Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Political Science 506 & ILS 371
Spring 2017

Instructor: Richard Avramenko
Office: 203 Meiklejohn House
Office Hours: W 2:00 – 3:30

**Course:** PS 506/ILS 371
**Location:** Van Vleck B325
**Time:** W 4:00 – 6:30

**Objective:**
This course offers 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 taste in Tocqueville’s thought; the case for American Exceptionalism; the place of religion in democracy; whether Tocqueville himself recognized the limits of his “institutional” political science; and finally, the prospects for democracy and democratization around the globe. The intention is less to defend what Tocqueville says than to comprehend how he thought through democracy and its problems. Finally, we will explore how Tocqueville’s thinking can be brought to bear on our contemporary political predicaments.

**Required Texts:**

Students are **required** to purchase these translations/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. Students must bring the relevant text to each class.

**Requirements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation:</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>94 % + ⇒ A</th>
<th>73-77 ⇒ C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Midterm Paper (4-6pp):</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>88-93 ⇒ AB</td>
<td>68-72 ⇒ D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Midterm Paper (4-6pp):</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>83 -87 ⇒ B</td>
<td>Else ⇒ F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper (10pp):</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>78-82 ⇒ BC</td>
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**Participation:**
The course is a seminar. Effective seminars depend on two things: reading and participation. The grading schema is therefore designed to encourage both. The participation grade is based on
attendance, preparedness, and participation in discussion. Carefully reading the assigned material before each class will go far to ensuring full participation grades.

**Papers:**
The topics for the midterm papers will be disseminated a week prior to their due date. The term paper is the most important part of the course. It will be due on the date of the registrar-scheduled final; the topic is open and will emerge during the semester as students discover issues of particular interest. All term paper topics, however, need to be approved in consultation with me. Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day.

**Itinerary:**

**Volume I**

January 18: Introduction (watch *The Wild Bunch*)
February 1: Vol. I, Part I. Chs. 4, 5, 6 (pp. 61-70, 87-105), Ch. 8 (121-138, 149-170)
February 8: Vol. I, Part II, Chs.1-5 (174-230)
February 15: Vol. I, Part II, Chs. 6-8 (231-276), Ch. 9 (277-315)
February 22: Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 10 (316-407), Conclusion (*First mid-term paper due*)
March 1: Henry James, *The American*

**Volume II:**

March 15: Conversation/Film day
March 22: Spring Break
April: 5: Charles Murray, *Coming Apart* (selections)
April 12: Vol. II, Part III, Chs. 1-5 (561-580), Chs. 8-14 (585-608)
April 19: Vol. II, Part III, Chs. 15-26 (609-664) (*Second midterm paper due*)
April 26: Vol. II, Part IV, Chs. 1-4, 6-8
May 3: Nahid Rachlin, *Foreigner*
May TBA: *Final paper due*

**Grades.** Upon return of papers, I will not discuss your grade for at least 48 hours. If, after two days, you would like to discuss your grade, please schedule an appointment with me. You must provide a written memo detailing how and why you think your grade ought to be different than assigned. I will evaluate your memo, reread the paper/exam and determine whether the grade was accurate. There are no further appeals.

**Honor Code.** This course demands adherence to a certain code of honor. As such, I will construe all cheating in this class as a personal insult. Since it is no longer acceptable to get satisfaction in a duel, I will recur to a less-than-honorable action: I’ll tell on you and fail you. In short, plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize or cheat, you will receive an F for the course and the case will be referred to the Dean’s Office. There are no exceptions. I’m ruthless on this matter.