

TOCQUEVILLE, MILL, AND THE AMERICAN GENTRY*

James T. KLOPPENBERG

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* continues to enjoy a position of prominence in American culture. But in much of the historical scholarship written on early America, the larger topic of democracy has been displaced. In this essay I discuss the reasons for both of those phenomena, for the continuing fascination with Tocqueville in the culture at large, and for the less central position his argument concerning American democracy enjoys among historians of early America.

In 2005, the year in which multiple academic conferences commemorated the bicentennial of Tocqueville's birth, President George W. Bush observed that "de Tocqueville, the Frenchman who came to America in the early 1800s, really figured out America in a unique way." Knowing his tendency to mangle most of the ideas he touches, any historians in the audience must have cringed at the thought of what would come next.

* Selected portions of this essay derive from James T. Kloppenberg, "Life Everlasting: Tocqueville in America," in Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Page references in the text of the article are to the J. P. Mayer edition of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969). This long-standard edition is soon to be eclipsed by the Library of America edition, translated by Arthur Goldhammer and edited by Olivier Zunz, and by James T. Schleifer's forthcoming translation of Edward Nolla's critical edition, which includes Tocqueville's own notes and alternate passages, to be published by the Liberty Fund in 2006.

But Mr. Bush continued: Tocqueville saw that, in the President's words, "Americans form association[s] in order to channel the individualistic inputs of our society to enable people to serve a cause greater than themselves." A few days later, underscoring his apparent immersion in the arguments of *Democracy in America*, President Bush observed that Tocqueville had written about Americans who were able to "associate in a voluntary way to kind of transcend individualism."¹ Any sentence in which George Bush uses the word "transcend" must be expected to include at least a split infinitive with a folksy qualifier such as "kind of." By invoking Tocqueville, Mr. Bush placed himself in a long line of American heads of state. Every President since Dwight Eisenhower has quoted Tocqueville in public addresses. Both Republicans and Democrats have found in *Democracy in America* wisdom that they have used to provide a patina of culture, or at least an illusion of historical depth, for a dizzying range of partisan arguments. In recent years, both Newt Gingrich and Pat Buchanan on the right and both Bill Clinton and Hilary Clinton on what passes for the left in American politics have quoted Tocqueville.

That fascination is shared by political theorists in the United States. Harvey Mansfield, among the most visible partisans of conservative ideas on the faculty of Harvard University, has published, together with Delba Winthrop, a new and controversial translation of *Democracy in America*. In their Introduction, Mansfield and Winthrop portray Tocqueville as a critic of democracy who saw the need for order and authority. Commentators have indicated the ways in which this edition subtly claims Tocqueville as a man of the right, a thinker useful to President Bush and his allies.² Further to the left of the fairly narrow contemporary American political spectrum, Robert Putnam frequently invokes Tocqueville as the source of his own concern with the decline of public participation in the civic sphere. Putnam contends that the decline of what he calls "social capital," which he has catalogued in countless ways, is captured in the phrase *Bowling Alone*, the title of his comprehensive study of the privatization of life in contemporary America and its consequences for democratic politics. Whereas Americans used to bowl on teams, in leagues, with friends, such sociability has been replaced by solitary television watching and internet surfing. Rebuilding the social capital Tocqueville encountered in America has become a preoccupation of

many political commentators, both conservative and liberal, in recent years.³

Outside the spheres of politics and political theory, readers of popular books and periodicals in America are subjected to a steady stream of prose written by Americans or by visitors who self-consciously follow in Tocqueville's footsteps, either by revisiting some of the stops on his trip around the United States or by imitating what they see as his effort to extract universal lessons about democracy from one or another feature of American politics and culture. The most recent of these is a multi-part series of articles in *The Atlantic* written by Bernard Henri-Levy, who conjures up deep wisdom from his brief visits to sites of profound cultural significance such as a McDonald's restaurant, a nuclear submarine, a trailer park, and the office of the political commentator William Kristol.

In American historical scholarship, on the other hand, Tocqueville and his arguments concerning the importance of democracy in England's American colonies have become rather less central. Two of the most widely read and celebrated overviews of early America published since 2000 are Alan Taylor's *American Colonies* and Jon Butler's *Becoming America*. These are fine books. Taylor has been justly praised for having incorporated Americans of many different ethnic groups and for decentering his narrative from the Atlantic seaboard and including valuable discussions of the Caribbean, the Spanish Southwest, and the vast middle of the continent where Europeans encountered American Indians. But there are only two references to democracy in Taylor's vast panorama. First, Taylor emphasizes the tight control exercised in all the English colonies by the governors appointed by the king. Such appointments enabled the crown to help local oligarchies consolidate their power over their people. They did not have to deal with what Taylor refers to dismissively as "a colonial longing for democracy" because, he assures readers, such a longing "was not evident." The second reference, longer and more detailed, concerns a feature of American life that Tocqueville missed, pirate ships, which, Taylor asserts, did operate as democracies. A reader might finish Taylor's book convinced that the only evidence of democracy in early America were the decisions of bands of self-governing pirates to rebel against their cruel captains and seize control of their ships.⁴

Jon Butler's book *Becoming America* is an equally fresh and illuminating study of topics frequently ignored by earlier historians of early America. He devotes loving attention to describing what America looked like, smelled like, and sounded like. He writes about gaudy, ungainly furniture, pigs and other livestock, and the garish colors New Englanders chose to paint the churches that we now mistakenly assume were always a tasteful white. In his chapter on politics, Butler writes a single decisive sentence: "Colonial politics was not democratic." He concedes that there was a lot of what might appear to an uninformed observer to have been active popular involvement in the public sphere. But like Taylor, Butler is at pains to insist that hereditary oligarchies managed to maintain control throughout the colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵

In this essay I will contrast those portraits of an oligarchic early America to the strikingly different image presented in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. I will try to explain the difference by looking at some of those who shaped Tocqueville's ideas, notably James Madison and Jared Sparks, and briefly compare their conceptions of democracy with the ideas of John Stuart Mill.

To Tocqueville, who as a member of the French aristocracy might be thought to have known oligarchy when he saw it, American public life seemed less oligarchic than democratic. Indeed, explaining the relative success and historical significance of American democracy for Europeans was his goal in the two volumes he published in 1835 and 1840. Many of Tocqueville's American informants, the people whose work he read and those with whom he spoke during his travels, were members of the American gentry about whom the historian Daniel Walker Howe has written brilliantly in his books on Unitarians, Whigs, and others who accomplished what he calls *The Making of the American Self*. The animating principle of these ambivalent republicans, according to Howe, was "ordered liberty."⁶ In the city of Worcester, an hour west of Boston, stands a nineteenth-century neo-classical courthouse with the following words carved in stone: "Obedience to law is liberty." It would be hard to find a clearer statement of the sensibility of the Americans that Howe has studied, the former Federalists and proto-Whigs who served as some of the most influential of Tocqueville's informants. Their complex combination of a longing for stability together with a professed

commitment to the democratic principle of self-government strongly resembled the ambivalent sensibility that Tocqueville himself developed during the 1830s and 1840s.

