

6-1999

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Original Citation

Lieske, Joel. 1999. "Race and Democracy: Prologue." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 32:217-224.

Repository Citation

Lieske, Joel A., "Race and Democracy: Prologue" (1999). *Political Science Faculty Publications*. 2.
https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clpolsci_facpub/2

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Race and Democracy

Prologue

As every school child knows, America, if nothing else, is a nation of immigrants drawn from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. What many adult Americans also consciously perceive, but seldom admit, is our collective discomfort in addressing the issue of race and race relations honestly and forthrightly.

Fortunately, this was not the path followed by what many might consider to be an “illiberal” Tocqueville (Banfield 1991). And it would be a mistake to dismiss his analysis of the American race dilemma as too “raw,” too “pessimistic,” or perhaps “antiquated” and even “offensive” by present-day standards, although nineteenth-century word usage and a formal literary style may encourage this misperception. Rather, we need to understand what he had to say, if for no other reason than doing so opens a window to the past and provides a benchmark to measure how far we have come.

by
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As a cultural historian and political philosopher, Tocqueville knew that to comprehend the development and evolution of American federal democracy he first had

to understand the origins and characteristic features of our political culture and how and why it changed. Clearly, the dominant racial views held by Americans during the early nineteenth century are not those held by most Americans today. But neither is there any guarantee that our more liberal and enlightened views will hold sway during the next millennium in the face of the tensions and conflicts generated by cultural diversity and the reduction of whites to a racial minority. Nor is there any certainty that the experiment in democracy will survive our unprecedented experiment in nation building.

In 1965, a liberal Democratic Congress enacted amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act that ended “racist” national quotas and introduced the family-reunification principle. Along with special congressional amnesties and group preferences, as well as differential fertility rates among the races, these amendments have produced dramatic increases in immigra-

tion and permanently altered the current and future racial-ethnic composition of the United States. In 1960, the United States was 88.6% white, 10.5% black, and less than 1% Asian and other. Today, whites constitute less than 74% of the population, while blacks, Hispanics, and Asians comprise another 13%, 9%, and 4%, respectively (Lieske 1998).

Currently, some 830,000 legal, and an estimated 300,000 illegal, immigrants enter the country each year, most from Third World countries. This is more than are admitted into all of the other countries of the world combined (James 1995). As a result, the Bureau of the Census estimates that the percentage of whites will drop to 64 by 2020 and to less than 50 by 2050. But so far, the Bureau’s forecasts have not been able to keep up with changes in the pace of immigration and the country’s racial-ethnic makeup. This is another reason why Tocqueville’s analysis of the American race dilemma takes on new meaning and relevance today.

Surely the changes we are witnessing in American society at the turn of the twenty-first century are at least as momentous, if not more so, than those Tocqueville observed during his visit (Beck 1994; Caplan 1998; Fallows 1983). If current immigration policies and trends persist, whites will become a racial minority sometime during the next century. And the U.S. will have become, if it is not already, the most racially and ethnically diverse country on the face of the globe (Murdoch 1995; White 1982).

In this article, I first examine some of Tocqueville’s concerns about the American democratic experiment. Then I discuss why he regarded the American race dilemma as the central stumbling block to the success of this experiment, a view that reflected the fears of many white Americans of his day over the threats posed by a sizeable slave population as well as a hostile and indigenous Native-American population. I then explore the lessons in race relations that may be drawn from the “expulsion” of the Indians, Henry Reeve’s euphemism for their forced deportation, which unfortunately does not reflect either the reality—“ethnic cleansing”—or effects—“genocidal”—of their removal. Next, I examine why Tocqueville thought the principle of modern slavery tended to enslave not only the Africans but also

their southern white masters, thereby confronting the new republic with a blatant repudiation of its democratic ideals and an intractable race dilemma. Finally, I discuss the recent changes in race relations, both positive and negative, that may bear on the future of American democracy.

The Doubting Tocqueville

It could be argued that Tocqueville came to America skeptical of democracy and returned to France as a believer, if not in its possibilities for human progress, at least in its inevitability. But like the struggles to keep his Christian (Catholic) faith, which began at the tender age of 15 when he stumbled across the works of the French philosophers while browsing through his father's library (Pierson 1959, 8), Tocqueville seems to have been plagued throughout his life and the ten years it took him to write *Democracy in America* with serious misgivings and doubts.

