

Alexis de Tocqueville  
1805-1859

- ◆ Conservative
- ◆ French Aristocrat
- ◆ Pessimist (life is a tragedy)
- ◆ wrote: Democracy in America

de Tocqueville in his study of  
America:

Equality among citizens has its up  
and down sides.

Tocqueville examined the positives  
and negatives of American  
equality which was missing in  
France.

### Advantages of Equality

- (1) People have equal  
opportunity (no more  
deference to rank)

### (2) Equality in the American family

What are some impacts of  
increasing equality among family  
members?

How does it affect dating?  
Marriage? Family bonds?

- women no longer treated as property
- dating based on personal attraction  
rather than arranged marriages; less  
infidelity
- marriage based on love rather than  
arrangements
- family bonds held together by  
sentiment rather than money

(3) Equality affects how people  
talk to and treat one another.

What might be the difference?

- More straight forward and  
trustworthy
- Less putting on "aires"

(4) Equality among citizens affects the workplace.

How might this be?

- no longer a master and servant relationship
- the worker contracts out her/his labor rather than being a servant

(5) Equality among citizens affects their sympathy toward others.

Why might this be?

- People can more easily relate to (be sympathetic towards) those less fortunate.

And what effect might this have on those less fortunate?

The creation of charities and the desire to rehabilitate criminals

Dis-advantages of Equality  
(as compared to France)

- (1) Individualism and selfishness
- (2) everyone seeks to get rich quick
- (3) Ceaseless striving for social position

Dis-advantages of Equality

- (4) less "culture." people lack aesthetic style, novelty
- (5) lack of aristocracy opens door for tyranny

Dis-advantages of Equality

- (6) military officers must earn a high rank, so seek wars for promotion, prestige
- (7) politicians must earn support, political mudslinging; media attacks

de Tocqueville  
Distinguished between  
"equality" and "freedom."

How is equality different from  
freedom?

people can be equal  
while not being free

de Tocqueville  
believed that decentralized  
government has advantages.

What are the advantages and  
disadvantages of a decentralized  
government over a centralized one?

Advantages of decentralization:

- citizens are more involved,  
energetic, prosperous
- centralized government creates  
"lifeless quiet"

Disadvantage of Decentralization:

- lack of protection
- lack of support for the arts

de Tocqueville believed that the  
separation of church and state is  
beneficial.

Why might this be?

- the church is not forced to support  
political decisions and vice versa
- both are strengthened

de Tocqueville  
believed the U.S. had advantages  
due to:

- (1) its government structure,
- (2) geographic location, and
- (3) culture.

How might these be advantageous,  
particularly compared to his home  
country of France?

- Structure—provides a balance of power (judges free from politics)
- geography—less threat of war from surrounding nations
- culture—with most residents sharing a similar culture there is less political conflict

The End