Bowling Ninepins in Tocqueville's Township

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Despite elevating Alexis de Tocqueville to iconic status in our national debate on civic engagement, we have frequently neglected the range and depth of his associational thought. In this essay, I trace the early manifestations and evolution from 1828 to 1840 of his understanding of the commune or township, a featured source of public participation and cohesion within his larger associational lexicon. I show how his reflections on local liberties, in general, and the New England township, in particular, inspired and helped to shape both volumes of his Democracy in America. I emphasize the degree to which Tocqueville saw the participatory vector originating in the township's political life as galvanizing an ardent civic spirit leading to cultural, intellectual, and economic achievements. I conclude by seeking to connect lessons gleaned from Tocqueville's township to contemporary strategies to strengthen citizen participation.

"Tocqueville was right," Robert Putnam (1993, 182) proclaimed as he concluded his immense Italian studies by asserting that it was northern Italy's dense network of voluntary associations and its accumulated reservoir of social capital that deserved principal credit for producing effective democratic government there. Trumpeting his attention to the primacy of these "*sociocultural factors*" (11), Putnam seamlessly wove Tocqueville into the early conceptual frame of his own larger project, which has expanded during the past decade to encompass a series of works calling for a reappraisal of the very texture of day-to-day American civic life. "Making democracy work," Putnam's now famous argument goes, requires the engagement (or reengagement in America's case) of citizens to the tasks of building (or rebuilding) thriving networks of social interaction and trust. By adducing Tocqueville's powerful imprimatur, Putnam has sought to enhance his theoretical argument and bolster his own "social capitalist" agenda.

Putnam's reading of Tocqueville is misleading. Of course Tocqueville makes a classic argument about the value of voluntary networks or associations in the early American republic—his comments on these matters are excerpted in anthologies of American political thought and cited with unabashed veneration by political and civic leaders alike, with President Bush only the latest in such a line of admirers (Bumiller 2002). But despite locating several of these evident features of Tocqueville's fertile and fervent associational topography, Putnam ignores or fails to grasp the larger forest within which Tocqueville's analysis is situated.

Tocqueville's analysis of American civic life, as we will see in this paper, is noteworthy for its consistently *political* dimension, evident in his unswerving attention to a participatory vector that originated in the political life of the American township and then disseminated its own bracing vitality to civil society as a whole. Nor was Tocqueville's analysis of this dynamic exclusive to America. In 1836, after the publication of volume 1 of *Democracy in America*, he wrote his own analysis of the roots of civic engagement in northern Italy: Reading Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, Tocqueville (1989, 546) concluded that liberty as exhibited in "political passions" and revolutions, however turbulent it might have been, was a principal catalyst (*"agent puissant"*) for the Florentine republic's "extraordinary expansion" of the human spirit, its power and commercial riches, and its perfecting of the arts, sciences, and letters from 1245 to 1492. Twenty years later, in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville ([1856] 2001, 243) analyzed the evisceration of French civil society that preceded and precipitated the French Revolution, memorably concluding that "when the Revolution broke out, one would have searched in vain in the greatest part of France for ten men who had the habit of acting in concert in a regular manner." Based upon his ruminations during four and one-half years about the Revolution's causes, he finally fingered in his book the French monarchy as the principal culprit for French civic isolation, owing to its centuries-old tendency to suffocate local community life by absorbing local political responsibilities.

Tocqueville's associational topography is both more extensive and more nuanced than commentators have tended to recognize.[1] In *Democracy in America*,

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[1] Besides Putnam, I have in mind analysts such as Skocpol, who sees Tocqueville as epitomizing "a zero-sum way of thinking that pits 'state' against 'society'" (1997, 459) and who criticizes his consistent associational "romanticism" (1996, 23–24), and Mark E. Warren (2001, 32), who argues that Tocqueville's frame consists of a "relatively simple bipolar model of state–civil society relations." Several commentators have provided thoughtful discussions seeking to clarify Tocqueville's subtle associational framework, among them Wudel (1993), Galston (2000), Fleischacker (1998, 308–10), Rosenblum (1998, 43–44), Whittington (1998, 21–32), and Encarnación (2001). Of these, Galston, Whittington, and Encarnación draw explicit attention to the common failure of contemporary civil society enthusiasts to grasp Tocqueville's political emphases. Fried (2002) cites additional areas in which she believes that Putnam neglects important aspects of Tocqueville's analysis and methodology.

