

Thematic areas of inquiry

- 1) Individualism and its threat to freedom
 - a. 2:2:1; 2:2:2; 2:2:4; 2:2:8

- 2) Governmental and administrative centralization and associations
 - a. 1:1:5; 1:2:4; 2:2:1; 2:2:7; 2:4:6

- 3) The political effects of religion in the US (relation between religion and politics)
 - a. 1:1:2; 1:2:9; 2:3:10

- 4) Origin and diversity and character of Americans?
 - a. 1:1:2; 1:1:3; 1:2:5 (197-199); 2:2:20; 2:3:17; 2:3:21

- 5) Tyranny of the majority and what restricts it (associations, rights)
 - a. 1:1:4; 1:2:4; 1:2:6; 1:2:7; 1:2:8

Individualism and its threat to freedom in democracies

- 1) Read pp. 506-508
 - a. *What is individualism, according to AT? How does it differ from egoism? Why is individualism a problem for democratic societies?*
- 2) Read pp. 536-538
 - a. *What causes citizens in democracies to be restless and dissatisfied in the midst of their wealth?*
- 3) Read pp. 604-605
 - a. *Why does AT believe that in private life, the citizens of a democracy tend to form small and exclusive groups or cliques? Consider how this argument is related to his discussion of individualism.*
- 4) Read pp. 509-511
 - a. *How does individualism in democratic societies facilitate the rise of despotic authorities? According to AT, what are free institutions and how do they combat the effects of individualism?*
- 5) Read pp. 68-70
 - a. *Townships are an example of a free institution in America. Consider how his discussion here illustrates the argument of the preceding section.*
- 6) Read pp. 525-528
 - a. *What is the "doctrine of self-interest well understood"? What are its benefits, according to AT?*

Overall, how would you describe the balance between private life and civic participation in the US today? What factors contribute to shaping this balance, in your opinion? What does this indicate about the political future of the US, in your opinion?

Governmental and administrative centralization and despotism

- 1) Read p. 87
 - a. *What is the key difference between AT's concepts of governmental centralization and administrative centralization?*

- 2) Read pp. 90-92 and 249-250
 - a. *What are the different effects of administrative centralization and decentralization? What does the example of prisons in the US tell us about the weaknesses of administrative decentralization?*

- 3) Read pp. 93-98
 - a. *What are the political effects of administrative decentralization in the United States?*

- 4) Read pp. 690-695
 - a. *How does AT's feared democratic despotism differ from despotism in a monarchy? Consider the relationship between administrative centralization and democratic despotism.*

To what extent is the administration of public affairs in the US today centralized? Have any of the aspects of democratic despotism come to pass?

The political effects of religion in the US

- 1) Read pp. 41-46
 - a. *Here AT describes two sets of laws created by Puritan settlers in New England in the 17th century (these is the part of American civilization that AT finds most promising). How do the Puritans' criminal laws differ from their political laws? How does religion influence both of these sets of laws?*
- 2) Read p. 47
 - a. *In general terms, how does AT characterize the ideal relationship between religion and politics in democratic eras?*
- 3) Read pp. 290-292
 - a. *How, according to AT, is religious life at once unified and diverse in America? How specifically does religious belief in America influence politics (see also pp. 592-594) and what sorts of values and practices does it promote?*
- 4) Read pp. 295-298
 - a. *AT argues that religion in the US is able to preserve its influence by restricting its sphere of activity. Why is this the case? What are the particular dangers for religions that ally with the state in democratic periods?*

Does AT's argument about the relationships between religion and political liberty hold true in the United States today? Why or why not?

The tyranny of the majority and its restrictions

- 1) Read pp. 58-60
 - a. *What are the main features of popular sovereignty that AT find in the US?*
- 2) Read pp. 254-256 and 259-261
 - a. *How might popular sovereignty exercise an even greater power over citizens in a democracy than did the absolute monarchs of feudal times? How might majority rule threaten freedom and stability in a democracy?*
- 3) Read pp. 192-195
 - a. *How do political associations (what we would call political parties) restrict the power of the majority? How to American associations differ from European ones?*
- 4) Read pp. 274-276
 - a. *Why are citizen juries useful in a political sense, according to AT? How might the effects of juries reduce the possibilities of the abuse of majority rule?*
- 5) Read pp. 237-240 (“The idea of rights”)
 - a. *Why are the notions of political and property rights strong in the US, according to AT? How might this limit the tyranny of the majority?*

Would AT believe that true freedom of thought exists in the US today? Why or why not? What restrictions exist today on majority rule, if any?

Origin and social life of Americans

- 1) Read pp. 34-36
 - a. *What are the main differences that AT identifies between the groups of Europeans that colonized America?*
- 2) Read pp. 55-56
 - a. *How does equality extend even to intellect in the US?*
- 3) Read pp. 197-199
 - a. *Why, according to AT, are elected leaders in the US generally mediocre?*
- 4) Read pp. 614-616
 - a. *What is it about the US that bores AT? Why does he describe it as at once agitated and monotonous?*
- 5) Read pp. 635-639 (starting from "But is this in fact so?")
 - a. *What factors does AT see as contributing to social stability in the US? What factors might contribute to revolution?*
- 6) Read pp. 555-558
 - a. *What might be the unintended consequences of the industrial revolution in democratic societies?*

AT portrays America as a rather tedious place where people are concerned with their own private interests, tend to all think in pretty much the same way, and lack great political and cultural leaders. Do you think that this is a fair characterization, or is America more diverse than Tocqueville gives it credit for? If so, why? You can consider America today as well as America in Tocqueville's time.