What made democracy possible in America? Were the causes largely accidental and providential? More specifically, was America's success due to the absence of hostile neighbors and disorderly metropolises? Good early settlers (at least in the case of the Puritans)? An empty and boundless continent? The restlessness of Anglo-Americans, their commercial spirit, and their insatiable quest for material prosperity? Or was it due to the laws and political institutions of the Anglo-Americans? Or alternatively, was it because of their mores, habits, and customs, in short, what today would be called their culture? Even as Tocqueville ([1835] 1945, I: 319) sorted out the relative importance of these factors—the laws over physical circumstances and culture over all—he was unsure what tied Americans to each other.

In Knickerbocker New York, his initial impressions of America were anything but favorable. Perhaps overly quick to judge, the young French aristocrat found the

What appeared to Tocqueville to constitute the greatest threat to the new republic, however, was the presence of a large black (slave) population and the failure of the three races—white, black, and red—that then inhabited the United States to assimilate.

residents “stinking with national conceit,” materialistic, and disappointingly middle class. But he thought he understood what held the developing ethnic polyglot together. The only possible answer, he concluded, was self-interest, which he later expanded into “mutual self-interest” or “self-interest properly understood.” In his diary, he wrote: “American Society is composed of a thousand different elements newly brought together. The men who live under the laws are still English, French, German, Dutch. They have neither religion, nor morals, nor ideas in common. Up to the present it can't be said that the Americans have a national character, unless it's that of having none. Here there are no common memo-

ries, no national roots. What, then, can be the only tie which unites the different parts of this vast body? L'intérêt?” (Pierson 1959, 73).

But later, in developing the major themes and ideas of *Democracy*, during what Schleifer (1980) calls his “second journey,” Tocqueville ([1840] 1945, II: 318) alerts readers to the larger and perhaps more serious dangers he saw for the new democratic republic: an excess of materialism, rampant individualism, the threat of a tyrannical majority, political corruption, and, last but not least, a paternalistic state despotism that would be implemented by the “guardians” of democracy in the name of equality.

The American Race Dilemma

What appeared to Tocqueville to constitute the greatest threat to the new republic, however, was the presence of a large black (slave) population and the failure of the three races—white, black, and red—that then inhabited the United States to assimilate.¹ But the exclusion of blacks and Indians from American life was not the only threat that concerned him. He was also troubled by the profound cultural differences that separated the races and the instances of racial genocide (bloody slave rebellions) that perhaps foreshadowed events yet to come.

Perhaps because he was European, Tocqueville saw the white “man” as superior, because of his civilization, “in intelligence, in power, and in enjoyment.” Well below him were the “Negro” and the “Indian,” two “unhappy” races that he believed had “nothing in common, neither birth, nor features, nor language, nor habits.” And, given the profound technological and social differences that separated the races, Tocqueville thought that the “superior” position of the European was similar to the dominant position of “man” (the human race) over the lower animals. “He makes them subservient to his use, when he cannot subdue he destroys them” (1945, I: 332).

In Tocqueville's view, both the black and Indian races were sorely oppressed. But he believed the subhuman state of blacks made them particularly vulnerable. In one stroke, he wrote, the bondage of slavery had “deprived the descendants of the Africans of almost all the privileges of humanity.” The “Negro” had lost all memories of his country, language, religion, and customs without “acquiring any claim to European privileges,” and therefore found himself isolated in a no man's land “between two races, sold by the one, repulsed by the other” (332). The condition of many blacks appeared to be so wretched that Tocqueville doubted whether they could ever take care of themselves. Servitude, he thought, might brutalize them, but liberty would surely destroy them.

The oppression of the Indians, in Tocqueville's judgment, was no less fatal. But he felt the effects were different because, like many of his contemporaries, he held

a condescending view of them. Indians were “savages,” who “lived quietly in their woods, enduring the vicissitudes and practicing the virtues and vices common to savage nations.” By dispersing and driving them into the Great American Desert, European settlers had marginalized them and “condemned them to a wandering life, full of inexpressible sufferings” (333).