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Tocqueville carefully distinguished four principal forms of association: permanent, voluntary political, voluntary civic, and small private. He began by emphasizing America's "permanent associations created by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties"; he then separated these from more ephemeral, voluntary associations "that owe their birth and development only to individual will" (Tocqueville [1835 & 1840] 2000, 180; hereafter *DA*).[2] He proceeded to split his voluntary associations along a political/civic axis, with the former principally treated in volume 1 and the latter in volume 2. Leaders and members of such voluntary political and civic associations were driven by the very logic of potent democratic equality to cast their associational nets widely. In their desire to achieve lofty objectives with their organizations, they knew they had to garner broad membership on an often vast geographic scale. Their efforts thus differed in nature and scope from those of members of Tocqueville's fourth associational group—the host of small private associations that formed in democracies to allow residents "to taste the enjoyments of private life" (577). Tocqueville deferred treatment of such groups to volume 2, part 3, when he discussed less conscious, less voluntary, more natural "mores properly so-called." I do not include religious sects in Tocqueville's associational lexicon, since he did not refer to them as associations per se in either volume 1 or volume 2. Religion for Tocqueville underpinned democratic life in a host of largely indirect ways (Zuckert 1981); it did so by responding to human spiritual aspirations in a manner that restrained (volume 1) and elevated (volume 2) democratic men and women at precisely the points of democracy's greatest needs (Mitchell 1995, 5–11; Tinder 1999). By steering clear of democratic politics, religion made democratic politics possible. All four types of association also operated in spheres separate from that of the state and national governments that protected the homeland. Although these governments ensured the nation's political "*great liberty*" (Tocqueville 1977, 1:407–8), by themselves they were incapable of maintaining and renewing "the circulation of sentiments and ideas in a great people," owing to their ingrained tendency to dictate their wishes to the populace (*DA*, 491–92).[3]

To begin to grasp the multiple dimensions of Tocqueville's associational quadrant, I concentrate in this paper on one neglected aspect of it—the township. By tracing the trajectory of his township investigations through pre-American (1828–31), American (1831–32), and post-American (1832–40) phases, and by examining his expression of his findings in both volumes of *Democracy in America*, I hope to broaden our appreciation of the range and depth of his associational thought. To sharpen our understanding of the importance he ascribed to the political origins of American civic dynamism, I examine Habermas' and Arendt's own thoughtful responses to his arguments. Finally, I situate our Tocquevillian analysis within the context of contemporary debates about our nation's civic shortcomings. Remedial proposals have foundered, I believe, on the shoals of conceptual ambiguity, leading even a prestigious panel such as Putnam's Saguaro Seminar (2001, 79) to conclude its recent report by conflating town meeting attendance and running for public office with cookie baking and neighborhood barbecues, thus unintentionally trivializing the national "civic crisis" (6) to which it has sought to draw our attention. In my opinion, we simply cannot equate family picnics (Putnam 2000, 414) with various types of political engagement if we hope to make our democracy work. But at the very least, if we insist upon doing so, we should remove Alexis de Tocqueville as an expert witness or national cheerleader for this saccharine project.

TOCQUEVILLE'S INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDIEVAL COMMUNE IN GUIZOT'S LECTURES

Prior to setting foot in America, Tocqueville recognized the importance of the township, or commune, as an indispensable, if often turbulent and unstable, incubator for local liberties. For decades, our understanding of the importance of this conceptual underpinning for his associational thought has been obscured, however, by a gap in Tocquevillian scholarship that has only recently begun to be filled: the recognition of François Guizot as "one of the essential interlocutors of Tocqueville, and perhaps the principal among them" (Furet 1984, 230). To grasp the significance for Tocqueville of his discovery in America of the New England township, we must begin by examining his response to Guizot's portrayal of the medieval commune in his 1828–30 lectures at the Sorbonne. And to grasp the novelty of our own emerging understanding of the importance of that response, we must briefly recap 150 years of Tocquevillian scholarship.

