In the 19th century, the French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville believed he was witnessing the dawn of a new age of equality. The aristocratic order that had governed Europe for centuries was yielding to an era without distinctions of lineage and privilege, one dominated instead by what Tocqueville came to call the “democratic social state.”

Tocqueville studied this emerging revolution in his most famous work, *Democracy in America*. The United States, however, was not the main subject of the book. As he told John Stuart Mill, “America was only the frame. My picture was Democracy.”

Tocqueville expanded on his study of his own country, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, a work that drew attention to the danger of promising equality to people who are denied it every day.

But Tocqueville's scope expanded even beyond these two countries. He believed that world affairs of the new democratic age would be driven by large states outside of Europe. These states that would be “Democratic” in their appeals to the equality of citizens, but would choose one of two paths to this equality: one liberal, the other authoritarian. Citizens “have two ways to be equal,” Tocqueville wrote. “They can all have the same rights or all be equally deprived of rights.”

The major political and economic concerns of our time seem well-suited for study in the light of Tocqueville’s ideas. Domestically, Americans are worried that their country is riddled with inequalities of income, education, and opportunity. Overseas, the 20th century saw a new egalitarianism sweep across non-Western societies, such as India and China, which had been profoundly hierarchical. Having adopted socialist and nationalist ideals (in either democratic or authoritarian form), India and China are now churning with stunning economic growth that is creating new elites of wealth and power.

These elites are profoundly aware that they defy Tocqueville’s prophecies at their peril. For about five years Tocqueville’s *The Old Regime* has been a bestseller in China, as both members of the Politburo and democratic activists wonder whether their own regime’s days are numbered.

**Learning Goals**

This class will study Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* and *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, treating both as profound examples of historical and comparative sociology. Students will learn to emulate ways by which to tease sociological theories
from the historical and contemporary record of evolving institutions and mores. Among the questions we will ask are:

- How, according to Tocqueville, had Americans preserved liberties once protected by the aristocracy?

- In what way did Tocqueville imagine that individualism could lay the foundations of despotism?

- What sociological theories did Tocqueville formulate in his study of the French Revolution?

- How had the French revolution revealed the dangers of “rising expectations?”

- Why did differences between “equality of conditions” and “equality of condition” prove so aggravating to the French?

The class will also explore whether Tocqueville’s major theories can help explain aspects of the new powers rising in Asia. We will ask, for example:

- What role did the political ideal of nationalism play in upending the hierarchical orders in China and India?

- What role did Hindu “mores” (to use Tocqueville’s term) play in the establishment of democracy in India? What role was played by institutions of the former Raj? How did the two combine to create a new national political order?

- Did China’s Cultural Revolution secure the egalitarian despotism of the Communist Party?

- Is the rise of the “princelings”— the wealthy and well-connected children of China’s Communist Party elite – provoking a popular backlash of the kind Tocqueville would recognize?

- In what ways is the expanding middle class of India changing the country’s democracy? Are the middle class’ current anti-corruption campaigns the fruit of rising expectations among members of this class?

**Course Requirements**

This course will feature four types of review of your work: class participation and quizzes, take home midterms, and a final paper.

**Class participation and quizzes** will be used to judge your comprehension of the course material. The class will be a combined lecture-seminar format in which informed
participation is essential. Together participation and quizzes will account for **10 percent**
of your final grade.

**The take home midterms** will be a series of short essay questions. The first will cover
themes from Tocqueville; it will be distributed on **Oct. 24 and due on Oct. 28.** The
second will ask students to explore these themes with reference to our case studies: it will
be distributed on **Nov. 21 and due on Nov. 25.** Each midterm will be worth **20 percent
of your grade.**

**Final Research Paper.** Students are required to write a final research paper. The paper
should be between 10-15 pages in length, using double space, 12-point font, and one-inch
margins on top, bottom, left and right of paper. Students are strongly encouraged to
expand on one of the questions listed above but may also write a comparative paper that
brings what they have learned to bear on another example of conflicts between
democracy and inequality. The final paper will be worth **30 percent of your grade and
will be due on Friday, Dec. 13.**

**Absences and Late Work**
Class participation is a large part of the overall grade and students should be fully
prepared for each week’s class. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to
submit work on a timely basis, unless documentation is given excusing an absence or late
submission for medical, religious or personal reasons, or for official university business.
Late assignments will be penalized by a half-letter grade deduction per day late.