Moreover, he believed, the Indians’ misery was only compounded by their rejection of European civilization. Before the discovery of America, their behavior had been held in check “only” by their culture. When European settlers took their land and destroyed their way of life, “their wants increased above measure” and “European tyranny rendered them more disorderly and less civilized than they were before” (333–34). And, as the Indians’ moral and physical condition grew progressively worse, “they became more barbarous as they became more wretched.” For this reason, Europeans were unable “to change the character of the Indians”; and, though they had the power to destroy, they were not able “to subdue and civilize them.”

In comparing the plight of the Negro and the Indian, Tocqueville found both paradox and irony. The black man, he thought, had been placed at “the extreme limit of servitude,” while the Indian had always resided at “the uttermost verge of liberty.” Thus the “Negro makes a thousand fruitless efforts to insinuate himself among men who repulse him; he conforms to the tastes of his oppressors, adopts their opinions, and hopes by imitating them to form a part of their community. Having been told from infancy that his race is naturally inferior to that of the whites, he assents to the proposition and is ashamed of his own nature” (334). By contrast, the Indian “has his imagination inflated with the pretended nobility of his origin, and lives and dies in the midst of these dreams of pride. Far from desiring to conform his habits to ours, he loves his savage life as the distinguishing mark of his race and repels every advance to civilization, less, perhaps, from hatred of it than from a dread of resembling the Europeans” (334).

As a result, Tocqueville concluded, “the Negro, who earnestly desires to mingle his race with that of the European, cannot do so, while the Indian, who might succeed to a certain extent, disdains to make the attempt. The servility of the one dooms him to slavery, the pride of the other to death” (355).

The Expulsion of the Indians

The systematic removal of Indians from their tribal lands constitutes one of the darker chapters in American history. But it contains a number of harsh, yet universal and timeless, lessons—for example, the struggle for racial dominance, the resettlement of contested land by the dominant race, the territorial basis of racial survival, the ubiquitous risks of minority racial status, and the vulnerability of civil liberties and rights in a multiracial society—that may apply with equal force to the plight of

contemporary ethnic minorities, such as the Kurds in Iraq and the Palestinians in Israel.

The story begins with the destruction of the Indian habitat. At first, Tocqueville noted, a few scattered European settlers would drive away the wild game, thereby depriving Indians of their livelihood. This process, he argued, had the same effect as sterilizing agricultural fields. But strictly speaking, it was not the Europeans who drove the Indians away. Rather, “It is famine, a happy distinction which had escaped the casuists of

THE ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE EXPLORING DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

December 25, 1831: Tocqueville and Beaumont board a steamer in Memphis bound for New Orleans. Also onboard are Sam Houston, soon to be president of Texas, and 50 Choctaw Indians under federal guard. The Indians were being forcibly relocated to Arkansas.

former times and for which we are indebted to modern discovery!” (339).

By the time of Tocque-

ville’s visit, however, the expulsion of the Indians had become a regular, legal, and institutionalized process. Whenever European settlers began to encroach on tribal land, he observed, the federal government would send envoys to negotiate a new land grab. After assembling the Indians, and then eating and drinking with them, the envoys would patronize them, questioning whether the land they inhabited was any better than the lands abounding in game and solitude to the West. After that, the officials would proffer the carrot of European civilization: “firearms, woolen garments, kegs of brandy, glass necklaces, bracelets of tinsel, ear-rings, and looking-glasses.” If the Indians balked, they would brandish the stick. Consent was required, they emphasized, and if it was not forthcoming, there were no guarantees that the federal government would be able to protect Indian rights. In this manner, Tocqueville noted, the Americans were able to obtain “at a very low price, whole provinces, which the richest sovereigns of Europe could not purchase” (341).

To his credit, Tocqueville deplored the “great evils” of this expulsion, but saw them as “irremediable.” The Indian nations of North America were “doomed to perish,” he predicted, because they were afforded “only the alternative of war or civilization”; they could “either destroy the Europeans or become their equals.” But he felt the Indians were incapable of civilizing themselves in time. “Civilization,” he argued, “is the result of a long social process, which takes place in the same spot and is handed down from one generation to another, each one profiting by the experience of the last.” Moreover, the first step toward civilization, he thought, was to “cultivate the soil” and tie people to the land. The Indians, he believed, would never pass through this agricultural stage because they viewed “labor not merely as an evil, but as a disgrace.” And so he saw their pride contending against civilization “as obstinately as their indolence” (342–43).

