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# Taking Modernity's Wager: Tocqueville, Social Capital, and the American Civil War

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## Taking Modernity's Wager: Tocqueville, Social Capital, and the American Civil War

Alexis de Tocqueville (ed. Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings), *Tocqueville on America after 1840: Letters and Other Writings* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009) 576 pp. \$99.99 cloth \$32.99 paper

Although Alexis de Tocqueville did not live to witness the American Civil War, it would not have surprised him. A close student of democracy, Tocqueville believed that America's fate lay in its ability to maintain social order through voluntary association. This recent translation into English of selections of Tocqueville's writings about the United States during the two decades after publication of his *Democracy in America* offers historians an opportunity to witness Tocqueville's growing concern about America's fate.<sup>1</sup> Taking advantage of this new collection, this essay interprets why and how Tocqueville lost faith in American democracy's ability to avoid France's fate—civil war, anarchy, and, possibly, despotism. Building on Tocqueville's writings as well as recent historical work on civil society, the public sphere, and social capital, it then presents a new perspective on the crisis that led Northerners and Southerners to take up arms in 1861.

The American and French revolutions ushered in modernity and with it what Seligman called "modernity's wager." By giving up on the idea of a natural, external authority—the kind that religion provided in traditional society—modernity unleashed individuals to see themselves as sacred (transcendental) and to view all

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1 Hereinafter, *TOA*.

impositions on their freedom as coercion and power rather than legitimate authority. In such a world of radical individualism, however, Seligman wondered what holds “seemingly autonomous selves together at all”?<sup>2</sup> Taylor and Habermas stress the wager’s relation to society as a whole. Taylor reminds us of the novelty of constructing a social order absent transcendent principles; Habermas concludes that modern social orders in a “post-metaphysical” age can be constructed only by the constant deliberation of individuals.<sup>3</sup> Seligman, Taylor, and Habermas confront the same issue—whether modern democratic society can sustain itself over time. Such is the wager that the United States made in 1776, and France in 1789.

Since Tocqueville’s time, many scholars have argued that the key to sustaining modern social order is to develop mediating institutions that connect individuals together into a larger social whole. Mediating institutions, especially voluntary associations, are vital to modern democratic social orders because they encourage the production of social capital which, in turn, produces social trust. Social trust can be defined as the level of confidence that citizens have in each other and in their social and political institutions. Without the authoritative structures of the old order, modern democratic societies rely on social trust to prevent violence and/or excessively self-interested behavior.<sup>4</sup> Social capital gener-

2 Adam B. Seligman, *Modernity’s Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence* (Princeton, 2000), 12, xi.

3 Jürgen Habermas (trans. William Rehg), *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discursive Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, 2004).

4 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000); Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton, 1997), esp. 75–100; Eric M. Uslaner, “Democracy and Social Capital,” in Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (New York, 1999), 121–150; Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York, 1995), esp. 3–12. For discussions about the definition(s) of social capital, see John Farr, “Social Capital: A Conceptual History,” *Political Theory*, XXXII (2004), 6–33; John Field, *Social Capital* (London, 2003); Robert I. Rotberg, “Social Capital and Political Culture in Africa, America, Australasia, and Europe,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX (1999), 339–356; Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C., 1977). For a discussion that distinguishes clearly between networks, norms, and trust, see Karen Schweers Cook, “Networks, Norms, and Trust: The Social Psychology of Social Capital (2004 Cooley Mead Award Address),” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, LXVIII (2005), 4–14; for a more critical perspective, Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, “Making Sense of the Civic Engagement Debate,” in *idem* (eds.), *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington, D.C., 1999), 1–23; Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy*, VII (1996), 38–52. For an in-

ates social trust by creating the networks that link people together, making possible the feelings of mutual affection and obligation that form the basis for common life. In Putnam's words, social capital comprises "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."<sup>5</sup> The more extensive these networks are, the more likely they are to promote "generalized reciprocity," trust, cooperation, and confidence in government: "Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity. Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action."<sup>6</sup> Without social capital, produced through the mediating networks of civil society, individuals would not connect their private lives to their public ones. Lacking a sense of generalized reciprocity, citizens would then be unwilling to make sacrifices for each other.

Social capital, however, is double-edged. In Putnam's terms, it has both a "bridging" effect that unites individuals and society and a "bonding" effect that creates outsiders. At the national level, networks bridge citizens to the extent that they overcome ethnic, regional, and/or class divisions, but they also bond citizens by dividing them from other peoples. A similar dynamic takes place at the local level. Small, cohesive, closed networks reduce social capital's integrative function even as they link people who might otherwise be isolated.<sup>7</sup> Such was the case during the sectional crisis. Networks that had once functioned as bridging social capital fractured under the stress of slavery and became sources of regional, bonding social capital. By Abraham Lincoln's election, Northern and Southern Americans no longer trusted each other, the result being exactly what Tocqueville and other critics of modernity most feared.

MEDIATING ASSOCIATIONS To Tocqueville, under France's hierarchical *ancien régime*, nobles mediated between the people and the king, helping to secure social integration. But these old relations

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triguing historical analysis that correlates personal violence to levels of social trust, see Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

5 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

6 *Ibid.*, 20–21. On government, see Marc J. Hetherington, *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism* (Princeton, 2005).

7 In addition to Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, see Uslaner, "Democracy and Social Capital."

were undermined by the idea of equality. The potential for anarchy increased with the demise of the aristocracy and the divine right of kings.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Tocqueville concluded, equality—and thus democracy—was the future for Europe as well as the United States: “Everywhere a diversity of historical incident has re-dounded to democracy’s benefit. . . . The gradual development of the equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact.”<sup>9</sup> Associations could forge new connections between people to replace those destroyed by revolution. Only “citizens joined together in free association might then replace the individual power of nobles, and the state would be protected against tyranny and license.” No wonder Tocqueville believed that “in democratic countries, the science of association is the fundamental science.”<sup>10</sup>

8 For Tocqueville’s fears of modernity, see Alan Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York, 1992); Jon Elster, “Tocqueville on 1789: Preconditions, Precipitants, and Triggers,” in Cheryl B. Welch (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville* (New York, 2006), 49–80; Craiutu, “Tocqueville’s Paradoxical Moderation,” *Review of Politics*, LXVII (2005), 599–629; Sheldon S. Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, 2001), which should be read along with Olivier Zunz’s review, “Holy Theory,” *Reviews in American History*, XXX (2002), 564–570; Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago, 1995). According to Matthew Mancini, *Alexis de Tocqueville and American Intellectuals: From His Times to Ours* (Lanham, Md., 2006), Tocqueville “knew that the most arresting feature of the whole American democratic enterprise was its sheer endurance” (76). For a critical examination of how Tocqueville’s concern with modernity (the relationship between equality and liberty) prevented him from fully appreciating how modernity bred new inequalities through large organizations, see Seymour Drescher, *Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization* (Pittsburgh, 1968).

9 Tocqueville (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), *Democracy in America* (New York, 2004), 6. See also *TOA*: Tocqueville to Edward Everett, Feb. 15, 1850, 115–116; “Report on *Democracy in Switzerland*,” Jan. 15, 1848, 354; “Preface to the Twelfth edition of *Democracy in America*” (1848), 374–376. According to Françoise Mélonio and François Furet, “Introduction” in Tocqueville (trans. Alan S. Kahan), *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (Chicago, 1998), I, to Tocqueville the French Revolution “was nothing more than the sudden acceleration of a movement towards equality that was at work in the whole western world” (4). Francis Fukuyama, “The March of Equality,” *Journal of Democracy*, XI (2000), gives Tocqueville’s reasons for believing in the ultimate victory of equality (11–17). Tocqueville did not imply that democratic societies were absolutely egalitarian. He recognized, and criticized, the growing inequalities spurred by industrial capitalism. For him, equality intimated, first, democratic societies in which no permanent classes existed, and second, societies in which citizens did not view their fundamental stations and relationships as hierarchical.

