “Why are you not here?”
    - Writings inspired Mahatma Gandhi (resistance) & Martin Luther King, Jr. (nonviolence)
Major critics of Transcendentalism (held dark view of human nature)

- Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)
  - The Scarlet Letter (1850) and The House of the Seven Gables (1851)
  - Viewed the Transcendentalists' principal of faith in self as mere unbridled egotism
- Herman Melville (1819-1892)
  - Moby Dick (1851), recognized by many as America's greatest novel
  - Called Transcendentalism "gibberish"

Other great American authors

- James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)
  - Became America's first novelist after wife challenged him to write
  - Series of five novels known as the Leatherstocking Tales (hero is Natty Bumppo)
  - Most famous was The Last of the Mohicans (set during the French and Indian War)
  - Theme of romanticism = civilization corrupt; wilderness (inc. Indians) noble & natural
- Washington Irving (1783-1859) → "Rip Van Winkle" & "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
- Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
  - Wrote poetry; perfected the detective story and the horror tale
  - “The Raven,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Pit and the Pendulum”

Other great American poets

- Walt Whitman (1819-1892) → Leaves of Grass (1848 thru 1892)
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)
  - Professor at Harvard known for his epic poems on American themes
  - The Song of Hiawatha & The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere
- John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1882) → poems critical of inhumanity, injustice, intolerance
**The Second Great Awakening**

- Swept the United States after 1790 and lasted into the early 1830s
- Presented optimistic view of mankind’s situation
  - Rejected idea that God fully determined one’s salvation or damnation
  - Stressed individual responsibility for the afterlife (and in the meantime, for betterment of society)
- Paralleled Jacksonian glorification of the common man (= individualism, democracy, equality, optimism)
- Outdoor camp meetings (aka revivals) might last several days and draw crowds of 25,000+
- Charles Grandison Finney most famous evangelist of the late Second Great Awakening
  - Prayed for sinners by name
  - Used “anxious bench” for parishioners struggling in their faith
- Baptists and Methodists benefited the most (and because they welcomed blacks)
  - Circuit riders = traveling frontier preachers (esp. Methodists)
  - “The devil hates the Methodist because they sing and shout the best”
  - Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Unitarians supported by wealthy & educated
- Formation of black churches
  - African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816)
  - Suppressed in the South after 1820
- Unleashed cascade of reform (e.g. temperance, education, women’s rights, abolitionism)

**Utopian Experiments**

- Attempted to replace mainstream American society with extreme spiritual unity and group cooperation
- Whether religious or secular, shared optimism of perfectionism and millennialism
- “Utopia” = derived from two Greek words meaning “a good place” and “no such place”
- Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516)
- None particularly successful (no agreement on philosophies and operating methods)
Utopian Experiments (cont’d)

- Shakers (aka United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing) → Ann Lee (1770s)
  - Series of religious visions revealed female side of the divinity
  - Most prevalent in the Northeast & Northwest (first commune at New Lebanon, NY, in 1787)
  - Formed first commune at New Lebanon, New York, in 1787
  - Movement’s greatest growth came years later (6,000 members in 1840, more female than male)
  - Sexes remained largely separated and celibate because end of the world was at hand
  - Shakerism was meant as refuge from “perversions of marriage” and its “gross abuses”
  - Name derived from ritual in which followers shake free of sin while chanting and dancing
  - Women afforded unusual authority and equality, inc. church leadership roles
  - Shakers known for cleanliness and order, hard work, simple means
  - Without natural increase, membership declined after 1850
  - Small contingent still exists today (split between two factions known as Salts and Peppers)

- Rappites (aka Harmony Society) → George Rapp (1805)
  - Left Germany with ≈600 followers and est’d community of Harmony, Pennsylvania
  - Held property in common, practiced celibacy, believed the millennium was imminent
  - Later headed west, then returned to establish new commune called Economy (near Pittsburgh)
  - New Harmony, Indiana, est’d by Robert Owen in 1825 (remnants of Rapp’s western settlement)
  - Intended as a “Village of Cooperation” (equal work and equal benefit)
  - Owen believed environmental surroundings determined human character
  - Failed after just two years because most of the 900 inhabitants lacked skills and commitment
  - American wages too high, land too cheap, individualism too strong for socialist ventures
Utopian Experiments (cont’d)