What were the essential components of Tocqueville's portrait of American democracy? Of course, given the richness and complexity of his analysis, no brief summary can capture it. For my purposes I will focus on two of his arguments in his first volume, then two aspects of the second volume. The idea of popular sovereignty was one of the "idées mères," to use Tocqueville's phrase, of his entire analysis. The idea that authority legitimately resides in the people rather than, say, in the monarch, or in Parliament, or in the monarch and Parliament together, was one of the central achievements of the American democratic project. Tocqueville argued that the concept of popular sovereignty could be traced back to the ideas, institutions, and behavior of people in the early towns of New England. No reader of the first volume of Tocqueville's *Democracy* can miss the emphasis on the role of the New England town in shaping American democracy. Where did that idea come from? It came from New Englanders themselves. Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont spent almost a month in Boston. They stayed at the relatively luxurious Tremont Hotel, and Tocqueville noted that Boston was "a pretty town, situated in picturesque fashion on several hills surrounded by water." The people they met, Tocqueville reported, reminded them of "the upper classes of Europe." Tocqueville seems to have felt more at home in Boston than anywhere else in America. In his words, "Here luxury and refinement prevail. Almost all the women here speak French well, and all the men we have seen so far have been to Europe. Their manners are distinguished, their conversations turn on intellectual subjects. One feels one has left behind the commercial habits and financial spirit that made New York society so common."⁷ Although Tocqueville never witnessed a New England town meeting, he came away from New England convinced that the secret to American democracy lay in that institution. The origins of American democracy could be traced back to the first settlers' practice of gathering in Puritan meeting houses and deliberating over issues of common concern. From that practice had come the idea of popular sovereignty and the institutions that embodied it.

If town government was the most prominent feature of New England and one of the sources of American democracy, the

institution of slavery in the southern states played an almost equally important part in Tocqueville's first volume. He observed the presence of economic differences in the North, but he contrasted that situation to that of the South. Economic differences between southern whites, although they did exist, did not matter nearly as much because of the existence of slavery. The effect of the American Revolution, Tocqueville argued, had been to break down the economic foundations of the southern planter aristocracy by removing the feudal institutions of entail and primogeniture that had kept it in place. That legal transformation had changed the distribution of property among southern whites, Tocqueville argued, eroding the stability of the planter aristocracy by causing estates to be divided up by successive generations. Yet that change, although it consolidated the principle of equality that Tocqueville associated with democracy, did not succeed in transforming southern culture, Tocqueville argued, because it did not remove the poison of race slavery.

One danger of democracy that Tocqueville described in volume one, of course, was the potential that a majority might become tyrannical. But that tendency seemed to him contained in America by a number of different forces: the vitality of a free press, the widespread participation of Americans in public life through voluntary political associations of various kinds, the separation of powers and the extent and layers of the federal republic, and the steadying influence of lawyers and the engagement of so many ordinary Americans in the nation's decentralized legal system.

Between the completion of volume one and the writing of volume two, however, Tocqueville visited England and his anxieties deepened. He became increasingly worried that a combination of industrialization and centralization of the sort he witnessed in both Great Britain and France might extinguish the spirit of participation that he identified in America. He offered a complex and subtle account of the process that alarmed him. The democratic inclination to concentrate on material gain, a tendency he associated with the equality and mobility that he saw in America, might end in either of two outcomes. One of these continues to haunt the contemporary left; the other haunts the right. The economic opportunities available to Americans made entrepreneurial activity more attractive than art, scholarship, or martial honor and contributed to an ever expanding

middle class. But Tocqueville warned that equality and that prosperity might lead in either of two almost equally distressing directions. If Americans lost interest in politics, if they gave up on the intermediate associations that engaged them in public affairs and concerned themselves only with material goods, then they might end up suffering from the haunting anomie of Putnam's solitary bowlers or as the passive citizen-clients who worry President Bush, people no longer able to "transcend" their individualism because they have been lulled into relying on government to do for them everything that needs to be done. Only public spiritedness, the quality that Tocqueville called "self-interest properly understood," prevented Americans' *moeurs* from deteriorating into the simple egoism that troubles Putnam. On the other hand, from President Bush's point of view, only by keeping centralized government at bay could America avoid becoming a crowd of dependent and demoralized losers. One problem identified by Tocqueville, the danger that a vibrant democratic culture might decline, has spawned markedly different diagnoses and equally different remedies.

Tocqueville's perennial appeal in American culture is due partly to the *lack* of congruence between his ideas and those prevailing in American politics at any time, which makes possible his adoption by disparate guardians eager to embrace – or, as Sheldon Wolin's recent study of Tocqueville reminds us, excoriate – him for their own purposes. By his own admission he was neither simply a democrat nor simply an aristocrat. He fits only awkwardly into our categories of Hamiltonian or Jeffersonian, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal. For that reason we characterize him, as Marvin Meyers did in the 1950s, as a "venturous conservative," or as Roger Boesche has done recently, as a "strange liberal," or as Alan Kahan has done even more recently, as an "aristocratic liberal."⁸ But for reasons Tocqueville himself made clear, even such characterizations are adequate only if they take into account both his changing perceptions over time and the extent to which his different writings reflected particular observations and varying purposes.

I think it is possible to see what Tocqueville was driving at by looking carefully at what remains more or less constant in both of the quite different volumes of his *Democracy*. It is by now generally acknowledged that these two volumes differed considerably from one another in their tone, and even in their arguments, largely because of

developments in France between 1835 and 1840 and partly because of Tocqueville's journey to the industrial cities of England. The first volume focuses on his fear that majority tyranny will stifle dissent; the second that there will be no dissent to stifle but only conformity. The first volume worries that uncontrolled passions will lead to tyranny; the second that there will be no passions to control but only torpor. The first volume registers no concern with industrialization; the second expresses Tocqueville's alarm about the dangers of a new industrial aristocracy, and so on.⁹

Given those significant differences, what, if any, are the threads connecting the two volumes? There are at least two, reciprocity and religion. First, the characteristic of American democracy that has impressed commentators on Tocqueville from the earliest to the most recent is the importance of voluntary associations. Participation in such associations prepares Americans for civic life by prompting them to focus on solving concrete problems as members of community groups of all kinds, from the most benevolent and/or ambitious to the most self-serving and/or trivial. Serving on juries, to take a central example, teaches Americans how to imagine themselves in each other's shoes.¹⁰ All of these experiences produce "self-interest properly understood," to use that crucial phrase of Tocqueville's, and prevent that quality from degenerating into either the old-fashioned egoism that earlier moralists abhorred or the equally unattractive, new-fangled individualism that Tocqueville portrays as a danger in volume two. He considered both egoism and individualism inimical to democracy.