10 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 7–10, 599. For a discussion of Tocqueville’s ideas about mediating institutions, see Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Leveled Society?* (New York, 2008), 146–151; Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca, 2008), 294–308. Dijn emphasizes the royalist and aristocratic roots of Tocqueville’s fears of democracy, whereas Jainchill

In a democracy, tyranny could emerge from equality itself, as the majority pursued its goals without concern for the rights and interests of minorities.<sup>11</sup> Yet, although in theory “no durable obstacle” existed to check the people’s will, in practice political associations, especially political parties, served as barriers to limit what popular majorities could do. Political associations encouraged democratic deliberation by enabling minorities “to ascertain their numerical strength” in order to “weaken the moral ascendancy of the majority.” In addition, partisan “competition among ideas” might make enough of “an impression on the majority” to bring a minority party to dominance. Finally, thanks to “universal suffrage,” Americans’ political associations could never claim to speak for a majority; majorities were determined during elections. If a party lost, it must accept its minority status and try to persuade citizens to vote for it.<sup>12</sup>

But, importantly, Americans did not associate solely for political reasons; they also carried out a broad range of activities through what Tocqueville labeled “civil associations.” Political as-

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emphasizes the role republican ideas played in shaping Tocqueville’s hope that American citizens’ engagement in politics would help mitigate the dangerous effects of modern individualism. See also Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, “Editors’ Introduction” to Tocqueville (trans. *idem*), *Democracy in America* (Chicago, 2000), xxiii–xxxix; for Tocqueville’s ideas about voluntary associations, John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York, 1999), 160–169; Pierre Manent (trans. John Waggoner), *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (Lanham, Md., 1996), 23–26; Jack Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York, 1965), 127–143. Furet, Welch, and Larry Siedentop argue that understanding the social and political context in which Tocqueville wrote is as important as understanding his specific intellectual influences. See Furet, “The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville’s Thought,” *Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, VII (1985–1986), 117–129; Welch, *De Tocqueville* (New York, 2001), 7–48, 88–95 (on associations); Siedentop, *Tocqueville* (New York, 1994), 20–40.

11 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 197, 218. Tyranny was not just a political problem. Although Tocqueville was committed to checking political tyranny, his deeper concern was that the idea of majoritarianism, if elevated too high, would prevent freedom of thought as all people sought to conform to the mean. See Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville & the Modern Prospect* (New Haven, 2009), 154–189; Donald J. Maletz, “Tocqueville’s Tyranny of the Majority Reconsidered,” *Journal of Politics*, LXIV (2002), 741–763; Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 202–228, 241–259, 304–373; Mansfield and Winthrop, “Editors’ Introduction”; Manent, *Tocqueville*; Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, esp. 34–80; James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 191–211; Lively, *Social and Political Thought*, 71–103.

12 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 221–222. Even in the United States, suffrage was limited by race and gender. See Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review*, LXXXVII (1993), 549–566; *idem*, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, 1997).



sociations were vital to political deliberation, whereas civil associations provided the underlying bond that held society together.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Tocqueville’s discussion of civil associations falls within his exploration of the “influence of democracy on the sentiments of Americans.”<sup>14</sup> Tocqueville’s basic assumption was that individualism “disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw into the circle of family and friends.” “Having created a little society for his own use,” the individual “gladly leaves the larger society to take care of itself.” Aristocracy connects all of society “in a long chain from peasant to king,” but democracy “breaks the chain and severs the link.” People turn inward and no longer concern themselves with the common good. Instead, Tocqueville concluded, each man is left “in the loneliness of his own heart.”<sup>15</sup>

Individualism had two major, related risks, Tocqueville argued—anarchy and despotism. Anarchy was intolerable because it bred insecurity and inequality, leading citizens to embrace despotism for the sake of security and equality, but at the expense of liberty. Only mediating institutions, through which democrats could collectively generate their own social order, could check these dangerous tendencies.<sup>16</sup> Tocqueville believed that Americans had two effective types of mediating institutions to protect their equality without resorting to despotism—local government, through which ordinary citizens came “to value the affection of their neighbors and relatives,” and voluntary associations.<sup>17</sup> By fostering “the reciprocal action of human beings on one another,” associations ensured that Americans would forge social order, address social concerns through cooperation, and learn to care for each other. In association, Tocqueville wrote, citizens’ “feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart expands, and the human spirit develops only through the reciprocal action of human beings on one

13 For interesting discussions of the relations between different kinds of associations, see Dana Villa, “Tocqueville and Civil Society,” in Welch (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, 216–244; William A. Galston, “Civil Society and the ‘Art of Association,’” *Journal of Democracy*, XI (2000), 64–70.

14 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 579.

15 *Ibid.*, 585–587. A good discussion of Tocqueville’s evolving understanding of individualism can be found in Jean-Claude Lamberti (trans. Goldhammer), *Tocqueville and the Two Democracies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 168–190.

16 See Mitchell, *Fragility of Freedom*; Lamberti, *Tocqueville and the Two Democracies*.

17 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 590, 592.

another.”<sup>18</sup> Like other Americans and Europeans of his era, Tocqueville hoped that the emotional bonds of sympathy would create new links between people to replace the hierarchical ones of the old order.<sup>19</sup> The result would be the generation of social capital which, in turn, would produce social trust.

In the published first volume of *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville made clear that centralization, anarchy, and despotism were likely wherever mediating institutions were weak. The long-term narrative of *The Old Regime* is continuity between the pre- and postrevolutionary eras. Centralization of state power began under the French monarchy and culminated in Jacobin tyranny and Napoleonic despotism. As the monarchy centralized, it stripped away the aristocracy’s mediating function. The French people, unaccustomed to liberty, engaged in an orgy of equality that overturned old institutions but produced no new forms of social capital. Instability ensued until Napoleon imposed social order from above, protecting French equality but destroying French liberty. As Tocqueville wrote, “when a people has destroyed its aristocracy, it runs toward centralization as if self-impelled.”<sup>20</sup>

THE ANTEBELLUM SECTIONAL CRISIS IN AMERICA The question facing Tocqueville following the publication of *Democracy in America* was whether American debates about slavery risked destroying the fragile social order that democracy had constructed. In the

18 *Ibid.*, 596–599. The result of associating was to transform individualism into “the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood.” Volume II, pt. 2, of *Democracy* begins with the dangers of equality and individualism (581–589) and proceeds to discuss civil associations (590–609) and how they mitigate individual interest. Associations taught Americans that their private lives depended on their public cooperation (610–613).

19 James T. Kloppenberg, “Life Everlasting: Tocqueville in America,” in *idem*, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York, 1998), 71–81; Andrew Burstein, “The Political Character of Sympathy,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, XXI (2001), 601–632; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Democracy and Associations in the Long Nineteenth Century: Toward a Transnational Perspective,” *Journal of Modern History*, LXXV (2003), 269–299; Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2008); Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 23–32; Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009); Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, 2010), 101–127.