- Fourierist colonies → Charles Fourier (1840s)
  - French sociologist who believed natural inclinations of man could result in social harmony
  - Society should be organized into phalanxes (= economic units of 1,620 people each)
  - People would live in a community building and divide total work among them
  - Several dozen Fourierist colonies est’d in America; none lasted significantly

- Oneida Community (aka Putney Association) → John Humphrey Noyes (1848)
  - Formed in Vermont; later relocated in upstate New York
  - God was not vengeful, but benign deity who wanted humans to be happy
  - Key to happiness was suppression of selfishness (e.g. land, sexual partners, etc.)
  - Doctrine of “complex marriage” = communal sexual relations (upon approval)
    - Women protected from male lust and delivered from traditional bonds of family
    - Planned reproduction by selecting parents to produce morally perfect children
    - Children raised communally, often seeing little of their biological parents
  - Internal dispute in 1879 drove Noyes from power and dissolved the community
  - Oneidans became a company specializing in manufacture of tableware (under Noyes’s son)
  - Annual stockholders’ meetings now take place on the grounds of the former commune

- Brook Farm → George Ripley (1841)
  - Transcendentalist community near Boston planned for 24 residents
  - Goal was "a society of…intelligent and cultivated persons…living…wholesome and simple life"
  - Ripley attached positive connotation to “leisure” (≠ lazy, shiftless, unmotivated, irresponsible)
  - Once described by Ralph Waldo Emerson as “a perpetual picnic”
  - Nathaniel Hawthorne visited for several months in 1841
    - Sought solitude to write, but instead performed chores for ten hours each day
    - Expressed displeasure in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)
  - Closed in 1849 after fire destroyed the main building a few years earlier
**Reform Movements**

- Jacksonian era produced greatest number of significant reform movements in American history
- Grew out of revivals of the Second Great Awakening, with emphasis on doctrine of good works
- Romanticism, which professed unlimited potential of each individual, also strengthened reform
- Abolition of slavery → Thirteenth Amendment (1865)
  - Political issues
    - Generally avoided at Constitutional Convention
    - Invention of cotton gin by Eli Whitney (1793) made cotton King in the South
    - Number of slaves states vs. free states
    - Popular sovereignty (Lewis Cass of Michigan) → led to “Bleeding Kansas” during 1850s
    - Argued as states’ rights issue by the South (esp. John C. Calhoun of SC)
    - Inconsistent enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act by northern states
  - American Colonization Society (1817)
    - Gradual emancipation, compensation to owners, deportation to Africa for resettlement
    - Purchased land and est’d the Republic of Liberia (capital = Monrovia)
  - Slave rebellions → feared by southerners; sporadic; usually abortive; swift & severe punishment
    - Denmark Vesey (South Carolina, 1822)
    - Nat Turner (Virginia, 1831)
    - *Amistad* (Cuba / Connecticut, 1839)
  - Underground Railroad
    - Esp. helpful to slaves in Upper South
    - 50-70,000 total slaves escaped (most to Canada)
    - Most famous “conductor” was Harriet Tubman (escaped slavery in 1849)
    - Tubman made 19 trips, guiding 300 slaves to freedom
Extremism vs. moderation

- William Lloyd Garrison → demanded immediate end to slavery in *The Liberator*
- Benjamin Lundy → Quaker who favored persuasion over interference by fed’l gov’t
- Frederick Douglass → worked patiently within the system for black freedom & equality

Liberty Party (1840)

- Arthur & Lewis Tappen (NY businessmen) and Theodore Dwight Weld (minister)
- Wanted universal emancipation introduced gradually through legislation
- Presidential candidate (& 1944) was James G. Birney, former Kentucky slaveholder