Why did Tocqueville think voluntary associations, service on juries, and all kinds of participation in public affairs mattered so much? He certainly did not consider Americans uniquely virtuous. In fact, he refused even to associate "self-interest properly understood" with virtue, either in its republican or Christian forms.¹¹ But he did identify it closely with the practice of deliberation and the ethic of reciprocity, which he believed associational life fosters and which makes democracy work. The *experience* of associational life inclines Americans toward benevolence, or sympathy, whether they are virtuous or not. Even at the end of volume two, where Tocqueville confessed his anxiety about the threat of government centralization in democratic cultures lacking this practice of deliberation and the ethic

of reciprocity that undergirds it – democratic nations such as France – he emphasized this feature of American democracy:

It is through political associations that Americans of every station, outlook, and age day by day acquire a general taste for association and get familiar with the way to use the same. Through them large numbers see, speak, listen, and stimulate each other to carry out all sorts of undertakings in common. Then they carry these conceptions with them into the affairs of civil life and put them to a thousand uses (524).

In America, he wrote in the concluding pages of volume two, “interest as well as sympathy prompts a code of lending each other mutual assistance at need. The more similar conditions become, the more do people show this readiness of reciprocal obligation” (572).

This ideal of reciprocity, which underlay the exercise of deliberation in voluntary associations and in public life that was central to what Tocqueville meant by democracy, provides the first thread of continuity between the two volumes of *Democracy in America*. It is reciprocity that prevents a tyrannical majority from stifling dissent through the decentralization of authority in volume one; it is reciprocity, or sympathy, that prevents the decline of “self-interest properly understood” into egoism or selfish inwardness in volume two.

Tocqueville valued associational life for the same reasons James Madison did. Madison’s contributions to *The Federalist* were among the most important sources of Tocqueville’s arguments. The lessons he drew from Madison were quite different from the lessons drawn by most twentieth-century American political scientists, who see in Madison’s *Federalist* Number Ten nothing more than an account of how to manage unruly interest groups jockeying for position. Madison’s deeper insights are now more sharply in focus thanks to the later work of Marvin Meyers and the work of more recent historians such as Drew McCoy and Lance Banning. As these historians have shown, Madison, like Tocqueville, believed that as a result of participating in common projects, people learn something that enables them to see beyond – to “transcend,” as President Bush put it – the simple clash of competing interests emphasized by political scientists writing about pluralism. Through the process of confronting and filtering different ideas, clashing interests, and divergent ideals, people in associations can learn to see things from other points of view. To translate this very old insight into the hip

lexicon of contemporary cultural studies, encountering the other teaches people how to think dialogically, to appreciate the instabilities and complexities of judgment. That hope underlay Madison's commitment to federalism, just as it underlay Tocqueville's stubborn refusal to dismiss the possibility that democracy in America might survive despite the dangers it faced.¹² Tocqueville's commitment to taking seriously other ways of thinking and allowing those differences to alter one's own ideas was among the signal features of Tocqueville's own thought, an observation made forcefully by Agnès Antoine and Françoise Mélonio in the conference on Tocqueville held at Cerisy in the summer of 2005.

The other common thread connecting both of Tocqueville's volumes is the importance of religious faith. This dimension of Tocqueville's argument is more important than most American commentators in the last fifty years have appreciated. It is not clear that Tocqueville himself was religious; that vexed question may never be answered more thoroughly than it was by André Jardin in his biography of Tocqueville.¹³ But it is important to see that Tocqueville, whatever his own religious beliefs or lack thereof, thought nineteenth-century American democracy worked because of a shared commitment (at least among most white males) to the ethic of reciprocity and an orientation toward a future in which virtue would be rewarded and vice punished. From Tocqueville's perspective, the principal historical contribution of Christianity had been its revolutionary commitment to "the equality, the unity, the fraternity of all men," a commitment distinct from the prior acceptance of human inequality as inevitable. Moreover, Tocqueville insisted that even though some slave holders and their apologists professed a belief in Christianity, such ideas disgusted Christians who took seriously the brotherhood of all races. Hypocrisy, however common, should not blind us to the ideals being mocked: "my heart rebels daily at seeing the little gentlemen who pass their time in clubs and wicked places, or great knaves who are capable of any base action as well as of any act of violence, speak devoutly of *their holy religion*. I am always tempted to cry out to them: 'Be pagans with pure conduct, proud souls, and clean hands rather than Christians in this fashion.'"¹⁴ Tocqueville emphasized the importance of acknowledging the difference between those who lived according to Christian principles

and the hypocrisy of some who called themselves Christians without embracing Christ's stern ethic of love.

Tocqueville argued in *Democracy* that the close connection between civic life and religious faith, which took various forms in the wildly diverse tapestry of America's ethnic communities, was possible in America only because the separation of church and state prevented an opposition from growing between individual liberty and religious institutions of the sort that an official state religion created in France and other European nations (289). In a democratic age, according to Tocqueville, religion alone could draw people away from the materialism that might otherwise obsess them, thereby keeping alive the precious sense of mutual obligation that animated community life (445). "Despotism may be able to do without faith," Tocqueville reasoned, "but freedom cannot" (294).

In recent decades historians have underestimated the significance of this argument for the importance of religious faith, which Tocqueville advanced with reference to Pascal's wager. Some historians have faulted Tocqueville for underestimating the importance of revivalism and for paying too much attention to the exceptional views of a few New England Unitarians.¹⁵ But I think those informants, especially Jared Sparks, made a crucial difference in Tocqueville's understanding of democracy in America. Religious faith was inextricably intertwined with associational life in the structure of his argument: as his emphasis on the Puritan concept of the covenant at the beginning of volume one makes clear, he believed that Americans' practice of association embodied the ethic of reciprocity that derived from their common Christian heritage. He also saw, as we should see just as clearly, that although such an ethic in principle elevates benevolence, in practice it could and did serve to justify slavery – or lynching, or assassination – activities driven by hatred instead of sympathy. Not by invocations of religiosity, then, but by the precise nature of the activities undertaken ostensibly under its inspiration, should the value of all forms of community organizing be judged.