European dominance over the Indians, therefore, was due not to differences in native intelligence but to superior civilization. He was convinced that Indians had “as much natural genius as the peoples of Europe in their greatest undertakings; but nations as well as men require time to learn, whatever may be their intelligence and their zeal” (347). Unfortunately, ancient history suggested to him that barbarous nations become civilized only when they conquer more advanced civilizations, as in the Mongol conquest of China. Even recent history seemed to confirm the “destructive influence” of highly civilized nations upon less civilized ones.² Unfortunately, the historical lesson that seemed most relevant to the American experience was not encouraging (347): “when the side on which the physical force lies also possesses an intellectual superiority, the conquered party seldom becomes civilized; it retreats or is destroyed.”

Tocqueville believed that President George Washington had articulated an enlightened policy of magnanimity toward the Indians. In an address to Congress, Washington had emphasized that, since they were “more enlightened and powerful than the Indian nations,” Americans were “bound in honor to treat them with kindness, and even with generosity.” But, as Tocqueville recorded, this “virtuous and high-minded policy” was never followed. Sadly, “the rapacity of the settlers [was] usually backed by the tyranny of the government” (350). Moreover, he felt that southern state legislatures had purposely sought the expulsion of the Indian government itself had allowed “a few savage tribes” to perish in order to preserve the Union.

The federal government may have tried to mitigate the plight of other tribes by transporting them into remote regions at public cost, but Tocqueville understood why the Indians were reluctant to settle out West. Foremost, they justifiably feared that the domestic habits they had acquired would be “irrevocably lost” in the wilderness. Second, they had neither the “energy of barbarians” nor the “resources of civilization” to subdue the hostile tribes which would oppose their entry. Finally, they realized that their next home would also only be temporary because of state laws hostile to Indians, the inability of the federal government to secure the promised sanctuary, and the “hollow” promises of the white man. “Thus the tyranny of the states,” Tocqueville concluded, “obliges the savages to retire; the Union, by its promises and resources, facilitates their retreat; and these measures tend to precisely the same end” (353).

In his closing arguments, Tocqueville appended a moving quote from a 1829 Cherokee petition to Congress affirming the tribe’s unwillingness to give up lands they believed were bequeathed to them by their forefathers. “By the will of *our Father in heaven*,” the petition begins, “the red man of America has become small, and the white man great and renowned.” After noting the grad-

ual extinction of the northern tribes, the petition questions whether the Cherokee “remnants” will suffer the same fate. It then lays out, in language that is clearly intended to appeal to Christian morality and evoke the God-given “unalienable rights” claimed by the Founders in the Declaration of Independence, the Indians’ (aboriginal) claim to their tribal land as “an inheritance from our fathers, who possessed it from time immemorial, as a gift from *our common Father in heaven*” (353–54; emphasis added).

Finally it asks what justification the state of Georgia or the United States could have for seizing Cherokee land. If the land was being taken as reparation for the Cherokee’s support of Britain during the American Revolution, then why was a “land for peace” clause not inserted into the first peace treaty after the war? In a scathing denunciation, Tocqueville concludes that the expulsion

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of the Indians was accomplished in the very name of morality (355; emphasis added):

The Spanish were unable to exterminate the Indian race by those unparalleled atrocities [hunted them down with bloodhounds] which brand them with indelible shame, nor did they succeed even in wholly depriving it of its rights; but the Americans of the United States have accomplished this twofold purpose with singular felicity, tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without shedding blood, and without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world. *It is impossible to destroy men with more respect for the laws of humanity.*

The Enslavement of the Blacks

The expulsion of the Indians was clearly a shameful repudiation of the new republic’s humanitarian ideals. But it was the peculiar institution of slavery, peculiar in the sense that it went against everything America stood for, that Tocqueville thought constituted the greatest physical threat to whites and the ultimate survival of the republic itself. In his view, slavery posed a race dilemma that came in three interrelated parts: the presence of a large black population on American soil, the segregated condition of the white and black races, and the racial prejudices of white Americans.

In his section on the “Situation of the Black Population in the United States, and Dangers with which Its Presence Threatens the Whites,” Tocqueville distinguished three types of white racial prejudice: the “prejudice of the master,” the “prejudice of race,” and the

“prejudice of color.” He also raised the disturbing possibility that racial prejudice in America, at least at the time of his visit, may not have been wholly irrational and without justification.