20 Tocqueville (eds. Furet and Mélonio; trans. Kahan), *The Old Regime and the Revolution, the Complete Text* (Chicago, 1998), I, 137. See also Furet and Mélonio, “Introduction,” in *Ibid.*; Dijn, “The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville’s *The Old Regime and the Revolution*,” *Modern Intellectual History*, V (2008), 1–25; Welch, *Tocqueville*, 121–164; Furet, “De Tocqueville and the Problem of the French Revolution,” in *idem* (trans. Elborg Forster), *Interpreting the French Revolution* (New York, 1981), 132–163.



decades after 1840, Tocqueville continued to extol American government—its bicameralism, its executive power, and its independent judiciary—for its ability “to combat the natural defects of democracy.”<sup>21</sup> Americans balanced freedom and order to protect liberty.<sup>22</sup> During debates about the appropriate constitution for the Second Republic, Tocqueville consistently advocated learning from Americans the lesson that democracy and liberty are distinct, equally important goods. Democracy on its own tended toward anarchy or tyranny, but the co-existence of a bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary ensured that impassioned majorities would never be able to impose their will on minorities, thus protecting liberty within a democratic context.<sup>23</sup>

In private, however, Tocqueville worried that the United States would lose modernity’s wager. In their fine introduction to the volume under review, the editors argue that as Tocqueville observed the United States, he began to “question *some* of the most significant claims of his widely acclaimed book.” They rightly note that Tocqueville was frightened by the transformation of American mores as a result of westward expansion, immigration, and slavery. But his correspondence in the two decades following *Democracy in America* also suggests that he never questioned his core theoretical belief, expressed in the penultimate chapter of volume I, in America’s accidental situation (its land and isolation), its laws, and its “habits and mores” as the “causes that tend to maintain the democratic republic in the United States.”<sup>24</sup> He now concluded, however, that these same factors might be its undoing.

Tocqueville’s first cause for concern was westward expansion. In *Democracy in America*, he had identified the expanse of the American continent and its separation from Europe as opportunities; the American landscape enabled political decentralization, local democracy, freedom from foreign intervention, and the wide

21 Tocqueville, “Report on *Democracy in Switzerland*,” January 15, 1848, *TOA*, 363.

22 Tocqueville, “Popular Banquet at Cherbourg,” March 19, 1848, *TOA*, 373.

23 Tocqueville, “Contributions to the Debate on the Constitution of the Second Republic” (1848–1851), *TOA*, 377–408.

24 Craiutu & Jennings, “The Third *Democracy*: Tocqueville’s Views on America after 1840,” *TOA*, 36; Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 319. My argument also challenges Hugh Brogan’s conclusion that Tocqueville, despite having access to thoughtful American correspondents, offered no theory for the sectional crisis. See Brogan, “Alexis de Tocqueville and the Coming of the American Civil War,” in Brian Holden Reid and John White (eds.), *American Studies: Essays in Honor of Marcus Cunliffe* (New York, 1991), 83–104.

distribution of wealth and prosperity.<sup>25</sup> The native advantages that had once allowed Americans “to commit great errors with impunity” now threatened the social order by unleashing selfish, aggressive, antisocial passions.<sup>26</sup> Tocqueville felt “apprehension” that Americans’ “spirit of conquest and even plunder” would undermine the moderate mores that democracies require to maintain social order and liberty.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, his letters reveal his concern that America’s wars for expansion risked greater European intervention in North American affairs.

Law was the second major contributor to American stability.<sup>28</sup> Along with federalism and local institutions, an independent judiciary was instrumental in tempering majoritarian tyranny and engendering democratic habits. Judges appointed for life could check overzealous majorities, but antebellum judges were becoming “dependent on the multitude or the parties (because of the election of judges by universal suffrage and due to the short duration of their mandate).” Elected judges no longer could “offer a sufficient guarantee to the individual as to encourage him not to take up the task of defending himself.”<sup>29</sup>

Nothing mattered more to the stability of democratic republics, however, than the “influence of mores.”<sup>30</sup> Democratic liberty was fragile because modern social orders were fragile. Democracy was not simply a system of government; it was a cultural system. Thanks to Americans’ “habits of the heart,” or “mores,” the dan-

25 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 319–330.

26 Tocqueville to Theodore Sedgwick, August 29, 1856, *TOA*, 181–183.

27 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, December 5, 1852, *TOA*, 136–137. See also Tocqueville’s reference to Americans’ “spirit of adventure” in Tocqueville to Jared Sparks, December 11, 1852, *TOA*, 139–140.

28 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 330–331.

29 Tocqueville to Francis Lieber, October 9, 1857, *TOA*, 261. See also Tocqueville, “Report on a Work by Mr. Th. Sedgwick. Entitled: *A Treatise on the Rules which Govern the Interpretation and the Application of Statutory and Constitutional Law*” (July 1858), *TOA*, 456–460; Tocqueville, “Report on Switzerland.” By the onset of the Civil War, twenty-one of thirty states had adopted judicial election. See Kermit L. Hall, “The Courts, 1790–1920,” in Michael Grossberg and Christopher Tomlins (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Law in America. II. The Long Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2008), 115. For a good discussion of debates about the judiciary, see Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early American Republic, 1789–1815* (New York, 2009), 400–468.

30 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 331–356: “Laws do more to maintain a democratic republic in the United States than physical causes do, and mores do more than laws” (352). Good discussions of the role of mores in *Democracy in America* can be found in Donald J. Maletz, “Tocqueville on Mores and the Preservation of Republics,” *American Journal of Political Science*, XLIX (2005), 1–15; Lamberti, *Tocqueville and the Two Democracies*, 13–39.

gers of democratic anarchy and tyranny were held at bay. But Tocqueville worried that the combination of new immigrants coming to the United States and slavery's expansion meant that America's mores would change, endangering the delicate balance that Americans had achieved in their effort to win modernity's wager.

In a letter of 1854, Tocqueville wrote that he was "astounded" to learn the extent of German emigration to America. He worried that "Germans [would] take their ideas with them to the United States and, to a certain extent, preserve them there," because Germans, according to Tocqueville, had been acculturated under "the long practice of absolute power." Unlike Americans who might be expected to defend their freedoms, Germans, already victims of "centralization," exhibited a "widespread passion for positions and dependency." Since the emergence of despotism was one of Tocqueville's worst fears, "the rapid introduction of foreigners into the United States and thus into the English race [was for him] the greatest danger faced by America."<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding Tocqueville's worries about immigration, he was adamantly antiracist. To Tocqueville, all human beings, although not all cultures, were equal.<sup>32</sup> Hence, upon receiving Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853), which posited a scientific basis for racial inequality, Tocqueville

31 Tocqueville to Gustave de Beaumont, August 6, 1854, *TOA*, 330–331; to Sedwick, August 29, 1856, *TOA*, 181–183; to Sedgwick, October 14, 1856, *TOA*, 188–189.

32 The argument herein takes issue with the conclusion of Curtis Stokes in "Tocqueville and the Problem of Racial Inequality," *Journal of Negro History*, LXXV (1990), that Tocqueville's distinction between cultural and racial/biological inferiority is practically unimportant (1–15). As Schleifer, *Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, makes clear, Tocqueville early in his travels to the United States discarded the idea that race as biology could explain differences between societies and peoples (62–72). As Stokes correctly points out, the cultural argument enabled Tocqueville to legitimate British and French imperialism and to claim that enslaved people in French colonies required a period of "apprenticeship" before being capable of sustaining a free society (Tocqueville, "Report on Abolition," in Seymour Drescher [ed.], *Tocqueville and Beaumont on Social Reform* [New York, 1968], 130–133). However, Tocqueville was equally critical of elite, white aristocratic mores—those of both the old regime French nobility and the Southern plantation aristocracy. In short, Tocqueville looked beyond the lens of race to the larger issue of the relationship between democracy and culture, well aware that not only did democracies require certain cultures but also, as he wrote in *Democracy in America*, that different cultures would create different kinds of democratic societies and institutions. As a case in point, he did not recommend that the French "follow the example set by American democracy or imitate the means it has used to achieve its goal," concluding that it would be "a great misfortune for the human race if liberty were obliged to exhibit identical features wherever it manifests itself" (Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 364).

wrote, “I do not believe anything of it at all.” Instead, Tocqueville attributed differences to culture: “I think that there is in each nation, whether it comes from race or rather the education of the centuries, something very tenacious, perhaps of a permanent character.”<sup>33</sup> Gobineau’s characterization of different human beings as “cousins at best,” justified the retrograde system “of masters and slaves by birth or right” that Tocqueville associated with proslavery ministers in the American South.<sup>34</sup>

Tocqueville’s concern about immigration was really about whether new immigrants would share, or come to share, the same habits of the heart as native-born Americans. Democracy, as Stout argued, is a form of praxis. It is a tradition that is often unarticulated, given expression through constant use among a people over time.<sup>35</sup> Tocqueville would have agreed. In various letters, he attributed to Americans a “common sense” and “practical wisdom” that had emerged out of both their social conditions and history.<sup>36</sup> In 1857, he wrote that although America’s elected leaders sought to flatter and deceive citizens, he was confident that Americans’ “practical sense,” a sense that emerged from practice rather than reason, would protect self-government from corrupt leaders.<sup>37</sup> If American democracy was to survive, ordinary people’s habits of the heart would have to be stronger than both immigrants’ European habits and political elites’ machinations.