The dual emphasis on voluntary associations and the civic value of religious faith, which enables us to bridge the gap between the first and second volumes of Tocqueville's *Democracy*, does help to account for the renewed intensity of engagement with Tocqueville that is

apparent in much public debate in America today. Inasmuch as emphasizing the importance of reciprocity in *Democracy in America* helps focus attention on aspects of Tocqueville's analysis blurred by treatments that emphasized only his interest in individual freedom and voluntarism, it can serve to remind us of the delicate balance that characterizes his work and explains its perennial appeal. But exaggerating his emphasis on the ethic of reciprocity as the keystone of democracy would distort his arguments as much as ignoring that issue did several decades ago. If focusing on deliberation obscures the persistent realities of unequal wealth and power in America, for example, it will advance our understanding of one aspect of Tocqueville's argument only by blinding us to another: he emphasized not only the habits of the heart but also advanced a hard-headed assessment of the unsentimental calculations of self-interest that such habits must struggle to restrain and redirect. Only within the relatively equal social and economic conditions of antebellum America could the practice of deliberation and the ideal of reciprocity flourish. Under the more common conditions of inequality, Tocqueville feared, democratic behavior and democratic goals would wither.

So, where did Tocqueville's ideas concerning reciprocity and religion come from? Of course he drew on the most important French thinkers who had shaped his ideas about politics and society, thinkers ranging from Pascal through Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire to Guizot.¹⁶ But it was his reading of Madison that convinced Tocqueville American democracy was something new under the sun, a culture that made possible the survival of republican government without the small scale or the reliance on classical civic virtue that earlier writers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau had considered indispensable. Just as important as Madison's reworking of republican political theory in *The Federalist* were the insights Tocqueville derived from the people he met in America and the ideas they gave him.

Among the most important of these, I believe, were the people he met in Boston. Tocqueville talked with many New Englanders, including not only prominent merchants and preachers and writers and statesmen, but also the former President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, the current President of Harvard College, Josiah Quincy, and the future President of Harvard, Jared Sparks, who was particularly influential in shaping Tocqueville's ideas about America.

Tocqueville considered Sparks a man of rare knowledge and judgment, an assessment the self-confident Sparks seems to have shared. Sparks told Tocqueville, in a phrase that has taken on a life of its own, that "New England is the cradle of American democracy." Tocqueville not only spent a lot of time talking with Sparks, he spent even more time studying a lengthy essay Sparks sent him in response to a list of questions he sent to Sparks just before embarking on his trip to Washington.

The essay Sparks sent Tocqueville, "On the Government of Towns in New England," expanded on the arguments Sparks had made in his conversations with Tocqueville. He had observed, according to Tocqueville's notes, that the early settlers had come to New England in the seventeenth century as "republicans and religious enthusiasts." In contrast of most societies, in which authority is concentrated, these early settlers were "abandoned to our own devices, forgotten in this corner of the world." In that isolation, they existed in what Sparks called "a state of nature." Each settlement they established, beginning in Plymouth and then spreading throughout Massachusetts and into Connecticut and the rest of New England, was self-governing. "Each person, Sparks wrote, had a voice in the several councils, and all rules and decisions were established by a majority of voices. As circumstances required it, they adopted new regulations, or laws, but always upon the same principles, that is, the equal rights of each individual, and the power of a majority to control the whole." All the new towns operated, Sparks continued, "for all essential purposes, as independent republics." When they needed to unite either to fight Indians or resist the Crown, these independent republics formed themselves into a self-governing commonwealth, but their citizens retained the sovereignty they first exercised before joining together.¹⁷

Many historians, beginning with Charles Andrews and Herbert Baxter Adams in the closing years of the nineteenth century, have worked to contextualize Sparks's own views on the New England town. At the time of Tocqueville's visit, New England's former Federalists and proto-Whigs were in the midst of an important political project of their own. Concerned that they were being marginalized by the dominance of Andrew Jackson and worried about the rising power of southern democrats, they staked out a position as loyal citizens of the United States and contrasted their

own loyalty to the disunion threatened by the proclamations of states' rights beginning to rumble from the southern states. In light of those sectional tensions, historians have tended to emphasize the ulterior motives beneath the surface of Sparks's account and to reveal his desire to make New England the repository of American democratic principles and practice.

But we should look more closely. In fact the position Sparks took was inconsistent with the fetish for hierarchy, authority, and order, and the fervent proclamations of a nationalism grounded on such principles, that historians have attributed to the New England elite. Sparks located the legitimate source of authority at the local level, at a level below the state sovereignty being claimed by southerners already anxious about northern criticism of slavery. The portrait Sparks painted for Tocqueville actually ran *counter* to the positions most of his peers were taking in their critiques of their southern rivals for national political prominence.

Sparks insisted that sovereignty in America originally derived from the individual members of individual Puritan congregations, in individual New England towns. This was the key to American democracy that Sparks gave Tocqueville, and it provoked many of the most enduring features of Tocqueville's analysis, including the importance of religion, voluntarism, association, and majority rule. This doctrine of popular sovereignty and extreme decentralization – and, Tocqueville argued – this *practice* of democratic governance differed dramatically from the opposite extremes of royal sovereignty and royal centralization that he identified with his native France.¹⁸

If the argument Sparks made to Tocqueville actually ran counter to the argument we might have expected him to make as a member of the New England gentry, how can we explain it? I want to make the radical claim – a claim seldom made by a member of the American historical profession since the early 1960s – that Sparks made the argument because it was true. Jared Sparks was right. The New England town *was* the “cradle of democracy.” If so, how did Sparks discover that truth, and how has the American historical profession managed to lose it?

This is a complicated question, which I will try to answer in a book I am writing about democracy in America and Europe, so I cannot offer a complete or adequate answer in a brief essay. But here

is a sketch of the answer. Sparks was a member of the generation of Americans who first began retrieving, cataloging, and making use of the early records of colonial America. These were the antiquarians and historians who began to compile the records of early American settlement as part of a broader cultural project of telling the story of the rise of the United States. In New England, this is what they found.