Until the mid-1980s, Tocqueville studies proceeded in relative ignorance of Guizot's influence on Tocqueville's thought. The reason is not hard to discern: Tocqueville himself had no desire to trumpet his debt to his most prominent political rival, and Gustave de Beaumont, in his own hagiographic role as posthumous editor of Tocqueville's works, neglected even to mention Guizot in either his 1861 "Notice" or his 1864 "Preface," let alone incorporate in his nine-volume *Oeuvres complètes* any portion of the extensive lecture notes that Tocqueville had transcribed as a rapt student at Guizot's Sorbonne lectures in 1829–30. The result of Tocqueville and Beaumont's systematic discretion

[2] For passages cited from *Democracy in America*, I have used the translations of Mansfield and Winthrop (Tocqueville [1835 & 1840] 2000), with occasional changes where I saw fit. For several of Tocqueville's (1985a) letters, I have used Toupin's and Boesche's translations, again with occasional changes. Other translations of Tocqueville's writings and correspondence are my own.

[3] I collapse Tocqueville's "state" and "national" governments within a single sphere based upon his comments in I:1:5 and elsewhere that portrayed state governments as components of that "national power [that] is more concentrated [in the United States] than it was in any of the old monarchies of Europe" (*DA*, 84). These multiple "republics of the New World," he added, using the plural to refer to both state and national governments, carried governmental centralization to a degree that rivaled that of the French National Convention of 1792–95 (85).

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was to obscure the influence of Guizot for many decades: Thus, we look in vain for more than a passing reference to Guizot in the writings of generations of Tocqueville scholars (e.g., Drescher [1964a, 1964b], Marcel [1910], Mayer [(1939) 1960], and Schleifer [1980]). Each probed Tocqueville's historical and sociological method, often with great care and insight, but with scant reference to Professor Guizot's influence on his most precocious student's reflections on civil and political society.[4]

It was the French Revolutionary historian, François Furet, who took the two essential steps that marked the decisive turn toward Guizot in Tocquevillian scholarship in a 1984 article, provocatively entitled "Birth of a Paradigm: Tocqueville and the Voyage in America (1825–1831)."[5] First, he highlighted the importance of Tocqueville's astonishing claim to Kergorlay in January 1835, just after he had published the *Democracy*, volume 1, that "it has already been almost ten years" since he had first contemplated modernity's inevitable move to equality of conditions, adding that "I was only in America to clarify this point for myself" (Furet 1984, 227–28). Based on this claim, Furet pushed the search for the roots of Tocqueville's historical insights back in time to 1825 in France . . . a period for the understanding of which Guizot's lectures and writings suddenly assumed immense significance. Second, he sought to pinpoint Guizot's influence more precisely (229–31) by analyzing it within an October 5, 1828, letter to Beaumont in which Tocqueville provided his fellow Versailles magistrate with a synopsis of English history spanning 1,000 years. In keeping with his earlier recognition of the abiding ambivalence of the relationship of student and professor, Furet took great care to distinguish the important differences in Tocqueville's and Guizot's respective analyses of English history, in general, and of the precipitating causes of the English Revolution of 1688, in particular (230–32).