Although westward expansion, judicial elections, and immigration endangered America, nothing worried Tocqueville more than slavery’s effect on mores, and nothing concerned him more

33 Tocqueville to Gustave de Beaumont, November 3, 1853, *TOA*, 328–329.

34 Tocqueville to Arthur de Gobineau, January 24, 1857, *TOA*, 337.

35 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, 2004). For an insightful discussion of the relationship between ideas and experience in this regard, see Susan Dunn, “Revolutionary Men of Letters and the Pursuit of Radical Change: The Views of Burke, Tocqueville, Adams, Madison, and Jefferson,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, LIII (1996), 729–754; Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 222–228.

36 Tocqueville to Edward Everett, August 5, 1851, *TOA*, 121–122. See Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 348–352: “The American learns about the law by participating in the making of it. He teaches himself about the forms of government by governing. He watches the great work of society being done every day before his eyes and, in a sense, by his hand.” See Robert T. Gannett, Jr., “Bowling Ninepins in Tocqueville’s Township,” *American Political Science Review*, XCVII (2003), 1–16; Rahe, *Soft Despotism*, 194–202; Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*; Villa, “Tocqueville and Civil Society”; Schleifer, *Making of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*, 121–141.

37 Tocqueville to Edward Vernon Childe, April 2, 1857, *TOA*, 224; to Sedgwick, June 13, 1857, *TOA*, 236.

than the sectional political crisis.<sup>38</sup> One of the longest sections in the first volume of *Democracy in America* concerned slavery. In it, Tocqueville expressed his hatred for slavery, his commitment to human equality, and his certainty that a race war in the South would play out much like the internal conflict of the French Revolution. In fact, this section in *Democracy* might be read as a primer for understanding Tocqueville's conception of relations between the state, the aristocracy, and the people in *The Old Regime*.

Tocqueville viewed slavery as a violation of both nature and Christianity, depriving enslaved Americans of "all the privileges of humanity." Many commentators had argued that enslaved people were naturally suited to their condition. Tocqueville, as he would do again in *The Old Regime* in his discussion of French peasants, argued that the causal chain worked the other way around. Africans, taken from their native society and thrown into slavery, became acculturated to slavery's mores: "Violence made him a slave, but habituation to servitude has given him the thoughts and ambitions of one." Slavery taught African Americans that they were other people's property. As a result, although not inferior by nature, enslaved people had neither the opportunity nor reason to develop their intellects.<sup>39</sup>

The development of slavery threatened democracy in the United States because it created a situation similar to that in prerevolutionary France—a master class habituated to the mores of aristocracy, and an enslaved black majority habituated to the mores of dependence. The Southern aristocracy was as useless in Tocqueville's portrayal as the French aristocracy would be in *The Old Regime*. Tocqueville celebrated the virtues of the free-labor system, but in the South, masters were "contemptuous not only of

38 For Tocqueville's position on slavery, see Mitchell, *Fragility of Freedom*, 167–182; Joel Lieske, "Race and Democracy," *Political Science and Politics*, XXII (1999), 217–224; Peter Augustine Lawler, "Tocqueville on Slavery, Ancient and Modern," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXX (1981), 466–477; Sally Gershman, "Alexis de Tocqueville and Slavery," *French Historical Studies*, IX (1976), 467–483; Drescher, *Dilemmas of Democracy*, 151–195.

39 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 366–367. Tocqueville asked his French readers to "reason by analogy." The French past manifested "great inequalities whose origins lay solely in legislation." Despite the obvious truth that there could be nothing "more factitious than a purely legal inferiority," Tocqueville reminded his readers that differences between the nobility and the peasants had "persisted for centuries." The "artificial barriers" that aristocrats had developed to distinguish themselves from "the mass of the people," which the French had to struggle to tear down, were analogous to the intractable traditions of racial aristocracy within the United States (Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 393–400).



labor but of all enterprises that succeed by virtue of labor.” “Living in idle comfort, [they had] the tastes of idle men.” Slavery produced an anachronism—an aristocratic culture in the midst of the most modern, democratic, egalitarian society in world history.<sup>40</sup>

To Tocqueville, the end of slavery depended on changing “the law of inheritance.”<sup>41</sup> Abolishing primogeniture was crucial to the transformation of America’s social order because aristocracy could not survive when every generation had to earn its wealth and status anew.<sup>42</sup> Southerners had long “resembled the noble families of Europe,” but when primogeniture ended, free workers emerged to challenge the old regime. Slavery might slowly disappear as the economic and social benefits of free labor became apparent and as the structural foundation—inheritable land—of aristocracy was undermined.<sup>43</sup> But the immediate abolition of slavery would prove “the greatest source of danger for Whites.” As in France, liberating millions of people acculturated to servitude and giving them the *ideas* of equality prior to the *habits and mores* of equality would produce a violent, disorderly revolution that would undermine democratic social order and produce a “rebellion with a future leader”—perhaps a Napoleon, a Toussaint L’Ouverture, or even a Nat Turner.<sup>44</sup> Despite the gross generalizations in his portrayal, Tocqueville’s South looked to him too much like prerevolutionary France, with an increasingly counterproductive aristocracy, an emerging free labor bourgeoisie (thanks to the end of primogeniture), and a peasant class not yet capable of embracing its rightful equality and liberty.

Tocqueville viewed slavery as “one of the greatest crimes that human beings could commit against the general cause of human-

40 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 400–401. For ideas about free labor and the dignity of work, see Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 271–286; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970). Whatever Tocqueville and white Northerners might have thought, however, historians should not draw too clear a line between a modern North and an aristocratic South. See Edward L. Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York, 2005), 131–144; Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810–1860* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 2 v.; William G. Thomas III and Ayers, “An Overview: The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities,” *American Historical Review*, CVIII (2003), available at [www.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR](http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR).

41 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 402.

42 *Ibid.*, 585–587.

43 *Ibid.*, 402–404.

44 *Ibid.*, 410, 417.



ity.”<sup>45</sup> But his concern was not just the morality of slavery but also its effect on American democracy.<sup>46</sup> Tocqueville had discovered in American democracy a form of equality that produced neither of his twin fears of disorder or tyranny. The combination of westward expansion, immigration in the North, and slavery in the South, however, risked undermining the mores that sustained America’s social order.

As early as 1844, Tocqueville had expressed his deep interest in America’s domestic affairs and its foreign policy, especially toward Britain regarding its interest in Oregon.<sup>47</sup> A decade later, he observed that the exclusively northern anti-Catholic Know-Nothing party was “dangerous to the internal peace of the Union” and that western “popular disorder,” a reference to Bleeding Kansas, demonstrated the potential for disorder and anarchy.<sup>48</sup> But because slavery created mores distinct from those in northern free societies, Tocqueville worried that the passions unleashed by the sectional crisis could not be mollified. By August 1856, as Americans readied for a presidential election, Tocqueville wrote that Europeans “are beginning to believe that you are not far from the time when you will separate yourselves from one another,” though he continued to “hope that this moment is farther away than people usually think.” Nonetheless, Tocqueville was concerned that increasing “foreign elements” had sullied Americans’ “practical sense” about democracy.<sup>49</sup> In June 1857, after the vio-

45 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, January 10, 1857, *TOA*, 195. Given his views about the sanctity of property (see, for example, Tocqueville, “Popular Banquet at Cherbourg,” March 19, 1848, *TOA*, 372–374; *idem*, “Preface,” *TOA*: 375–376), Tocqueville might well have agreed with Sen. John C. Calhoun that Northerners were erecting majoritarian tyranny by destroying the Southern (white) minority’s property rights. But because Tocqueville believed that slavery was a moral wrong, he concluded that its eradication did not involve the violation of any rights. See Margaret Kohn, “The Other America: Tocqueville and Beaumont on Race and Slavery,” *Polity*, XXXV (2002), 169–193.