When they returned to the debates over the War of 1812 with Great Britain, they found that individuals in New England towns debated – in earnest – whether or not to secede from the Union. The Hartford Convention was the most prominent example of that inclination, but it was only one of many efforts to reestablish the foundation of sovereignty in the conversations of individual citizens gathering in their town meetings. When this generation of historians looked earlier, to the debates over the ratification of the United States Constitution in the late 1780s, they found those debates occurring at the local level. Citizens insisted that they should meet to discuss, then vote to ratify, the Constitution of the United States, because sovereignty lay not with the elites meeting in Philadelphia but with them. When these historians looked even further back, to the process of writing and ratifying the state constitutions, they found countless documents emanating from town meetings throughout New England in which ordinary citizens, with haphazard spelling and an unsure grip on English grammar, nevertheless revealed a solid grasp of the principles – if not necessarily the texts of Locke and Rousseau – underlying the ideas of covenant and compact and in some cases even the rudiments of social contract theory. It was up to them, not up to those meeting in Boston or Hartford or Providence, to decide whether the new state constitutions would take effect. In the Constitution adopted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1780, the document still in force in my home state, they found the following language in the Preamble:

The body-politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals; It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good.

The Constitution itself, which was primarily the work of John Adams, provided that “All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights”; that “It is the right

as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being, the great creator and preserver of the universe." Moreover, the people authorized the legislature to require towns to maintain houses of worship and "public protestant teachers of piety religion and morality, in all cases where such provision shall not be made voluntarily." Finally, the Constitution stated the two underlying principles that authorized the entire exercise: First, "The people of this Commonwealth have the sole and exclusive right of governing themselves as a free, sovereign, and independent state" in every way that they did not expressly delegate to the United States. Second, "All power residing originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government, vested with authority, whether legislative, executive, or judicial, are their substitutes and agents, and are at all times accountable to them."¹⁹

When Sparks's generation of New England historians looked still earlier, back beyond the Massachusetts Constitution, they saw a long line of similar proclamations emanating from the town meetings of the crucial years from the 1760 through the 1770s, in which individual colonists gathered in meeting houses to debate the proper response to English policy. And at the very end of this long chain of documents, in the early seventeenth century, lay the founding charters of individual towns, and in those charters these historians found precisely the language Sparks relayed to Tocqueville. Congregations of separating and non-separating Puritans voluntarily emigrated from England, and then from the first towns established around Boston, and formed new towns. In those new towns they constituted themselves as both religious and civic communities, independent and self-governing according to the laws of God and the laws they gave themselves. Many of these founding charters, although not all of them, express precisely the sense of what they were doing that Sparks communicated to Tocqueville. In short, from the 1620s until the 1820s, the self-understanding of New Englanders remained pretty much the same: they saw themselves as Sparks saw them, as the "cradle of democracy."²⁰

What about the South? As in New England, Tocqueville relied on a combination of written sources, interviews, and his own impressions. Perhaps the most important written source was Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a book originally written in

reply to the queries of an earlier Frenchman curious about America. There Tocqueville learned about the undeniable cruelties of slavery, and from Jefferson the slaveholder he also learned about the importance of social equality to democracy. One of the first acts Jefferson recommended after he returned to Virginia from writing the Declaration of Independence in 1776 provided for the abolition of primogeniture and entail. Jefferson considered those steps essential for the success of democracy in Virginia. With primogeniture and entail, prosperous planters would consolidate their hold on wealth and power; without them, the way would be clear for ordinary farmers – ordinary white male farmers, to be sure – to live modest but autonomous lives of the sort Jefferson thought essential for democracy to thrive.

Besides his reading of Jefferson, Tocqueville learned about the South from various informants in the North even before he arrived in Baltimore and began his journey through the South. After his dinner with John Quincy Adams in Boston, at which the former President had confirmed the emphasis of Jared Sparks on what he called “the religious and political doctrines of the first founders of New England,” Adams delivered a remarkable discourse on slavery that left a lasting impression on Tocqueville. I will quote Adams’s words, as Tocqueville recorded them in his notes, at some length.

Slavery has modified the whole state of society in the South, added Mr. Adams. There the whites form a class which has all the ideas, all the passions, all the prejudices of an aristocracy, but don’t deceive yourself. Nowhere is equality among the whites greater than in the South. Here we have a great equality before the law, but it ceases absolutely in the habits of life. There are upper classes and working classes. Every white man in the South is a being equally privileged, whose destiny is to make the negroes work without working himself. We can’t conceive how far the idea that work is dishonourable has entered the spirit of the Americans of the South.... From this laziness in which the southern whites live great differences in character result. They devote themselves to bodily exercise, to hunting, to racing; they are vigorously constituted, brave, full of honour; what is called the point of honour is more delicate there than anywhere else; duels are frequent.²¹

Tocqueville learned from Adams a lesson that it took American historians generations to learn. It was the same lesson taught by another of his informants, Benjamin Richards, who was soon to begin a second term as Mayor of Philadelphia when he talked with Tocqueville. “Our republic is the triumph and the government of the

middle classes," he told Tocqueville. "In the Middle States and those of New England, for example, there exists no true tie between the people and the classes that are altogether superior," precisely the point John Quincy Adams had made. The upper classes, Richards continued, "betray but little faith in the wisdom of the people, a certain scorn for the passions of the multitude, a certain distaste for its manners; in fact, they isolate themselves." The people, in return, rarely elect such people to office. Instead "they choose candidates ordinarily from the middle classes. It is really they who govern." Except in the South and the West. There, Richards told Tocqueville, there was so much mixing and mingling that subtle gradations were impossible.²² Tocqueville's own impressions of the South confirmed that judgment. He found that the region was both very different from the rest of the nation and that divisions between upper- and lower-class whites were less pronounced, paradoxically, than in the North. Slavery Tocqueville learned to abhor; in a celebrated passage in *Democracy* he predicted it might tear the Union apart.

If Tocqueville's informants powerfully shaped his perceptions and judgments of American democracy, his own arguments just as powerfully shaped the ideas of his near contemporary John Stuart Mill. In his *Autobiography*, Mill revealed that the second most important intellectual transformation of his life commenced with his "reading, or rather study," of *Democracy in America*.²³ Just as his earlier transformation, which Mill dubbed his "mental crisis," prompted him to repudiate the relentless intellectualism of the education he received from his father James Mill and his father's friend Jeremy Bentham, so his reading of Tocqueville prompted Mill to renounce his prior faith in "pure democracy." His earlier crisis led Mill to enrich the thin atmosphere of Enlightenment rationalism in which he was brought up with an appreciation of the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of experience, a shift that manifested itself in the qualitative utilitarianism that marked his mature writings and distinguished his ethics from those of his father and Bentham. His encounters with Tocqueville's two volumes awakened him to the historical sources of American democracy, alerted him to the potential dangers of democratic excess, and inspired him to rethink the relation between cultural particularity and political institutions. Although Mill never mentioned Jared Sparks, and nowhere in the voluminous literature on Mill have I seen a reference to Sparks, the ideas Mill derived from

Tocqueville bore a striking – and, not surprisingly, previously unrecognized – resemblance to the central ideas Tocqueville derived from Sparks.