It was not until the publication in 1989 of Tocqueville's (1989, 439–534) complete lecture notes, containing his personal observations on Guizot's lectures carefully delineated by the editor, as well as the 1997 republication in the English-speaking world of Hazlitt's translation of Guizot's 1828 lectures on *The History of Civilization in Europe*, that the link with Guizot was finally made explicit, ushering in the surge of "Tocqueville–Guizot" commentary and studies since that time (e.g., Craiutu 1998, 1999; Hancock 2001; Mélonio [1993] 1998, 8, 34, 118–20; Siedentop 1994, 20–40, 42–43, 1997, xxx–xxxiii; and Welch 2001, 24–31). Should a further translation of Guizot's 1829–30 lectures on *The History of Civilization in France* appear, we can expect that it will provide new impetus to our recognition of the Guizot/Tocqueville parallels . . . and distinctions. If the 1960s featured a wave of important Montesquieu–Tocqueville studies (e.g., Aron 1965 and Richter 1969, 1970), the 2000s seem destined to solidify the complementary Guizot–Tocqueville intellectual lineage.

For the purposes of our discussion of the intellectual antecedents of Tocqueville's associational probes, we can thus now state with confidence that the future American voyager had closely examined the commune's evanescent role in European and French civilization when he attended or read Guizot's three cycles of Sorbonne lectures, delivered from April 9, 1828, to May 29, 1830. In his initial series of 1828 lectures, Guizot heralded the dramatic appearance in Europe of the medieval commune—home to the Third Estate, his principal protagonists in the rise of Western civilization. Winning its charter by fiery rebellion against oppressive feudal lords, Guizot's ([1828] 1997, 121) commune exercised a measure of local self-government:

> Let us enter into the borough [*commune*] itself . . . we are in a kind of fortified place defended by armed burghers [*bourgeois*]: these burghers tax themselves, elect their magistrates, judge and punish, and assemble for the purpose of deliberating upon their affairs. All come to these assemblies; they make war on their own account against their lord; and they have a militia. In a word, they govern themselves; they are sovereigns.

But local liberty in such communes was turbulent, Guizot ([1828] 1997, 135) proceeded to say, with the principal check on the power of local magistrates often consisting of popular riots by the larger body of inhabitants, who possessed a "blind, unbridled, and ferocious spirit of democracy." Guizot documented both the rise and the eventual fall of such chaotic communes during the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, showing how at the end of this period they succumbed to a sweeping process of royal centralization that united the nation and made possible the eventual rise of representative institutions. And what was Guizot's verdict on this historical process in which the traditional liberties of Europe, in general, and England, in particular, perished? "It must be understood," he emphasized, "that this revolution was not only inevitable, but beneficial [*utile*] also" (188).

[4] There are several important exceptions to this general neglect of Guizot. In 1938, Pierson ([1938] 1996, 23n) provided a tantalizing reference to a file of "Toc. notes" in the author's archives that he indicated had been transcribed at Guizot's lectures between April 11, 1829, and May 29, 1830; he then attributed Tocqueville's theory of democracy's irresistible march to the influence of Guizot's "progressive" history (23, 33). Building from Pierson's brief reference, Gargan (1955, 4–7, 1965, 26–34) subsequently hypothesized a number of possible areas of Guizot's influence on Tocqueville's historical studies, as did Diez del Corral (1960, 58–59) in his assessment of Tocqueville's relation to the Doctrinaires. In an essay that first appeared in 1971, Furet ([1978] 1981, 135–39), citing a 1969 paper by Stanley Mellon, characterized the Guizot–Tocqueville relationship as "a continuous intellectual and political exchange marked by a mixture of complicity and hostility"; he then analyzed the significant distinctions between their respective analyses of French history. In 1979, studying the Doctrinaires as architects of a distinct French liberal tradition, Siedentop (1979, 162–68) sought to trace the direct lineage between their political, sociological, and historical thought in France in the 1820s and Tocqueville's 1835 *Democracy*. In his 1984 biography, Jardin took advantage of his own access to Tocqueville's archives and excerpted a single note from Tocqueville's extensive files of notes to demonstrate the methodological parallels between professor and student (Jardin [1984] 1988, 82).

[5] Furet repeated and expanded his argument in the 1985–86 edition of *The Tocqueville Review* (117–29).

