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 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.

**Course Requirements**
This course will feature four types of review of your work: class participation, take home midterms, a class presentation and a short final paper.
**Class participation:** Students should attend class regularly and do the readings in advance. They should be prepared to discuss and debate the topics at hand. Class participation will count toward **10 percent** of your grade.

**The take-midterm** will be a series of short essay questions. The first will cover themes from Tocqueville; it will be distributed on **Oct. 15 and due on Oct. 19** and will be worth **25 percent** of your grade. Midterm questions might address:

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?

**Presentations by Working Groups:** The second part of class will explore whether Tocqueville’s major theories can help explain aspects of the new powers rising in Asia. Topics in inequality will be addressed by working groups, modeled on research teams in the Department of State, which will present studies of contemporary potential points of conflict. You will be asked to work with a group to prepare a presentation on one topic and also to write short responses on Latte to the other presentations. The topics to be addressed could include:

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

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?

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?

In what ways is the expanding middle class of India changing the country’s democracy?
Presentation and on-line responses will count for **25 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 Wednesday, Dec. 9.**

**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 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. **Be sure to get the right editions of Tocqueville!**

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

Course of Readings

August 29    Introduction

Aug. 31, Sept. 2 & 3 The Rise of the Global Bourgeoisie?

Evan Osnos, “Will the Middle Class Shake China?” Daily Comment, NewYorker.com, March 8, 2013. (Latte)

*The Economist*: Articles on anti-corruption in China. (Latte)

"Narendra Modi, Promising the Good Times." *The Economist*, May 24, 2014

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

Sept. 9 & 10: Tocqueville and Equality of Conditions

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

Contemporary America:


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

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


Contemporary America:


Sept. 21 & 24: Honor and its Absence, Soft Despotism


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

Contemporary America:


Sept. 29, 30, Oct. 1: 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 & 8: The French Revolution: Reform and Disappointed Expectations

OR, Part Two, ch. 8-12.

OR, Part Three, ch. 3-8.

Oct. 12, 14 & 15: Nationalism as the Form of the “Democratic Social State”


First midterm distributed

Oct. 19, 21 & 22: China: The Old Regime and the Nationalist Challenge


**Oct. 26, 28 & 29: China: The Cultural Revolution and Recovery**


**Nov. 2, 4 & 5: China: Reform, Economic Growth and Raised Expectations**


**Nov. 9, 11 & 12: India: Nationalism and Hind Swaraj**


Film: *Lagaan*

**Nov. 16, 18, 19 & 23: Nationalism and Independence**

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*.


**Nov. 30, Dec. 2 & 3: Class and Caste in Contemporary India**

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


**Dec. 7 & 9: concluding discussion**