46 Tocqueville to Edward Vernon Childe, April 2, 1857, *TOA*, 222–225. See also Tocqueville to Nassau Senior, September 4, 1856, *TOA*: 336; Tocqueville to Jared Sparks, July 15, 1857, *TOA*: 240; Tocqueville to Sedgwick, October 14, 1856, *TOA*, 187–189.

47 Tocqueville to Lieber, December 14, 1844, *TOA*, 77–78: “Write to us as soon as you can after your arrival in America. . . . The beginning of a new administration [the Polk presidency], its domestic and foreign policy, the state of the country, its attitude toward England, its likely decisions on the great issues of Texas, Oregon, and the Tariff . . . they all exercise greatly our curiosity.” Tocqueville to Lieber, December 2, 1844, *TOA*, 76–77.

48 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, September 19, 1855, *TOA*, 164–165.

49 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, August, 29, 1856, *TOA*, 181–183; October 14, 1856, *TOA*, 187–189.

lence in Kansas and the brutal beating of Sen. Charles Sumner by Rep. Preston Brooks on the Senate floor, Tocqueville wondered whether President Buchanan would be “capable of calming the almost revolutionary agitation” that followed his election. Americans appeared to have reached “a high level of violence which would be the infallible sign of civil war in Europe and which, even in America, could end by leading to it in the near future.” Tocqueville lamented the “evil passions” that could ultimately disrupt America’s delicate balance of equality, order, and liberty.<sup>50</sup>

By fall 1857, Tocqueville was interrogating his American correspondent about the country’s “present situation,” by which he meant not just “the state of the [political] parties, but what is more permanent than their squabbles, that is, the very foundation of mores and political customs.” He noted that many Europeans returning from America remarked on the “violent mores and uncouth habits” that they had encountered in America. “People [had to] carry arms with them in case they [had] to resort to legitimate self-defense.”<sup>51</sup> The advantages that had once sustained the republic—land, law, and, most of all, mores—no longer seemed effective.

**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY** Tocqueville’s understanding of the sectional crisis as expressed in his private correspondence was drawn almost directly from a specific chapter in *Democracy in America*’s first volume. Had he lived longer, he might have returned to the discussion of mediating institutions in the book’s second volume to locate the cause of the American Civil War in the breakdown of the associations that had sustained the social order. The fight about slavery fragmented America’s civil society; by 1860, social capital and generalized reciprocity between the two regions had all but vanished. Slavery may have caused the crisis, but Americans went to war because they no longer trusted each other.

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville had noted the danger of individualism without mediating institutions. As society’s stock of bridging social capital decreased, cooperation would also decline, and violence might become more likely. As Roth recently argued in *American Homicide*, personal violence and social trust are corre-

50 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, June 13, 1857, *TOA*, 234–236.

51 Tocqueville to Lieber, October 9, 1857, *TOA*, 260–262.

lated. The more that individuals trust their governmental institutions and elected leaders, the less likely are they to view violence as necessary or justified to achieve their ends.<sup>52</sup>

Tocqueville long recognized that slavery created a fracture that challenged efforts to forge mediating institutions. He saw the North and the South divided by “material interests” that “constitute[d] not so much parties as rival nations.” Northern manufacturers supported tariffs, whereas Southerners, dependent on Atlantic commerce, favored free trade. These economic divisions “pose[d] a threat to the future of the Union.” By 1860, the North and South had indeed come to regard each other as distinct nations. The issue, however, was not simply economics but the erosion of social trust caused by the breakdown of civil society’s mediating institutions.<sup>53</sup>

The American Revolutionary elite had been anxious to prevent their new republic—stripped, as it was, of the old mediating institutions—from following a fate similar to Rome’s.<sup>54</sup> They placed their faith in classical republican ideals—education, religion, and the wide distribution of property—to ensure a virtuous, engaged, and independent citizenry.<sup>55</sup> After the French Revolution, the issue seemed even more pressing, as Americans watched in horror the violence spawned in the name of republicanism. By

52 Read broadly, Roth’s argument in *American Homicide* suggests that the loss of social trust enabled leaders in both sections to channel Americans’ fears and anger into organized political violence.

53 Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 201. The following discussion develops themes explored in John L. Brooke, “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, XXIX (2009), 1–33; Neem, “Civil Society and American Nationalism, 1776–1865,” in Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie (eds.), *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America’s Political Past and Present* (Chicago, 2011). David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York, 1976), identified nationalism as one of the causes of the sectional divide that produced the Civil War. Nicholas Onuf and Peter S. Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville, 2006), make a strong case that the modern idea of liberal nationhood defined both Northerners’ and Southerners’ responses to the sectional crisis and, ultimately, their decision to go to war. See also Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question* (Athens, 2002).

54 John Greville Agard Pocock, “Civic Humanism and Its Role in Anglo-American Thought,” in *idem*, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), 80–103.

55 *Idem*, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969); Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York, 1989).

the nineteenth century, new class and social divisions had led to riots in America's expanding urban centers, reminding many observers of how fragile civil peace was.<sup>56</sup>

Federalists endorsed a strong central government to keep factional squabbles within and between the states from delivering the young republic to anarchic civil war and, ultimately, the hands of eager European empires.<sup>57</sup> The Constitution, however, created a "roof without walls," a new political structure without the emotional glue that might encourage Americans' loyalty to the new government.<sup>58</sup> Under George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, the Federalist party envisioned a nationalism constructed from the top down through policies that appealed to Americans' economic interests, through symbolic invocations of national unity in the press, and through what Waldstreicher calls "sentimental acts of celebration" involving ordinary citizens. Instead of national unity, however, the result was the mobilization of the Jeffersonian Republican party in opposition to this centralization of power. Although Federalists helped to lay the groundwork for a national identity, their efforts to impose social solidarity faltered.<sup>59</sup>

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, political and religious associations, not individual virtue nor the state alone, sustained America's democracy by developing social trust and joining

56 Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York, 2009); Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763–1834* (Chapel Hill, 1987); *idem*, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, 1996). Both Cleves and Gilje express a Tocquevillian sensibility that social division and violence are constantly present in society. Cleves urges historians to stop thinking of violence as the exception and instead recognize in human nature and society "the continuing ever-present potential for violence" (xiv). See also Roth, *American Homicide*.

57 David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence, 2003); Onuf and Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776–1814* (Madison, 1993).

58 John M. Murrin, "A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in Richard R. Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter (eds.), *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 333–348.

59 David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 108–173, 111. For Federalists' nation-building strategies, see Stephen Minicucci, "The 'Cement of Interest': Interest-Based Models of Nation-Building in the Early Republic," *Social Science History*, XXV (2001), 247–274; Smith, "Constructing National Identity: Strategies of the Federalists," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (eds.), *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, 1999), 19–40; Max M. Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York, 2003); Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, 1990).

people across America's vast territory into an imagined community.<sup>60</sup> These associational ties relied on a system of publicly encouraged and often publicly financed internal improvements—roads, rivers, canals, and later railroads—that unified America geographically, as well as on the federal postal service's cheap rates for newspapers that allowed civic organizers to reach readers across the continent.<sup>61</sup> Although the state encouraged new links across space, ordinary Americans could choose whether to participate in the vast network of political and religious groups that came to span the continent—North, South, and the expanding West.<sup>62</sup>

With the creation of the federal state came federal politics and, in turn, national political coalitions.<sup>63</sup> Although the first parties were largely elite efforts, expanding suffrage resulted in the mass mobilization of voters. By the 1820s, party builders had created tools to bring people to the polls. Parties hosted banquets and dinners and provided election-day entertainment. For many Americans, party affiliation comprised an important part of their

60 The idea of the nation as an imagined community comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983). On the role of associations in generating communal ties across space, see Amanda Bowie Moniz, "Saving the Lives of Strangers: Humane Societies and the Cosmopolitan Provision of Charitable Aid," *Journal of the Early Republic*, XXIX (2009), 607–640.