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Three months after the conclusion of Guizot's first cycle of lectures, Tocqueville (1988, 21–41) certainly appears to have woven his professor's theatrical account into his own earliest written reflections on English history. In his October 5, 1828, letter to Beaumont, he highlighted the appearance of "*the third estate* or *the communes*" in France and England in the eleventh century, with such communes composed "of all the industrious men of independent spirit on whom feudal or royal tyranny trampled on all sides" (27). Like Guizot, Tocqueville applauded the manner in which these thriving municipal centers exercised their local liberties in the manner of "a true republic"—electing magistrates, administering finances, raising a militia—while adding his own judgment that their success resulted from "a reasonable equality [that] is the only state natural to man" (28). Accurately reflecting the nuances of Guizot's account, Tocqueville characterized the local life of Europe's pioneering communes as a "bizarre blend of oppression and liberty" (27).

But where Guizot had portrayed the loss of communal liberties as a boon to centralization, Tocqueville decried the craven submission to the monarchy by members of the House of Commons who "had lost all of that republican energy that had marked their fathers" during a new era of absolutism when "the standard of one [ruler] everywhere succeeded the oligarchic liberty that had been enjoyed for two centuries" (38). He castigated the Tudor kings individually and collectively, while also decrying to Beaumont the English people's surrender of their precious constitutional liberties. "I don't know who can see in this time a step towards the Revolution of 1688," he stated with evident reference to Guizot (39).[6] He argued instead that the Revolution was made possible by the ability of the Commons to take advantage of surviving forms of constitutional government: "When the nation finally awoke, it found all of the instruments of its regeneration near at hand" (39).

Tocqueville's dismay with Guizot's tendency to "sell off communal liberties at a bargain price" (Pouthas 1923, 331) can be detected as well in his lecture notes of 1830. It was in the third and final cycle of his lectures that Guizot brought his portrayal of civilization's history in France to a climax. In a concluding four-lecture unit on the French medieval commune based upon further study of 236 royal acts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he differentiated his earlier 1828 portrayal of a generic commune into three distinct classes (Guizot [1829–30] 1868, 11–12). Tocqueville's (1989, 516–34) notes on these communal lectures display several signs of his discomfort with Guizot's portrayal, as he isolated and then judged for himself Guizot's two most distinctive strains of the bourgeois historical tradition. He urged particular attention to the first strain of the "true communes"—the independent, turbulent, fiercely proud and self-reliant "democratic" communes (520, 523, 526–27) that won their charters by insurrection but then surrendered them owing to fatigue caused by liberty's precarious status. Conversely, he disdained Guizot's second, triumphant bourgeois strain forged in communes granted by royal concession and exemplified by the orderly, docile, "excessively timid" group of bourgeois legists (521, 533–34) who assisted the king in expanding and codifying his central powers in exchange for personal equality and order, or what Tocqueville pejoratively dubbed "equality under a master" (516) or "the calm of servitude" (531). At the end of this third cycle, Guizot concluded his communal sequence and larger Sorbonne courses by repeating his own positive verdict on the demise of French communal liberties (534).

In these ways Tocqueville demonstrated his early recognition of the commune's importance as both an incubator for local liberties and a potential antibody to France's ubiquitous, stifling, centralized administrative regime. Fifteen and one-half months later, in fall 1831, Tocqueville would discover in America the thriving New England commune . . . and instantly recognize it as a prima facie rebuttal of Guizot's assumption that national liberty could only rest on a centralized foundation made possible by the sacrifice of local liberty.

TOCQUEVILLE'S DISCOVERY OF THE NEW ENGLAND TOWNSHIP

Tocqueville departed for America on April 2, 1831, 12 days after the passage by the July Monarchy's newly minted Chamber of Deputies of the nation's most significant decentralizing legislation in 40 years. For the first time since 1792, the laws of March 21, 1831, gave to France's 40,000 communes the right to elect their own municipal councils. Moreover, while the king could still appoint local mayors and their deputies, he now had to choose them from among the duly elected councillors. Changes in voter eligibility increased participation in each commune to 10%–14% of all males—qualified by the level of "cens" they paid or their superior "capacity" as demonstrated by a prestigious vocation or membership in a learned society—totaling more than 1 million municipal voters throughout France, five times the narrow electorate for the national legislature. Political participation, debate, and accountability were thus "reintroduced . . . into the villages where [politics] had been virtually extinct since 1800, if not 1792" (Furet 1988, 333–34).