Contrary to contemporary liberal views, Tocqueville thought the race dilemma was largely intractable. “Those who hope that the Europeans will ever be amalgamated with the Negroes appear to me to delude themselves,” he cautioned (359). In the next breath, however, he admitted that this conclusion was not based on reason or factual evidence. Rather, it rested on his pessimistic reading of history: “Hitherto wherever the whites have been the most powerful, they have held the blacks in degradation or in slavery; wherever the Negroes have been strongest, they have destroyed the whites; this has been the only balance that has ever taken place between the two races.”

Tocqueville apparently staked his claim on the stigma whites attached to interracial marriage. “It is true,” he conceded, “that in the North of the Union marriages may be legally contracted between Negroes and whites; but public opinion would stigmatize as infamous a man

who should connect himself with a Negress, and it would be difficult to cite a single instance of such a union” (359).³

Moreover, he believed that the effects of slavery were as detrimental and pernicious for whites as they were injurious and debasing to blacks. In support of this contention, he cited the American experience with slavery and noted how colonies and provinces comparatively free of slaves grew and prospered more rapidly than those containing large slave populations. The same generalization appeared to hold true in the West. Ohio was more populated and prosperous than Kentucky, he thought, because it was free and because slavery dishonored labor and degraded the human condition.

Slavery was less productive, he believed, because it provided fewer incentives to work and because the expense of maintaining slaves was constant, extending to the very young and the elderly who could do no work. Slavery, he thought, also influenced attitudes and tastes for work and pleasure in a profoundly negative way. To illustrate his point, he contrasted the “white inhabitant of Ohio,” who was compelled to “subsist by his own ex-



A slaveship enters port.

Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institute

ertions” and regarded “temporal prosperity as the chief aim of his existence,” with “the Kentuckian,” who lived in “idle independence” and scorned not only labor itself “but all the undertakings that labor promotes.” “Thus slavery,” Tocqueville concluded, “prevents the whites not only from becoming opulent, but even from desiring to become so” (I: 364). Finally, Tocqueville attributed the greater economic development he found in the North—in shipping, manufactures, railroads, and canals—to state prohibitions against slavery.

At the same time, he felt the “situation” of emancipated Negroes in the North was similar to that of the Indians. He thought they remained “half civilized and deprived of their rights in the midst of a population that [was] far superior to them in wealth and knowledge,” thereby exposing them “to the tyranny of the laws and the intolerance of the people” (367–68). On some accounts, he felt they were even worse off because they were haunted by the memories of slavery and could not own land. Many, he could see, were faring “miserably,” and those who were able to congregate in the “great towns” were eking out “a wretched and precarious existence” by doing “the meanest” of jobs.

Another negative feature of American slavery for Tocqueville was its division of the country into two distinctive cultural regions, North and South. The white population was growing much faster than the black population in the North, he observed, because of natural increase, immigration from Europe, and, most of all, the prohibition against slaves. This prohibition, he believed, had the unintended consequence of fostering a bifurcated migration: blacks to the South and whites to the North.

Because slavery was already established in the South, Tocqueville could see a host of reasons why it would be difficult to abolish. For one, Europeans were not well-suited to live and work in the southern tropics. For another,

southern agriculture, especially the production of tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane, required

more day-to-day care in the blazing sun than grain-based northern agriculture. Third, southern states that abolished slavery would put themselves at a competitive disadvantage with those that did not. Fourth, blacks would likely rebel if emancipation were introduced gradually to the children of slaves, as in some northern states. Finally, whites would not be able to rid themselves of a freed black population and would therefore feel threatened whenever they were confronted with equal or superior numbers of blacks. Even worse, once blacks were emancipated, they would justifiably demand land, education, and the (constitutional) right to keep and bear arms.

Given Tocqueville’s analysis of the race problem—the difficulties of abolishing slavery in the South, the realities of white race prejudice, the segregated condition of the white and black races, and the profound cultural differences that separated them—his pessimism about a multi-racial future becomes at least understandable. He could only conceive of two paths: total separatism or total integration. “The negroes and the whites must either wholly part or wholly mingle,” he warned (373). There was no middle ground. Yet, given the stigma attached to racial intermarriage, he could not entertain assimilation.