61 Richard R. John, "Governmental Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic, 1787–1835," *Studies in American Political Development*, XI (1997), 347–380; John L. Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Naomi Wulf, "'The Greatest General Good': Road Construction, National Interest, and Federal Funding in Jacksonian America," in Cornelis A. van Minnen and Sylvia L. Hilton (eds.), *Federalism, Citizenship, and Collective Identities in U.S. History* (Amsterdam, 2000), 53–72; John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal Service from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995). The state was also involved in shaping the legal rights and privileges that associations could exercise, a function that Tocqueville generally overlooked. See Kevin Butterfield, "A Common Law of Membership: Expulsion, Regulation, and Civil Society in the Early Republic," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 133 (July 2009), 255–276; William J. Novak, "The American Law of Association: The Legal-Political Construction of Civil Society," *Studies in American Political Development*, XV (2001), 163–188.

62 Although political parties were at times inclusive of the poor and other minorities, many other associations had largely middle-class or elite members. Early-nineteenth-century violence stemmed in part from the failure of mediating institutions to be sufficiently inclusive, or, in Putnam's phrasing, bridging. See Mary P. Ryan, "Civil Society as Democratic Practice: North American Cities during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX (1999), 559–584; Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 63–64; Roth, *American Homicide*, 186–189. For a more optimistic evaluation of the bridging influence of associations, see Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman, 2003), 108–131; Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 328–329.

63 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, 36–37.



identity. Partisans eagerly joined party-sponsored militias, debated their neighbors, and enjoyed patronage from political elites. In the streets of America's expanding cities, partisans marched proudly and, at times, engaged in mock and real violence against their rivals.<sup>64</sup> The proliferation of newspapers and the wide circulation of stories enabled American readers to imagine themselves as a national political public. In Brooke's words, party organizations and public partisan activities served to "mediate between the law-making powers of the state and the essentially private pursuits of happiness by ordinary people," constructing bridges linking individuals to the national community.<sup>65</sup>

Religious leaders were even more important to the formation of a national public in civil society. As states abandoned their tax support for churches and as Americans moved west, ministers embarked on a vast organizational effort to attract new congregants and to sustain and expand their churches.<sup>66</sup> One result was the formation of national denominations.<sup>67</sup> But ministers also taught their

64 Andrew W. Robertson, "'Look on this Picture . . . And on This!' Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1780–1820," *American Historical Review*, CVI (2001), 1263–1280; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000); Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York, 1998); Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1997), 94–131; *idem*, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997); Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, 1991). On partisan militias, see Albrecht Koschnik, *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together": Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775–1840* (Charlottesville, 2007), 90–152.

65 Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX (1998), 45. For partisanship and identity, see Koschnik, *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together"*; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 201–235; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983). For the importance of print in creating a national identity, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago, 2009); David Paul Nord, "Newspapers and American Nationhood," in *idem*, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana, 2001), 80–91. On the emergence and spread of newspapers, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, 2001); Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming-of-Age with the Press* (New York, 1995), 28–32; Sandra Gustafson, "The Emerging Media of Early America," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, CXV (2005), 205–250.

66 Nathan O. Hatch, "The Second Great Awakening and the Market Revolution," in David Konig (ed.), *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (Stanford, 1995), 243–264.

67 Sidney Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1963); Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780–



congregants to form voluntary reform associations to spread the religious values that they believed to be necessary in a republic devoid of the transcendent supports of the old order. Beginning in the 1810s and 1820s, American men and women joined mass-membership associations for such diverse purposes as distributing Bibles and tracts, supporting missionaries to the West and abroad, and encouraging temperance. These associations often had a central office, but much of their work was done by local auxiliaries that depended on middle-class women and men volunteers. Even more than parties, religious leaders circulated newspapers, magazines, tracts, and their associations' annual reports around the country, linking citizens together into shared reading communities.<sup>68</sup>

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1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly*, XXI (1969), 23–43; Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700–1865* (Chicago, 2003), 49–77.

68 Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, 81–113; Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, 85–98; Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of the Mass Media in America* (New York, 2004); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Peter J. Wosh, *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, 1994); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, 1990); Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (New York, 1989), 192–229; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815–1860* (New York, 1978); Lois W. Banner, "The Protestant Crusade: Religious Missions, Benevolence, and Reform in the United States, 1790–1840," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 1970); Mathews, "Organizing Process"; Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1865* (New York, 1960). Links to the South might have been weak because Southern reform associations tended to be composed of elite rather than middle-class members and limited in scope. See Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism," 8–9; McCarthy, *American Creed*, 78–97, 123–44, 165–191. Yet recent work suggests that Southern reform and voluntarism may have penetrated more deeply than once thought. See Timothy James Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville, 2007); Jonathan D. Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class 1800–1861* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 89–110; John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge, 1998); John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, Conn., 1982); Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860* (New York, 1985), 195–236; Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1980), 159–185. On the importance of religious print, see Nord, *Faith in Reading*; Wosh, *Spreading the Word*; Trish Loughran, "Abolitionist Nation: The Space of Organized Abolition, 1790–1840," in *idem*, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York, 2007), 303–361. The efforts of evangelicals spurred the mobilization of counter-movements that also linked citizens together. See Kyle Volk, "The Perils of 'Pure Democracy': Minority Rights, Liquor Politics, and Popular Sovereignty in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic*, XXIX (2009), 641–679; Eric R. Schlereth, "Fits of Political Religion: Stalking Infidelity and the Politics of Moral Reform in Antebellum America," *Early American Studies*, V (2007), 288–322.

By creating social networks based on party, denomination, and reform, political and religious associations helped to build social capital and encourage generalized reciprocity, particularly in the American West where migrants had to construct the social order anew.<sup>69</sup> Although western migrants undoubtedly carried their own “social and cultural baggage,” their visions of what constituted an ideal social order, the challenges of creating a social order in the West should not be underestimated.<sup>70</sup> Both settlers and ministers sent from the East had to act fast to build the institutions that would turn isolated individuals into a society; in fact, westward migration spurred the development of national networks.<sup>71</sup> This bridging social capital connected the West and the East into a larger community.

Ironically, the networks that brought Americans together also taught them about their differences. The most pressing issue facing Americans who moved westward was whether to permit slavery to move with them. Their disagreements resonated nationally. As John wrote, “it was not isolation, but familiarity, that posed the

69 The frontier was by no means vacant. The state relied on diplomacy and military force to clear the land of Native Americans and to exert federal and state sovereignty over them. See, among recent studies, Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australasia, 1788–1836* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); Leonard J. Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians, Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America* (Charlottesville, 2009); Jeffrey Pasley, “Midget on Horseback: American Indians and the History of the American State,” *Common-place*, IX (Oct. 2008), available at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/cp/vol-09/no-01/pasley/>.

70 Jack P. Greene, “Social and Cultural Capital in Colonial British America: A Case Study,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIX (1999), argues that the definition of social capital ought to include the social and cultural ideas that migrants use as resources as they go about constructing new settlements (495). See also Virginia E. McCormick and Robert W. McCormick, *New Englanders on the Ohio Frontier: The Migration and Settlement of Worthington, Ohio* (Kent, 1998). On the West see Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007); Roth, *American Homicide*, 180–249.