The five central themes of Mill's reviews of Tocqueville echo almost perfectly the central themes of Sparks' outline of American democracy: 1) the crucial role of citizens' participation in the original New England towns, a practice derived from Puritan congregationalism and extended to political decision making; 2) the indispensable political and moral education each citizen gains from participating in civic life; 3) the unlikelihood that anything other than the common good will emerge from decisions made by majority vote after the deliberation of well educated and independent-minded citizens; 4) the distinction between the narrow focus of individuals on their own self-interest in the economic sphere and the broadening of their sensibilities as a result of political engagement; and 5) the tight connection between the rough economic equality of citizens of moderate means and their willingness to engage each other in democratic debate and sometimes even to change their minds as a result of that experience.

Mill's anxieties about democracy became more pronounced in his review of the 1840 *Democracy*, in which he departed from Sparks and engaged the darker premonitions that shaded Tocqueville's second volume. There Mill noted the danger to liberty deriving from the conformity that would result if citizens abandoned civic engagement to concentrate entirely on material gain. There he worried – as Tocqueville did after his return from industrializing England – that such an outcome was becoming increasingly likely. The reason, Mill concluded, was not so much “democracy” as it was the growing dominance of a “commercial class” as apparent in “aristocratic England” as in democratic America.²⁴

To escape this danger Mill retreated to the preoccupations that would characterize his writings in the 1840s and 1850s. First came the celebration of individual freedom that marks his classic meditation *On Liberty*. Against the threat of conformity, against the danger posed by the tyranny of the majority, Mill urged individuals to safeguard personal freedom and counseled resisting government intrusion and regulation except in extreme cases. In his *Considerations on Representative Government*, a book that shows even more fully his worries about

democratic despotism, he advocated proportional representation and plural voting to amplify the voices of the educated segments of British society and open voting so that individuals might be shamed in public if they chose their own self-interest over the common good.

These qualifications of Mill's earlier commitment to "pure democracy" reflected his concern that the "commercial society" of his day was driving individuals further and further from the civic virtue of ancient Athens and headlong toward a dog-eat-dog competition from which only education could redeem them. From Mill's perspective, as from Sparks's and Tocqueville's, voting was but a piece of the democratic puzzle. Of much greater concern were the social and cultural practices that either predisposed people to concern themselves with each other and with public life or encouraged them to narrow their interests to themselves alone. Creating a more vibrant civic life mattered profoundly, Mill argued, because the form of government in which people live is "the most powerful of the influences, except their religious belief, which make them what they are, and enable them to become what they may be."²⁵ Jared Sparks could not have said it better.

Despite these significant qualifications, Mill vigorously defended democracy as the best form of government. His reasons, in the context of the writings of Sparks and Tocqueville, are striking. In the "ordinary life" of most people, Mill observed, there is little "to give any largeness either to their conceptions or to their sentiments." Their jobs are merely "routine," exercises of "self-interest in the most elementary form, the satisfaction of daily wants." In such circumstances "neither the thing done, nor the process of doing it, introduces the mind to thoughts or feelings extending beyond individuals." Only public participation can free individuals from such confinement. In the civic sphere the citizen must "weigh interests not his own" and "is guided, in case of conflicting claims, by another rule than his private partialities, to apply, at every turn, principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the common good." Without such experiences, individuals are left on their own, with "no unselfish sentiment of identification with the public. Every thought or feeling, either of interest or of duty, is absorbed in the individual and in the family." In those circumstances "the individual never thinks of any collective interest." Mill's goal was the fullest possible development of the moral potential of all individuals, and he

considered that development possible only in democracy: "the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state, is one in which the whole people participate." Any limitations on suffrage or other participation should be temporary, enduring only until education becomes universal. From that point on, "any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful," and "participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow," including eventually not only suffrage and service on juries but "participation in the details of judicial and administrative business." The goal, in Mill's words, should be "the utmost possible publicity and liberty of discussion, whereby not merely a few individual in succession, but the whole public, are made, to a certain extent, participants in the government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise derivable from it."²⁶

By the mid-1860s Mill had repudiated the unpopular mechanisms for limiting participation to the educated that he advanced in *Representative Government*. His brief advocacy of such a qualified democracy has made it easy for Mill's critics — as it has been for the critics of Tocqueville, who have emphasized his similar hesitations about universal suffrage — to label Mill an elitist, a Platonist, an anti-democrat. Historians, however, must attend to Mill's continuing development. After publishing *Representative Government* Mill became more concerned with a variety of other causes, including the end of slavery in the United States, the extension of the suffrage to women, and the reasons why the threat posed by commercial civilization had to be met by what has been called economic democracy or democratic socialism. Mill admitted in his *Autobiography* that "so long as education continues to be so wretchedly imperfect," he and his wife Harriet Taylor "dreaded the ignorance and especially the selfishness and brutality of the masses." But by the end of his life, not only was Mill advocating a national system of education such as Sparks identified as the "foundation" of republican institutions, he also "looked forward to the time when society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat, will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all; when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concern on an acknowledged principle of justice." In other words, Mill came to believe that democracy would

be possible only under conditions of relative economic and social equality, conditions of the sort that Sparks singled out as enabling both the civic spirit and the lively give-and-take of town government in seventeenth-century New England. Because Mill's closing thoughts on this subject echo both Sparks and Tocqueville, they merit more extended quotation:

Interest in the common good is at present so weak a motive in the generality, not because it can never be otherwise, but because the mind is not accustomed to dwell on it as it dwells from morning till night on things which tend only to personal advantage. ... The deep-rooted selfishness which forms the general character of the existing state of society, is so deeply rooted, only because the whole course of existing institutions tends to foster it; modern institutions in some respects more than ancient, since the occasions on which the individual is called on to do anything for the public without receiving its pay, are far less frequent in modern life, than in the smaller commonwealths of antiquity.²⁷

Or, as Jared Sparks and Alexis de Tocqueville had already observed, than had been the case in the early New England town. There the practice of participation had enabled ordinary people to share the burdens of public life under circumstances of greater social and economic equality than have been seen in America since Tocqueville's journey, and under those conditions democratic public life showed a different side.