Penitentiary reform instituted in Pennsylvania and New York during 1820s

- Philadelphia System → strict solitary confinement
  - Strict solitary confinement
  - Prisoners could reflect on wrongdoings and eventually reform their ways
  - Made “the deepest impression on the soul of the convict” (Tocqueville)

- Auburn System → limited social contact
  - Prisoners worked in shops and quarries (absolute silence req’d)
  - Floggings administered for slightest offenses
  - Regular moral and religious instruction provided
  - Made the prisoner “more comfortable to the habits of man in society” (Tocqueville)

Mental asylums → Dorothea Dix of Massachusetts

Physically disabled → Thomas Gallaudet (deaf) and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe (blind)

Temperance → Eighteenth Amendment (1919) and reversed by the Twenty-first Amendment (1933)

- Drinking traditionally part of men’s lives; excessive drinking an increasing problem
- Goals inc. complete abstinence and prohibition of sale
- Maine was the first state to pass legislation affecting alcohol consumption (1851)
- By 1855 dozen other states passed laws based on Maine’s example
- Lyman Beecher and Mary Vaughan
 Reform Movements (cont’d)

- Women’s Rights → Nineteenth Amendment (1920)
  - Often closely tied with abolitionist crusade and temperance movement
  - Abigail Adams urged her husband in 1776:
    - “…remember the ladies, and be more generous…to them than your ancestors”
    - “Do not put such unlimited powers into the hands of husbands…”
    - Began referring to the Adams’s farm as “ours” instead of “yours”
  - New Jersey’s 1776 constitution enfranchised women who met property requirements
    - Male protest: “The woman’s [task is] to direct the wheel & loom, not to direct the nation”
    - New state law in 1807 limited the vote to “free white male citizens”
  - Sarah (1792-1873) and Angelina Grimké (1805-1879)
    - Sisters within South Carolina slaveholding family
    - Moved north, became Quakers, spoke for abolitionism and women’s rights
  - Seneca Falls Convention (1848) → considered start of women’s rights movement in America
    - 240 men and women attended the New York conference
    - Organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott
    - Issued the Declaration of Sentiments (patterned after Declaration of Independence)
  - Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)
    - Most famous advocate for women’s rights
    - Also worked for abolitionism and temperance
  - Cult of Domesticity → the middle-class home becomes increasingly a female domain
    - Due in part to the workplace growing more and more separate from the household
    - Wife & mother to dispense love & moral guidelines to husband & children
    - Women held to higher standard (aka double standard) of sexual purity
    - Privacy of family (within the home) more and more prevalent
    - Overall positive = strengthened self-esteem of women
    - Overall negative = reinforced dominant role of men in society
The Cult of Domesticity. America's industrial revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century impacted the family structure. Not only did married couples produce fewer children, husbands were expected to be the family’s sole wage earner and concern themselves with worldly business while wives assumed domestic duties. Child rearing fell within the wives’ sphere and occupied time that earlier generations of mothers had devoted to tasks such as weaving, sewing, and farm chores. Hence, the middle-class home was profoundly transformed from a productive unit to a refuge from the world.

Education

- Common-school movement = goal was tax-funded, state-supervised schools with well-trained teachers
  - Premise was belief that gov’t based on democratic rule req’d an educated public
  - By the 1850s every state provided free elementary schooling (in principle)
  - Brought Americans of different economic status and ethnicity into mutually beneficial contact
  - Catholics opposed to sending children to public (Protestant) schools est’d parochial schools
- Horace Mann → Massachusetts lawyer who became the pioneer in American education reform
  - Drafted law creating state school board in 1837
  - Est’d minimum-length school year of six months
  - Advocated professional teacher training
  - Doubled teachers’ salaries (pay discrepancy between male and female remained)
  - Expanded curriculum (inc. history)
Education (cont’d)