To buttress his position, he appealed to authority, specifically Thomas Jefferson’s well-known, but now intellectually branded (O’Brien 1996), remark about the possibility of racial integration (Tocqueville 1945, I: 373):

Nothing is more clearly written in the book of destiny than the emancipation of the blacks; and it is equally certain, that the two races will never live in a state of equal freedom under the same government, so insurmountable are the barriers which nature, habit, and opinion have established between them.

Tocqueville then stated his own belief that the white and black races would never live in any country on an equal footing, and that achieving equality would be more difficult in the United States than elsewhere. A despot might be able to “succeed in commingling” the races, he predicted, but, as long as the country remains democratic, “no one will undertake so difficult a task; and it may be foreseen that the freer the white population of the United States becomes, the more isolated will it remain” (371).

Racial isolation and separatism, Tocqueville thought, derived from the human (universal) tendency to take pride in one’s own racial origins—an idea that is basic to many contemporary theories of “ethnic identification” and “ethnic nepotism”—which he felt was natural to the

English, but was augmented in the United States (Vanhanen 1991). “The white citizen of the United States is proud of his race and proud of himself” (Tocqueville 1945, I: 375). This pride of racial origin, he inferred, would lead to several predictable consequences.

One was that it would “always keep” southern whites aloof from the black race because of their fear of being assimilated to the “Negroes,” their former slaves, and because of their dread of sinking below other whites, their neighbors. Another was that the abolition of slavery in the South would only increase “the repugnance of the white population for blacks.” Tocqueville based this prediction on how whites avoided blacks in the North when legal barriers to integration were dropped. A final consequence, he thought, was that whites’ failure to “intermingle” would ultimately lead to race war (375).

Southern whites, in Tocqueville’s view, were therefore confronted with three stark choices: (1) they could free the blacks and “intermingle” (i.e., intermarry) with them; (2) they could keep them in slavery as long as possible; or (3) they could adopt “intermediate measures” that would likely and quickly terminate “in the most horrible of civil [i.e., race] wars and perhaps in the extirpation of

THE
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE
EXPLORING DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

March 2, 1839: Tocqueville is elected to represent Valognes in France’s Chamber of Deputies. He served in the national government in several posts until 1851, including a stint as Foreign Minister (1849), advocating civic engagement (short of revolt), prison reform, and abolition of slavery.

one or the other of the two races” (379). Thus, Tocqueville believed that southern planters were reluctant to abolish slavery, not so much for economic reasons, but because of their conviction that it “would imperil their own existence.”

Tocqueville also believed that southern whites would never accept assimilation because of their “racial pride.” At the same time, they would never abolish slavery because of their fear of becoming a racial minority, and that was why they would continue to deny blacks the education they needed to become free and independent. But, by sinking blacks to the level of “brutes,” Tocqueville observed, southerners had unwittingly debased themselves as well, especially the planters who lived in “illicit intercourse” with black women and consigned their progeny to the brutal marketplace of slavery.

Thus, the principle of modern slavery, Tocqueville concluded, had bequeathed southern whites with evil, but foreseeable, consequences and an inescapable dilemma (380–81):

When the Europeans chose their slaves from a race differing from their own, which many of them considered as inferior to the other races of mankind, and any notion of intimate union with which they all repelled with horror, they must have believed that slavery would last forever, since there is no intermediate state that can be durable between the excessive inequality produced by servitude and the complete equality that originates in independence.

Epilogue

When Tocqueville visited America, the moral revulsion against slavery, which first surfaced in Great Britain among evangelical Christians during the late eighteenth century, had already spread to New England and other northern states. What he could not foresee was the emergence of an anti-slavery crusade that would first legally ban the international slave trade, then end slavery in the United States and the British Empire, and ultimately succeed in abolishing it throughout the civilized world (Sowell 1994, 210). As a member of the French Chamber of Deputies, Tocqueville himself helped draft and push through legislation that abolished slavery in all of the French colonies. Thus, where Christian morality failed to save the Indians, it ultimately helped to liberate the Africans.

Although Tocqueville could envision a race war and the breakup of the Union, he could not foresee the bloody and costly Civil War, fought mostly by whites over the slavery issue. Neither could he foresee, although it would not have surprised him, a new system of racial subjugation in the South that would negate the civil rights amendments passed after the war and last until the middle of the twentieth century.