Having now sketched at least some features of Tocqueville's portrait of America, having suggested how he came to some of the most striking conclusions he offered in *Democracy in America*, and having indicated at least a few of the echoes that reverberate from Sparks and Tocqueville to Mill, I want to return to the question I posed at the beginning of this essay: How is it possible to account for the dramatic contrast between their *emphasis* on democracy in America and the *absence* of democracy as a topic in so much contemporary historical writing about early America, an absence illustrated by the work of historians such as Alan Taylor and Jon Butler?

There are two answers, I think, and both lead back to the 1960s. The first is the reconsideration of what "democracy" means. In the years following World War II, most American scholars turned away from socialism and the "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe and Asia. They also turned away even from the rich tradition of early twentieth-century American progressivism. Like many members of

the Democratic Party after World War II, they repudiated the tepid reformism of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Even more decisively, they rejected Roosevelt's ambitious Second Bill of Rights, proclaimed in 1944, an agenda as ambitious as the social democratic programs adopted by northern European nations in the wake of World War II.²⁸ Instead Americans embraced their own version of limited representative government as the apotheosis of democracy. The late 1940s and 1950s were years to celebrate what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., called *The Vital Center* and what Daniel Boorstin called *The Genius of American Politics*, the balancing of interest groups to moderate the supposedly excessive demands of democratic majorities that could spin out of control – as they were quite plausibly said to have done in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. It was during these years, in fact, that the pluralist readings of Madison's contributions to the *Federalist* and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* came to prominence. When these two texts were interpreted as explanations for and defenses of the liberal pluralist reading of American history, much of their richness and complexity was sacrificed on the altar of consensus.

Then came the 1960s. The Civil Rights movement, the New Left, second-wave feminism, and the antiwar movement provided a rising generation with the resources and the rationale for a much more expansive understanding of the meaning of democracy. Anything less than full participation for all citizens failed to measure up to this higher standard of democracy. At the same moment, and for many of the same reasons, came the emergence of the new social history, history from the bottom up, history as done by people influenced by that new and more inclusive sensibility that found expression in the founding texts of feminism, in the Port Huron Statement of the New Left, and in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. When the 1960s generation turned its attention to early America, it discovered the exclusion of women, the exclusion of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, the exclusion of those without property, and the perpetuation of old (and even the creation of new) forms of economic and social hierarchy. What Jared Sparks called the "cradle of democracy" seemed to historians of race, class, and gender more like a cradle of bigotry, authoritarianism, and sexism. Other historians likewise zeroed in on racism, slavery, and the dominance of the southern planter elite. They denied the significance of the end of

primogeniture and entail and contended that such steps were feeble challenges to the slaveholding oligarchy.

Surely such historians were right. Women, African Americans, and those at the bottom of the economic heap did not participate in the public life of early America. Yet, when one looks at the later campaigns for women's rights, for black equality, for the labor movement, and for all of those excluded from the prosperity many Americans enjoyed, one hears echoes of earlier dissenters such as Roger Williams, Judith Sargent Murray, and Frederick Douglass. One also hears echoes of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century proclamations of the principle of popular sovereignty and the idea of self-government, echoes that reverberate from the founding charters of towns such as Dedham, Massachusetts, Hartford, Connecticut, and Providence, Rhode Island.

Perhaps it might help us to reach some new equilibrium, some balance between our recognition of the shortcomings of early American democracy and some recollection of its genuine significance, to return to words written neither in the United States nor France nor England but in what is now Germany. In 1854 the King of Bavaria asked Leopold von Ranke to evaluate for him the consequences of the American Revolution. Some readers might recognize the words Ranke said in reply:

By abandoning English constitutionalism and creating a new republic based on the rights of the individual, the North Americans introduced a new force into the world... Thus, republicanism entered our Romanic-Germanic world... Up to this point, the conviction had prevailed in Europe that monarchy best served the interests of the nation. Now the idea spread that the nation should govern itself... This was a revolution of principle. Up to this point, a king who ruled by the grace of God had been the center around which everything turned. Now the idea emerged that power should come from below... These two principles are like two opposite poles, and it is the conflict between them that determines the course of the modern world.²⁹

As Ranke did, Tocqueville's informants had returned to the larger significance of the American Revolution and the constitutions of the new states and the new nation. Those who wrote those constitutions, as Willi-Paul Adams and Gordon Wood have demonstrated more clearly than anyone else, invoked very explicitly and self-consciously the principle of popular sovereignty that received its first expression in the founding charters of the towns of New England. It is certainly

important to remember the limitations of those early experiments in democracy, but it seems to me myopic to deny their significance.³⁰

I want to make a similar point, although much more briefly, concerning the American South. In a brilliant article in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, and in a more recent article prepared for a conference celebrating the bicentennial of Tocqueville's birth, Holly Brewer has pointed out that a generation of historians, misled by conclusions derived from an unpublished 1926 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation by C. Ray Keim, misinterpreted the significance of the abolition of entail in Virginia. She shows that Jefferson was right when he claimed that the abolition of entail was central to the effort to eradicate "every fibre. . . of ancient and future aristocracy" and to lay "a foundation . . . for a government truly republican."³¹ Brewer's research also confirms that Tocqueville was also right about the deliberate and self-conscious challenge to the legal underpinnings of aristocracy in the South. Loathsome and anti-democratic as the institution of slavery was, it now seems clear that the end of entail and primogeniture did transform property holding among whites in the South – even though it did not address the fundamental abomination of slavery – in just the ways that Jefferson and Tocqueville claimed it did.

So, how have the insights of Tocqueville, and those of Sparks and Adams and Jefferson and Madison on which he relied, been displaced? How has it happened that we can now dismiss what Ranke considered the world historical significance of the American Revolution and find on pirate ships the only evidence of democracy in early America?

