

### Tocqueville's 1840 Assessment of American Democracy Versus Traditional Aristocracy

"My critics insist upon making me out a party-man; but I am not that. Passions are attributed to me where I have only opinions; or rather I have but one opinion, an enthusiasm for liberty and for the dignity of the human race. I consider all the forms of government only as so many more or less perfect means of satisfying this holy and legitimate craving. They ascribe to me alternately aristocratic and democratic prejudices. If I had been born in another period, or in another country, I might have had either the one or the other. But my birth, as it happened, made it easy to me to guard against both. I came into the world at the end of a long revolution, which, after destroying ancient institutions, had created none that could last. When I entered life, aristocracy was dead and democracy as yet unborn. My instinct, therefore, could not lead me blindly either to the one or to the other. I lived in a country which for forty years had tried everything, and settled nothing. I was on my guard, therefore, against political illusions. Myself belonging to the ancient aristocracy of my country, I had no natural hatred or jealousy of the aristocracy; nor could I have any natural affection for it, since that aristocracy had ceased to exist, and one can be strongly attached only to the living. I was near enough to know it thoroughly, and far enough to judge dispassionately. I may say as much for the democratic element. It had done me, as an individual, neither good nor harm. I had no personal motive, apart from my public convictions, to love or to hate it. Balanced between the past and the future, with no natural instinctive attraction towards either, I could without an effort look quietly on each side of the question."—Letter to Henry Reeve, 22 March 1837

	<b>American Democracy</b>	<b>Traditional Aristocracy</b>
<u>Science</u>	Applied sciences; more pragmatic and monetary; pressure to produce	Pure sciences; more theoretical; less motivated by quick outcomes
<u>Arts</u>	Tendency towards cheap production in mass quantities; more focused on the useful and the realistic; less durable and more quickly discarded and replaced; favors faux-reproductions	Quality dominates and influences all classes' expectations; more focused on the few goods produced for ideal beauty and longevity; favors original productions
<u>Monuments</u>	Overcompensates with extremes sizes for public buildings but little attention to other uses	More traditional practice and expectations across sizes and uses
<u>Literature</u>	Widespread and popular works are stressed; cheaper printings, more often botched or lesser in quality	More singular, aloof, higher stress on quality and expense
<u>Language</u>	Heavy coinage of new words with high ambiguity	More calculated and precise in use of language
<u>Poetry</u>	Tends to take the future and human subjectivity as its subjects, less exalted and more ambiguous	Prizes ideal beauty, history, the past, singular works within a tradition
<u>Drama</u>	More focused on emotion than plot; tends to be out front in the popular viewpoints and expectations	Aristocracy tends to support works that focus on the noble few, though with attendance across classes
<u>History</u>	Focuses on general sociological forces in history	Tends to prize the history of great individuals
<u>Oratory</u>	Independent and competitive; inflated, even bizarre; worried about shaping the public	More precise and interdependent; focused on fine delivery

	<b>American Democracy</b>	<b>Traditional Aristocracy</b>
<u>Human Dignity</u>	Citizens tend to see each other as more alike and thus see each other as human.	In traditional cultures, groups tend to only recognize the humanity of those within their social stations.
<u>Social Relations</u>	Social relations based more around the accumulation of wealth.	Aristocracies base their relations around complex manners that reflect the expected behaviors of each class.
<u>Servant-Master Relations</u>	Democracies do not remove class distinctions but it softens them. There are no elite servants. A servant may one day be a master, and thus service is not regarded as degrading.	English aristocracy has the tightest multi-generational bonds between master and servant, while France has the loosest.
<u>Prices and Leases</u>	Tends to raise prices but shorten leases, for land tends to more regularly change hands. Land owners have little worry about the workers since social mobility is possible.	Land leases are typically hereditary; thus, a long-term family-land dependence is assumed. Likewise, land is held in perpetuity by aristocratic families.
<u>Wages</u>	Higher wages lead to workers having less dependence upon industrial employers. (Tocqueville anticipates something like unions.)	Aristocracies are land-based agricultural economies. In France, land-workers may have small plots of their own to fall back on if wages fall in price.
<u>Families</u>	The democratic family shares work and has greater familiarity and tenderness. Children regard each other as equals.	More psychological distance between fathers and children. Fathers serve as the bond between past and present.
<u>Girls and Wives</u>	Girls are raised in more open ways and are prepared with religious and rational reasons for their behavior, while wives are highly moral and regarded as the bedrock of American decency.	Girls are more protected in aristocratic cultures and less able to expect the costs of domestic life within a marriage. Wives in such an environment are, conversely more free yet also less faithful.
<u>Equality and Morals</u>	American democracy is superior in its valuing and practice of chastity. Their marriages tend to stress shared concerns with property and more character equality.	Forced marriages in aristocracies lead to more marital infidelity. Romantic fantasies and liability to seduction is another result.
<u>Male-Female Equality</u>	The husband is regarded as the leader of the family, while women are bond to their families, yet they are also protected against abusive divorce. Men have a general high regard for women and raise their level of education and culture.	European flattery of women often has a deeper level of contempt. Men are more likely to submit to women as sexual creatures yet treat them as incomplete beings.
<u>Private Societies</u>	Less social difference leads to more social mixing and association.	More social difference leads to little mixing and more class enclosures.
<u>Manners</u>	Manners breakdown more quickly across classes and their loss is not felt greatly.	Far more refined and exclusive of class-markers. Tocqueville feels their loss keenly.
<u>Action</u>	They prefer substantive and productive affairs with little interruption. All have a high sense of personal worth. Yet they are also constantly busy and prone to be rash in financial decision-making.	A preference for more dramatic and romantic events, yet they are singular in their focus on a goal, are attentive to matters at hand, and stress the long-term matter.

	<b>American Democracy</b>	<b>Traditional Aristocracy</b>
<u>National Pride</u>	Americans tend to be assertive and argumentative about their greatness as a country and a people.	Europeans are more reserved about their country's greatness, which takes more haughty forms.
<u>Fixed Spheres</u>	Their lives are busier yet more monotonous. Industry begins about a general sameness of existence.	Fewer desires of a grander nature. They are more diverse in their cultural attainments.
<u>Honor</u>	Honor is more fluid and based about commercial achievements. Without caste divisions, it is less important.	Held highly in regard and central to class importance. The validity of acts is class-based.
<u>Ambition</u>	Ambitions tend to be of a smaller, more material nature focused on the immediate. The end is to be a pioneer.	Ambitions are for greater, more noble ends. The end is to be great and in a highly-regarded public office.
<u>Revolutions</u>	The economic values of democracy actually lead to less social change in the long-run because they want to protect their monetary achievements which are more mobile in nature.	Aristocracies are more liable to great revolutions because of the high value placed on honor and because agriculture wealth is less likely to be lost. Thus, they fear conquest more.
<u>War</u>	Democracies prefer despotism to wars because their property attainments are more likely to survive. Conversely there is more promotion in a democratic army so soldiers are more invested in wars, and their armies can survive longer wars with the inevitable rise of new driven leadership.	Aristocracies prefer war to despotism because of their high stress on personal honor. And yet aristocratic armies are class-based and less invested in actual battles. They do not survive as easily protracted wars since their leadership is full of young, angry men who may or not be great strategists.