However, many other changes in race relations, mostly positive, fall within the purview of Tocqueville’s analysis and his predictions that American democracy would move, steadily and inexorably, toward greater political and social equality. One, of course, is a dramatic change since the 1940s in the racial attitudes among white Americans, who have become much more tolerant and

sensitive to racial and social injustice. A second is the passage during the 1950s and 1960s of civil rights legislation that struck down longtime barriers to racial equality. A third is the greater political representation of blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans in national, state, and urban government. A fourth is a much greater sensitivity on the part of state and federal governments to the plight of a surviving “remnant” of some one-and-one-half to two million Indians who still live, for the most part, on isolated reservations in the western states. To date, some relief has been granted in the form of special state and federal economic development and job-training programs, the recognition of aboriginal fishing rights, and the legalization of gambling casinos on Indian-held land. Finally, there has been a greater acceptance of interracial marriage. Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1995 show that 27.1% of all Hispanics, 9.8% of all blacks, and 2.7% of all whites marry outside their “race” or ethnicity (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998, 60).

On the negative side, American cities and metropolitan areas are as segregated today as they were during the 1960s (Gillmor and Doig 1992). Racial discrimination and ethnic nepotism have not gone away. And demographers have detected a new racial-ethnic separatism that is reflected in the development of new and distinctive regional subcultures, which have overlaid, consolidated, and sometimes swamped earlier waves of racial and ethnic settlement (Elazar 1994; Lieske 1993). Finally, in the wake of the new immigrant waves, some observers are beginning to express fears that America may be “losing itself” by virtue of a loss of self-government, an erosion of community, a diminishing of the American Dream, a decline in the overall quality of life, and a loss of national cohesion and political stability—as it continues to grow, shed its skin, and become more and more culturally diverse (Caplan 1998; Sandel 1996; White 1982).

Perhaps the major unknown in the race equation is the “new immigrants.” Will they assimilate into American society, or will they form separate and distinctive ethnic enclaves (Caplan 1998; Fallows 1983)? Will they fulfill the civic obligations of American citizenship, such as voting and community service, or will they become free-riders so they can better pursue the American Dream for themselves and their families (White 1982)?⁴ Finally, will they accept core democratic values, support America’s pluralistic institutions, and blend into our two-party system, or will they form new partisan coalitions with other minorities to achieve racial and cultural dominance when they become a political majority by the middle of the next century (James 1995)?

The American experiment in democracy has succeeded in the minds of many political scientists (Wilson and Di-Iulio 1998, 34) because the Founders “insisted on taking human nature pretty much as it was” and then adopted a system of checks and balances, primarily through the separation of powers and federalism, that has worked, not in spite of human imperfections, “but because of them.” But it remains to be seen whether we can forge a new democratic “nation” that truly lives up to our national motto: *E Pluribus Unum*, “from many, one.”

Notes

1. As Tocqueville warned in his poignant 104-page chapter on race relations, the longest by far in his two-volume treatise on American democracy: "The most formidable of all the ills that threaten the future of the Union arises from the presence of a black population upon its territory; and in contemplating the cause of the present embarrassments, or the future dangers of the United States, the observer is invariably led to this as a primary fact" (356).

2. Here, Tocqueville cited the displacement of the French by the Americans in Vincennes, Indiana, the dominance of the English in commerce and manufacturing in Canada and Louisiana and their confinement of the French in Canada, and the settlement of Mexican-held Texas by the Americans (349).

3. One often-cited instance is Thomas Jefferson's long-term affair with Sally Hemings, one of his daughter's slave attendants. Oral history

and recent DNA evidence suggest that he may have fathered at least one, and possibly five, of her children. Thomas Sowell has claimed that as a result of chronic surpluses of white men over white women and black women over black men, an "estimated 1 to 2 percent of the babies born to plantation slave women were fathered by white men, compared to nearly half in the cities" (1994, 207). He suggests this disparity resulted from an erosion of racial lines in urban settings.

4. An analysis of the validated, as opposed to the reported, vote from the 1988 NES survey reveals that turnout is highest for mainline (old stock) respondents (73.9%), next highest for white ethnics (63.4%), lower for "Americans" (49.5%), and even lower for members of racial minorities. The rate drops to 46.7% among African Americans, 44.4% among Hispanics, and 41.2% among Asian Americans.

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