In this essay I have focused on Tocqueville, Mill, and the members of the American gentry who were among Tocqueville's most important informants. Perhaps another look at Tocqueville's and Mill's familiar ideas, and another look at those less familiar Americans who helped Tocqueville develop the extraordinary analysis in *Democracy in America* and, indirectly, helped shape Mill's mature political ideas, might help us see the reasons why we should return to some very old arguments about self-government – arguments that date back nearly four centuries – and examine them once again with clear eyes and no preconceptions. Even if the early settlers of New England did not approach our own ideal of participatory democracy

as nearly as Taylor thinks early modern pirates did, Jared Sparks was right: they did begin the process of bringing into the world – or, as Guizot persuaded Tocqueville to believe, of *returning* to the world – self-governing communities. That was a process of lasting significance, the consequences of which people around the world continue to wrestle with two hundred years after Tocqueville's birth.³²

NOTES

- [1] Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush Finds Affirmation in A Frenchman's Words," *New York Times*, (March 14, 2005): A-17.
- [2] Alexis de Tocqueville, *DA* (trans. Mansfield & Winthrop). See the detailed commentaries on this translation by Arthur Goldhammer, Seymour Drescher, Cheryl Welch, and Melvin Richter, and the response of Mansfield and Winthrop, in *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 21 (Spring 2003).
- [3] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
- [4] Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking, 2001), 285, 295-296.
- [5] Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 90.
- [6] Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See also the discussion of this theme in Howe's more wide-ranging study of self-discipline in American thought, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and the discussion of "ordered freedom" in early New England in David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- [7] Tocqueville's note on Boston is quoted in André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography*, trans. Lydia Davis with Robert Kennedy (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 149.
- [8] For a spirited critique of Sheldon Wolin's *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), see Melvin Richter, "The Deposition of Alexis de Tocqueville," *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, 23, 2 (2002): 173-198. Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, 33-56; Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Alan Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

- [9] Seymour Drescher, "Tocqueville's Two Democracies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25 (1964): 201-216; S. Drescher, *Tocqueville and England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).
- [10] For a Tocquevillean account of deliberation as the democratic means toward the end of reaching unanimous verdicts, see Jeffrey Abramson, *We, the Jury: The Jury System and the Ideal of Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
- [11] This remains a common misunderstanding of Tocqueville's assessment. At the conclusion of a film shown immediately before Bill Clinton's speech accepting his party's nomination for President at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago on August 29, 1996, the President explained that his political career had helped him see again a truth he traced to Tocqueville: "America is great," Clinton proclaimed, "because America is good." Although familiar, and perhaps effective as election-year rhetoric, such claims are quite distant from Tocqueville's sober denial of Americans' superior civic or moral virtue.
- [12] See Marvin Meyers, ed., *The Mind of the Founder: Sources of the Political Thought of James Madison* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1981); Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (New York: Norton, 1980); and especially Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). I have discussed these issues in "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," and "The Republican Idea in American History and Historiography," chapters two and four in Kloppenborg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- [13] André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography*, trans. Lydia Davis with Robert Kennedy (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 528-533.
- [14] Tocqueville, *The European Revolution and Correspondences with Gobineau*, trans. John Lucacs (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 190f.; Tocqueville, *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche, trans. James Toupin and Roger Boesche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 342-344; and Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- [15] Sean Wilentz, "Many Democracies: On Tocqueville and Jacksonian America," in *Reconsidering Tocqueville's 'Democracy in America'*, ed. Abraham S. Eisenstadt (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 207-228.
- [16] Among the numerous studies of Tocqueville's French predecessors and their influence on his thought, I am particularly indebted to a brilliant article by Robert Gannett, Jr., "Bowling Ninepins in Tocqueville's Township," *American Political Science Review* 97, 1 (2003): 1-16, which both demonstrates the centrality of *political* associations in Tocqueville's analysis of democracy and makes clear the significance of the recent scholarly discovery of Guizot's 1829-1830 lectures at the Sorbonne. By discussing the presence of more or less self-governing towns in medieval Europe, towns whose independence vanished before the absolutist

- monarchies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Guizot appears (however inadvertently) to have readied Tocqueville to accept the judgment of New Englanders concerning the importance of town government.
- [17] Herbert Baxter Adams, "Jared Sparks and Alexis de Tocqueville," *Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science* 16 (1898): 7-49.
- [18] On Tocqueville and Sparks, see the discussion in George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (1938; rpt. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 397-416. For a more recent argument concerning the role played by his experience in America in shaping Tocqueville's understanding of democracy, see the article by James T. Schleifer in this issue of *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*.
- [19] For the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 and the hundreds of local petitions and resolutions stretching from the 1770s that prompted Massachusetts first to declare its independence and then eventually to ratify this Constitution, see the splendid collection of documents published in Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, eds., *The Popular Sources of Political Authority: Documents on the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966). The quotations are from pp. 441-443.
- [20] A recent comprehensive collection of these documents, drawn from every English colony and showing a wide variety of ideas and the distinctiveness of the New England compacts and covenants, is Donald Lutz, ed., *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998).
- [21] Tocqueville's notes on his conversation with John Quincy Adams are quoted in Pierson, p. 419.
- [22] *Ibid.*, 483.
- [23] John Stuart Mill, *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 134.
- [24] For Mill's reviews of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, see John M. Robson, ed., *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 volumes, xviii: *Essays on Politics and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). As Seymour Drescher pointed out in his insightful commentary when I delivered an earlier version of this paper at the Tocqueville conference at Yale on September 30, 2005, Mill's aversion to all forms of organized religion manifested itself in his refusal even to acknowledge, in either of his reviews of Tocqueville, the importance attributed to Christianity in *Democracy in America*.
- [25] Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, xix: 380-394.
- [26] *Ibid.*, 410-412, 436.
- [27] Mill, *Autobiography*, 162-163. My analysis of Mill's changing ideas concerning democracy has benefited from a number of recent studies, including Nadia Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Joseph Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Eldon Eisenach, ed., *Mill and the Moral*

- Character of Liberalism* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Wendy Donner, *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Richard Ashcraft, "Class Conflict and Constitutionalism in J. S. Mill's Thought," in Nancy Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Bernard Semmel, *John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Fred Berger, *Happiness, Justice, and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Stefan Collini, "The Tendencies of Things: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Method," in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- [28] For more detailed discussions of this dynamic, see my essay "Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Poverty in America," in *The Virtues of Liberalism*, 100-123; and Cass Sunstein, *The Second Bill of Rights: FDR's Unfinished Revolution and Why We Need It More Than Ever* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
- [29] Ranke quoted in Willi-Paul Adams, *The First Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era*, trans. Rita and Robert Kimber, expanded edition (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 128-129.
- [30] See especially Willi-Paul Adams, *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era*; and Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969). In a recent review of Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005), Edmund S. Morgan shows evidence of coming around to a similar point of view. See "The Other Founders," *The New York Review of Books* (Sept. 22, 2005): 41-43. Because Morgan's own critique of early American democracy, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988), offered one of the most influential challenges to the idea of popular government in early America, which Morgan dubbed "a fiction," his apparent rethinking of that judgment is noteworthy.
- [31] Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 54, 2 (April, 1997): 307.
- [32] I examine the question of Tocqueville's significance in American and French scholarship more broadly, particularly the differences between the interpretations offered by historians and those of social scientists, in James T. Kloppenberg, "The Canvas and the Color: Tocqueville's 'Philosophical History' and Why it Matters Now," *Modern Intellectual History* 3,3 (2006):1-27.