- Henry Barnard → held educational posts in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York in 1840s and 1850s
- William H. McGuffey → teacher and minister from Ohio who published school reading books in 1830s
  - Blended Christian piety and virtues of hard work
  - Stressed industry, punctuality, sobriety, frugality as well as the “three Rs”
  - Underlying message = “God has given you minds which are capable of indefinite improvement”
- Jim Nayzium → advocated that schools should offer physical activities along with intellectual subjects
- Educational opportunities for women → considered unable to compete intellectually with males
  - First female high school was Troy Female Seminary (NY), est’d by Emma Hunt Willard in 1821
  - Oberlin College (Ohio) became America’s first coeducational college (1837)
  - First American college for women only was Mount Holyoke (Mass), founded by Mary Lyon
- Educational opportunities for blacks → considered unable to compete intellectually with whites
  - Alexander Twilight was first black college grad (Middlebury College in Vermont) in 1823
  - Mary Jane Patterson was first female black college grad (Oberlin) in 1862
- Lyceums = mutual improvement societies
  - Equivalent of today’s adult continuing education programs
  - First started in Massachusetts by Josiah Holbrook in 1826; thousands followed
- North → ≈70% of kids enrolled in schools by 1860, but attendance was irregular for many
- South → ≈1/3 of all white children enrolled (blacks barred from education)
- West → population highly dispersed, hence many children had no access whatever to schools
- Literacy rate in 1860 among world’s highest (North 94%; South 83% of whites, 58% total population)
- Prominent historians
  - George Bancroft (aka “father of American history”) → 10-volume History of the United States
  - William Hickling Prescott → Spain and her North American empire
  - Francis Parkman → struggle between France and Great Britain for control of North America
Artistic Achievements

- Architecturally, little of note during first half of 1800s (continued to imitate European structures)
  - Thomas Jefferson's work as good as any (Monticello and some Univ of Virginia buildings)
  - Charles Bullfinch (1763-1844) developed Federal style, used extensively in Boston
  - American Gothic style popular (James Renwick designed Smithsonian Institution)
- Painting, as well, rather limited
  - Contrary to hustle and bustle of American society
  - Viewed by many as waste of time, even obscene
- John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) → Bostonian portrait painter of wealthy New Englanders
- Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828) → Rhode Islander known for several portraits of George Washington
- Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827) → Marylander who also painted numerous of Washington
- John Trumbull (1756-1843) → Revolutionary War veteran famous for his paintings of the period
- George Catlin (1796-1872) → paintings specialized in the study of Indians and tribal life
- Hudson River School emphasized nature in paintings
  - Large landscapes of America's countryside
  - To art what transcendentalists were to literature
- Nathaniel Currier & James Merritt Ives (mid 1800s) → lithographs of American life, manners, history
- Music beginning to escape restraints of Puritanism
  - American minstrel shows became popular
    - Dan Emmett and his Virginia Minstrels opened at the Bowery Theater in NYC (1843)
    - Blackened faces to resemble slave hands (racial stereotype would be offensive today)
    - Traded comic dialogue, sang songs ("Dixie"), danced
    - Eventually gave way to vaudeville at end of century
  - Stephen Foster (1826-1864) → "My Old Kentucky Home," "Oh! Susanna," "Camptown Races"
Science

  - Treated young Canadian woodsman in 1822 accidentally shot in abdomen
  - Conducted many experiments on the digestive system (wound never completely closed)
  - *Experiments and Observations on the Gastric Juices and the Physiology of Digestion* (1833)
- Medical science still elementary
  - Life expectancy ≈ 40 years for white person born in 1850 (less for blacks)
  - "Toss all the medicines into the sea, and humans would be better off and the fish worse off"
  - Laughing gas and anesthesia came about in the 1840s
- Samuel F. B. Morse → invented telegraph in 1837, first instantaneous electronic communicator
- Maria Mitchell → librarian in Nantucket, Massachusetts, who calculated position of a new comet in 1847
- John J. Audubon → ornithologist, naturalist, artist
  - *Birds of America* wonderfully illustrated
  - Audubon Society (for protection of birds) named after him