71 Neem, “Creating Social Capital in the Early American Republic: The View from Connecticut,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXIX (2009), 471–495; Gerald Gamm and Putnam, “The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840–1940,” *ibid.*, XXIX (1999), 511–557; Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York, 1987); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York, 1981); Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–1870* (Urbana, 1978); Phillip S. Paludan, “The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis in Law and Order,” *American Historical Review*, LXXVII (1972), 1021–1023; Tetsuo S. Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago, 1964). For a discussion of the West as transformed in eastern ministers’ minds from chaos to social order, see Rush Welter, “The Frontier West as Image of American Society: Conservative Attitudes before the Civil War,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVI (1960), 593–614.

gravest threat to the Union.”<sup>72</sup> For example, the emergence of Northern abolitionism forced political leaders in Congress to consider the slavery question.<sup>73</sup> Heretofore, Congress had tabled petitions regarding slavery’s abolition or spread, but the “gag rule” proposed by Sen. James Hammond from South Carolina in December 1835, which stated that Congress lacked jurisdiction to receive petitions concerning slavery, forced every representative to take a position and risk the wrath of his pro- or anti-slavery local constituents. The national parties also had to take sides in the debate, and given their role as national mediating institutions, the ensuing fragmentation threatened the entire nation. According to Freehling, “Hammond’s motion endangered every congressman’s local seat and national party—and thereby endangered national Union itself.” In 1835, however, the countervailing pressures of national parties prevailed. Northern Democrats joined with their Southern counterparts to support a more moderate gag rule, sustaining partisan, and therefore national, unity.<sup>74</sup>

The emergence of abolitionism points to another problem. Anti-slavery and its more radical abolitionist edge were not national but regional movements, emerging in the North and in the Old Northwest. Hence, to use Putnam’s terminology, they formed bonding capital that jeopardized national mediating institutions. America’s largest Protestant denominations fractured sectionally because of issues related to slavery. Presbyterians divided in 1837, and again in 1857; Methodists divided in 1844; and Bap-

72 John, *Spreading the News*, 63, 257–280. See also Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War?*, 131–144; Wells, *Origins of the Southern Middle Class*, 41–65; Brooke, “Cultures of Nationalism”; *idem*, “‘To be Read by the Whole People’: Press, Party, and Public Sphere in the United States, 1789–1840,” *Proceeding of the American Antiquarian Society*, CX (2000), 44–118; Katherine Anna Pierce, “Networks of Disunion: Politics, Print Culture, and the Coming of the Civil War,” unpub. Ph. D. diss. (University of Virginia, 2006); William H. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion. I. Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990), 308–352; McCarthy, *American Creed*, 123–143; Loughran, “Abolitionist Nation.” For the relationship between regionalism and nationalism, see also Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 246–293; Peter S. Onuf, “Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism,” in Ayers et al. (eds.), *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore, 1996), 11–37.

73 Brooke, “‘To be Read by the Whole People’”; Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women’s Political Identity* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, 1993); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976).

74 Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, I, 312; Brooke, “‘To be Read by the Whole People’”; Leonard L. Richards, *Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780–1860* (Baton Rouge, 2000), 107–133; Silbey, “‘There Are Other Questions Beside That of Slavery Merely’: The Democratic Party and Antislavery Politics,” in *idem*, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York, 1985), 87–115.

tists differed over whether slaveholders could serve as Baptist missionaries in 1845.<sup>75</sup>

As denominations split, national interdenominational associations also felt new pressures. First, sectional denominational divisions made interdenominational efforts more suspect. Second, sectional tensions stressed national reform efforts. Northern anti-slavery activists pressured national reform associations to take a stand against slavery. Some Southerners sought to keep slavery out of national reform associations' work, while others turned against national associations altogether to avoid reforms that might threaten slavery.<sup>76</sup> Efforts to remain neutral alienated citizens from both regions. Organizational leaders sought to convince both pro-slavery and anti-slavery activists that national ties were vital to both the societies' religious ends and the health of the Union. As one speaker told members of the American Sunday School Union in 1857, despite the tensions between South Carolina and Massachusetts "in politics," in the Sunday School Union they "exchange the kiss of peace" and act as "fellow-labourers."<sup>77</sup>

American leaders recognized that the breakdown of religious mediating institutions threatened the entire Union. In April 1845, Sen. Henry Clay commented: "Indeed, scarcely any public occurrence has happened for a long time that gave me so much real concern and pain as the menaced separation of the Church, by a line throwing all the Free States on one side, and all the Slave States on the other. I will not say that such a separation would necessarily produce a dissolution of the political union of these States; but the example would be fraught with imminent danger, and, in co-operation with other causes unfortunately existing, its tendency on the stability of the Confederacy would be perilous and alarming."<sup>78</sup> With their organizations divided, Southerners were free to construct a pro-slavery Christianity, especially in re-

75 Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1993); C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, 1985); Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise*, 103–107; H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . Racism in Southern Religion, 1780–1910* (Durham, 1972).

76 Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise*, 98–170; Pierce, "Networks of Disunion," 59–77; Wosh, *Spreading the Word*, 118–150; Clifford S. Griffin, "The Abolitionists and the Benevolent Societies, 1831–1861," *Journal of Negro History*, LXIV (1959), 195–216; *idem*, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, 177–197.

77 *Thirty-third Annual Report, American Sunday School Union*, 1857, quoted in Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise*, 146–147. For the Sunday School movement, see Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven, 1988).

78 Clay quoted in Goen, *Broken Churches*, 100–101.

sponse to Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion. Northerners, in turn, were free to express their hostility to slavery. The informational networks that had once brought Americans together now chronicled each other's sectional heresies. Tied institutionally only to their sectional counterparts, citizens lacked the social trust that might have moderated their hostility to each other.<sup>79</sup>

Parties also lost their ability to sustain national social trust. As Northern anti-slavery adherents grew in numbers, associations, and media presence, Northern voters became more determined to elect anti-slavery representatives. Southerners were no less determined to endorse political leaders who supported slavery's expansion. As Holt argued, the ability of the national parties to sustain national coalitions depended largely on their ability to represent issues other than slavery and to hold different views about slavery in the North and South.<sup>80</sup> But as slavery became a litmus test, the national media made it difficult for parties to talk out of both sides of their mouth. The Whig party was the first to collapse in the face of these sectional pressures. In the wake of its demise emerged the exclusively northern Republican party, which nearly captured the presidency in 1856. Like the abolitionists, the Republicans formed bonding social capital, linking Northerners together but lacking bridges to the South. The only other major mediating institution was the Democratic party, which sustained a national coalition until 1860. In 1844, Northerner, and former president, Martin Van Buren was denied the Democratic party's nomination because of his unwillingness to bow to Southern demands for the immediate annexation of Texas; in 1848, he defected, with others, to support the northern-based Free Soil party.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, the Democratic party held together until 1860, when disagreements about slavery led the party to run different candidates in the North and the South and to lose the presidency to Republican Abraham Lincoln.

The fragmentation of civil society along sectional lines under-

79 Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism," 20–33; Pierce, "Networks of Disunion," 131–174; McCarthy, *American Creed*, 126–141; Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 132–210; Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 257–296; Smith, *In His Image*, 166–207.

80 Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978); Freehling, *Road to Disunion*; William E. Gienapp, "The Crisis of American Democracy: The Political System and the Coming of the Civil War," in Gabor S. Boritt (ed.), *Why the Civil War Came* (New York, 1996), 81–124.