**Academic Honesty**
Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis
University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except
when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use
the words or ideas of another person – be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner
–without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes
and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas
found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section 3 of “Rights
and Responsibilities,” may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could
end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any
assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations**
If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented
disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the
first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability,
please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office
(x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
Course books:

The following books are on sale at the Brandeis Bookstore or available from other booksellers. They are required.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America.* ed. by Harvey Mansfield. (University of Chicago Press, 2002.)


Other course materials will be available on Latte.

I would also strongly recommend that buy two books from which we will be doing extensive readings. They are:


Maria Misra, *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India Since the Great Rebellion.* (Yale, 2007).

Course of Readings

**August 29**  
**Introduction**

**Sept. 4**  
**The Rise of the Global Bourgeoisie?**


Articles about Bo Xilai in the *Financial Times.* (Latte)

**Sept. 9-12: Tocqueville and Equality of Conditions**

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America:* (hereafter DA); Introduction: (pp. 1-15)

Tocqueville, DA, Vol. I, Part 1, ch. 2-5 (pp. 27-93)

Contemporary America:

“How Inequality Poisons Society And Equity Benefits Everyone: An Interview with Richard Wilkinson,” in *This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and*
the 99% movement, edited by Sarah van Gelder. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011) (Latte)

Sept. 16, 17, 18: Tyranny of the Majority, Individualism

Tocqueville, DA, Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 7, 9 (pp. 235-302, skim ch. 8)


Contemporary America:


Sept. 23, 25: Honor and its Absence, Soft Despotism


DA, Vol. II, Part 4, ch. 1-8; (pp. 639-676)

Contemporary America:


Sept. 30, Oct. 2 & 3: The Seeds of Revolution in the Old Regime

The Old Regime and the French Revolution (hereafter OR), Part One, chapters 1-5

OR, Part Two, ch. 2-7.


Oct. 7, 9 & 10: The French Revolution: Reform and Disappointed Expectations

OR, Part Two, ch. 8-12.

OR, Part Three, ch. 3-8.
Oct. 21, 23 & 24: Nationalism as the Form of the “Democratic Social State”


First midterm distributed

Oct. 28, 30 & 31: China: The Old Regime and the Nationalist Challenge

First midterm due on Oct. 28


Orville Schell and John Delury, Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the 21st Century. Random House, 2013. Ch. 6, on Sun Yat-Sen (chapters 4 & 5 also recommended).


Recommended:


Nov. 4, 6 & 7: China: The Cultural Revolution


Nov. 11, 13 & 14: China: Reform, Economic Growth and Raised Expectations


Yu Keping, "The Transformation of Chinese Culture Since the Launching of Reform," in *Democracy is a Good Thing*.


Recommended:


Nov. 18, 20 & 21: India: Nationalism and Hind Swaraj


Film: *Lagaan*

Recommended:


Second midterm distributed
Nov. 25: Nationalism and Independence

*Second midterm due*

Maria Misra, *Vishnu’s Crowded Temple*. Ch. 6.

Ananya Vajpeyi, "Jawaharlal Nehru: Dharma, the Self’s Aspiration, and Artha, the Self’s Purpose" in *Righteous Republic*.


Dec. 2, 4 & 5: Class and Caste in Contemporary India

Maria Misra, *Vishnu’s Crowded Temple*. Ch. 8.


**Recommended:**


Dec. 9: concluding discussion

**Recommended:**