Transportation

- Steamboat
  - Robert Fulton’s *North River Steamboat of Clermont* launched on Hudson River in 1807
    - Not an invention of Fulton; none of its elements were singularly new
    - However, able to form engine, boiler, paddle wheels, hull into efficient machine
  - Chugged at 5 mph, which is faster than sailing vessels could average
  - Strengthened ties between South and West
  - *General Pike* (1819) set standard for floating palaces (inc. marble columns, carpeting)
  - Countless steamboats on Mississippi River by 1830
- Internal improvements = upgrading of transportation facilities during early 1800s (inc. roads and canals)
  - Constitutional argument over gov’t funding
  - Maysville Road → Henry Clay & John C. Calhoun vs. Andrew Jackson (1830)
• Old National Road (aka Cumberland Road)
  ✓ Stone-based, gravel-topped highway constructed during 1811-1818
  ✓ From Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, Virginia (then Vandalia, Ohio, by 1852)
  ✓ Most important east-west land route between eastern United States and Ohio Valley
  ✓ Lancaster Turnpike → 60+ miles from Philadelphia to Lancaster
  ✓ Turnpike = road built by private companies or states which charged a fee for use

• Erie Canal
  ✓ Advantage = canals more expensive than roads to build, but able to move much larger cargoes
  ✓ Vigorously promoted by Gov. DeWitt Clinton (hence, called “Clinton’s Big Ditch” by skeptics)
  ✓ Goods placed on barges drawn by mules walking on towpaths along banks of the canal
  ✓ Constructed during 1817-1825 at cost of $7 million; Benjamin Wright chief engineer
  ✓ Linked Great Lakes with NYC and the Atlantic Ocean; total of 350+ miles
  ✓ Originally four feet deep (later seven) and 40 feet wide (later 70)
  ✓ Feverish canal construction followed (3,300 total miles by 1840)
  ✓ Canal era ended rather abruptly in early 1850s (thanks largely to railroads)

• Railroads
  ✓ Advantage = canals dependent on waterways, but track could potentially trace any route
  ✓ The railroad was not an American invention (British)
  ✓ Peter Cooper’s Tom Thumb locomotive steamed along 13 miles of track in 1830
  ✓ Baltimore & Ohio was America’s first railroad company
  ✓ ≈9,000 miles of railroad by 1850; ≈31,000 by 1860 (mostly in the industrial North)
  ✓ Northern and southern railways connected at only one place (Bowling Green, Kentucky)
  ✓ Early railroads operated on a regional basis only; no long-distance service until 1850s
  ✓ Initial problems = different gauges, poorly engineered curves and slopes, weak rails
  ✓ First transcontinental railroad completed in 1869 (Pacific Railway Act of 1862)
  ✓ America’s first true industry; responsible for growth of other industries
National Politics

- The White House
  - John Quincy Adams (Massachusetts) → Democratic-Republican → 1825-1829
  - Andrew Jackson (Tennessee) → Democrat → 1829-1837
  - Martin Van Buren (New York) → Democrat → 1837-1841
  - William Henry Harrison (Ohio) → Whig → 1841
  - John Tyler (Virginia) → Whig → 1841-1845
  - James K. Polk (Tennessee) → Democrat → 1845-1849
  - Zachary Taylor (Louisiana) → Whig → 1849-1850

- The “Great Triumvirate”
  - John C. Calhoun (South Carolina) → Unionist who became obsessed with “states’ rights” issue
  - Henry Clay (Kentucky) → known as the “Great Compromiser”
  - Daniel Webster (New Hampshire & Massachusetts) → believed in upholding the Union

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**Development of America’s Two-Party System**
Democracy in America, Volumes One and Two by Alexis de Tocqueville, trans. Henry Reeve is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University. This Portable Document file is furnished free and without any charge of any kind. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat and political thinker who came to America in 1830 to see "What a great Republic looks like." He spent nine months seeing as much of the young country as possible. Tocqueville later wrote the great classic book Democracy in America, which I shall summarize.