81 Among many sources on this subject, see Richards, *Slave Power*, 134–161.



mined the social trust that national organizations had produced. Before Lincoln's election, Southerners and Northerners had been willing to make compromises over slavery. For example, Northern and Southern state courts exercised comity in relation to each other's laws. Northern courts would return runaways and, despite their own prohibition of slavery, permit masters in transit to carry their slaves through free states. Southern courts would recognize the freedom of enslaved people who had traveled North or been freed by Northern courts. By 1860, both sides had rejected comity altogether. In 1857, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney gave comity a *coup de grace* in his *Dred Scott* opinion that, many Northerners worried, would open the door to nationalizing slavery by protecting masters' property rights throughout the Union.<sup>82</sup>

The breakdown in social trust is also evident in the turmoil surrounding the Compromise of 1850, which consisted of five distinct bills: a new fugitive slave law; the admission of California as a free state; the organization of territories taken from Mexico, without any determination about slavery (so-called popular sovereignty); a deal to limit the size of Texas in return for national help to pay its debt; and the abolition of the slave trade in Washington, D.C. When the five pieces were offered as an omnibus bill, sectional tensions trumped partisan loyalties, resulting in no overall majority. Only when the package was broken down into discrete bills in the Senate and House were distinct majorities possible. The Compromise barely passed, as parties failed to maintain national unity against the sectional beliefs of legislators and their constituents.<sup>83</sup>

After 1850, both sides concluded that they had given too much and received too little. Southerners grew tired of sacrificing their interest in free trade to aid Northern manufacturers and farmers without gaining sufficient support for slavery.<sup>84</sup> Northerners resented being led into war with Mexico, settling for low tariffs, and helping to sustain slavery in the South and Southwest only to face a hostile "Slave Power" committed to expanding slavery

82 My understanding of comity is indebted to Charles W. McCurdy at the University of Virginia. For further discussion, see Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill, 1981).

83 Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, I, 507–509.

84 Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore, 2009); Onuf and Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War*, 256–265.



throughout the Union.<sup>85</sup> The possibility for compromise was quickly giving way to social distrust and the potential for violence.

**SOCIAL TRUST AND CIVIL WAR** Social capital is vital to winning modernity's wager. When social capital is extensive, social trust is high, and citizens are willing to make concessions to minorities and others within the polity. As Hetherington wrote about recent American affairs, when trust in government is low, "public opposition to government is focused entirely on programs that require political majorities to make sacrifices for political minorities." Low trust increases the transaction costs of every negotiation as the price of giving something up rises and the expectation of receiving a fair return declines, requiring for each transaction ever-more difficult negotiations.<sup>86</sup> Hetherington's key insight, that when citizens trust their government they are more likely to promote public policies that help others than themselves, helps to clarify the relationship between trust and the crisis that produced the American Civil War. As reciprocity declined, the struggle regarding every tariff, every new state's admission, and every bill concerning slavery became more intense. Northerners and Southerners demanded policies that served their section best; without effective, and affective, mediation, both sides lost faith in the other side's willingness to return favors. By the *Dred Scott* decision and Lincoln's election, the North and the South had become two separate imagined communities or, as Tocqueville had written, "rival nations."<sup>87</sup>

Although historians have long debated the extent of the

85 Richards, *Slave Power*; Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, 2000), 61–80, 130–152; Pierce, "Networks of Disunion," 221–271.

86 Hetherington, *Why Trust Matters*, 3.

87 The development of a Southern national identity prior to secession brought many white Southerners together into the Confederacy. See Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism"; Gary W. Gallagher, "Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Directions in Recent Scholarship on the Confederacy," *Civil War History*, LV (2009), 329–253; James M. McPherson, "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question," *Civil War History*, L (2004), 418–433; Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill, 2005); Benjamin L. Carp, "Nations of American Rebels: Understanding Nationalism in Revolutionary North America and the Civil War South," *Civil War History*, XLVIII (2002), 5–33; Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988). For the North, see Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York, 2006); Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence, 2002); Grant, *North over South*; Mark

differences between the North and the South, the absence of mediating institutions to produce national bridging social capital encouraged each region to view itself as distinctive.<sup>88</sup> Thus, having lost trust in the North, the South's "apostles of disunion" convinced white Southern public opinion to abandon the Union and embrace a new nation.<sup>89</sup> Northerners, who—much like Tocqueville—saw modernity's wager and the very future of democracy to be at stake, believed, in Paludan's words, that secession would "produce disorder, anarchy, and a general disrespect [of minorities] for government." "What community was safe if such a pattern were established and endorsed?"<sup>90</sup> As President Lincoln stated in his 1861 inaugural address, "the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy."<sup>91</sup> To those who shared Lincoln's conclusion, secession revealed that democracies were incapable of sustaining social order and, therefore, that free societies were doomed to anarchy, as European defenders of monarchy proclaimed.<sup>92</sup>

Southerners were not unaware of modernity's wager. They tended to view their paternalistic, aristocratic traditions as bulwarks against the class conflicts that they saw to their north. Yet even as they publicly disavowed, they privately realized that their own system was inherently violent and unstable, which is why they sought to limit the circulation of abolitionist literature. As Tocqueville knew, nothing brings down aristocracy as effectively as the idea of equality.<sup>93</sup>

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Wahlgren Summers, "'Freedom and Law Must Die Ere They Sever': The North and the Coming of the Civil War," in Boritt (ed.), *Why the Civil War Came*, 179–200.

88 For an overview of the debate, see Thomas and Ayers, "Differences Slavery Made."

89 Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville, 2001). For how a minority secessionist movement relied on sectional identity and anger to pull the South out of the Union, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, II, 269–534. Silbey, "The Surge of Republican Power: Partisan Antipathy, American Social Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War" (1982), in *idem*, *The Partisan Imperative*, 166–189, reveals the extent to which Southern rhetoric built on the pre-existing ideological framework of the Democratic party.

90 Paludin, "American Civil War," 1017, 1019. Because the Civil War forced many Americans to consider the tension between equality and liberty and the benefits and dangers of an expanding state, *Democracy in America* received a serious reading for the first time. See Zunz, "Tocqueville and the Americans: *Democracy in America* as Read in Nineteenth-Century America," in Welch (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, 359–396.

91 Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address," March 4, 1861, in Andrew Delbanco (ed.), *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1992), 200.

92 McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861–1865* (New York, 1995), 27–46.

93 For a discussion of the tension between liberal equality and racial aristocracy, see James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York, 1990).

Tocqueville died on April 16, 1859, just before the American Civil War began, confident that equality was the way of the future and that slavery was incompatible with modernity. In 1858, he expressed his “hope that the abolitionist cause [would] triumph in Kansas[, desiring it] with all [his] heart, in the interest of the whole of mankind.”<sup>94</sup> He must have known, however, that supporting the abolitionist cause in 1858 meant risking civil war in order to rid America of one of humanity’s “greatest crimes.”<sup>95</sup> His experience of, and reflections on, France made him especially sensitive to modernity’s wager. He knew that modern societies—those divested of the transcendent and supposedly natural links that had once held people together—could lapse into violence, anarchy, and ultimately a return to despotism. His letters reveal his fears that the antebellum United States could follow France’s path, and his interpretation of mediating institutions in *Democracy in America* helps to explain how the war came.

Maintaining order and liberty in a modern democratic society is an ongoing challenge precisely because it depends on the consent of the governed. Order should not be imposed; it has to be produced. Essential to this effort is the social trust that enables citizens to sacrifice for each other. Americans today, far removed from the Civil War, tend to romanticize the men in blue and gray, forgetting the Civil War’s lesson on modernity’s wager. Tocqueville watched the emergence of sectional division with horror. His hope that Americans would find a way to avoid war waned in the 1850s. Had he lived to witness the Civil War, he might have recognized a parallel to aspects of the French Revolution that he had depicted in *The Old Regime*. Just as the failure of aristocratic mediating institutions had initiated the path to revolution in France, the failure of America’s democratic mediating institutions had created the conditions for civil war. Although Tocqueville may have concluded that war was justified to eradicate an evil as great as slavery, he also would have offered eloquent testimony about the importance of fellow citizens treating each other with the generosity and respect necessary to sustain the social trust on which democratic liberty and peace depends.

94 Tocqueville to Childe, Jan. 23, 1858, *TOA*, 280–282.

95 Tocqueville to Sedgwick, January 10, 1857, *TOA*, 195.