I take this to be the context for Tocqueville's (1985a, 56) June 29, 1831, lament shortly after his arrival in America to his cousin, Louis de Kergorlay, in which he regretted that the Bourbon kings themselves did not create such local political institutions during the 1814–30 Restoration:

> In my opinion, the communal and departmental system should have attracted all of [the Bourbons'] attention from the outset. Instead of living day to day with Napoleon's communal institutions, they should have hastened to modify them, to initiate the inhabitants little by little into their own affairs, to interest them in such activities over time,

[6] Furet (1984, 230, 1985–86, 121) similarly identifies Guizot as Tocqueville's probable target, drawing upon this comment as one piece of evidence for his assertion of the sharp "disagreement" in the views of Tocqueville and Guizot.

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> to create local interests and above all to found, if possible, *those habits and those legal ideas* that are, in my opinion, the only possible counterweight to democracy.[7]

In Tocqueville's view, local government could have provided an elite group of residents in each French community—"the most enlightened and most moral classes of the society" (56)—with an opportunity to gain by local experience the savvy, discipline, and respect for laws needed to bring "order and stability" to the chaotic process instituted by unfolding democratic equality.

Perhaps it was fitting that Boston's enlightened Brahmins were the first to apprise Tocqueville of the existence and significance of the New England township, since they were the very group whose elite counterparts in France stood to benefit most by the new communal electoral procedures. When Tocqueville first arrived in Boston on September 9, 1831, he appears to have had no notion of the important historical role played by the township in New England governance. Indeed, he was obsessed by two quite different paradigms that had monopolized his earlier thinking and tended to reflect American and French discontinuity: that of the need for Canada's French peasants to rebel against their English overlords (Pierson [1938] 1996, 339) and that of the evident "ease," as he told Kergorlay, "with which [the American people] does without government" (Tocqueville 1985a, 57). Such observations possessed no useful lessons for France, however, a point both Tocqueville and Beaumont emphasized repeatedly in their letters home (see, for example, Pierson [1938] 1996, 370–72). But Tocqueville's discovery in Boston of the New England township contained the seeds of such edification, causing him to launch on September 20 "a very sober investigation," in Pierson's words, "of [the theory and practice of local self-government] that had not hitherto engaged his attention" (380). The fortuitous fusion of Tocqueville's political beliefs with his field research findings thus made New England "the intellectual pivot of [his] voyage" (Mélonio 1986, 16), constituting the spark that would ignite his book.

In Boston, between September 20 and September 29, Tocqueville (1971, 38–39, 46–48) learned from Josiah Quincy, Jr., and Jared Sparks, present and future presidents of Harvard, of the Massachusetts township's indigenous "*communal spirit*" and of its subsequent exportation westward, thanks to New England's pioneers; he commenced his study of the American jury (41–42, 229–30, 310–16); he began to read the *Town Officer or laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Duties of Municipal Officers*..., given to him by President Quincy; and he encountered repeated eloquent statements of the benefits to American life afforded by the townships, such as that by State Senator Francis Calley Gray, closely paralleling his own comments to Kergorlay three months earlier:

> I regard it as even more difficult to establish municipal institutions among a people than great political assemblies. When I say municipal institutions, I wish to speak not of the forms but of the very spirit that gives them life. The habit of treating all matters by discussion, and of directing them all, even the smallest, by means of majorities, this habit is acquired with greater difficulty than all the rest. But it alone makes governments that are truly free. (45)

By September 30, Tocqueville was able to note in his journal the useful comparison that now resonated in his thinking between America, where "free habits have created free political institutions," and France, where "it's for free political institutions to create the habits" (Pierson [1938] 1996, 414, with journal entry misdated as September 13; Tocqueville 1991, 167). "There is the goal at which we must aim," he could now declare.

Preparing to leave Boston, Tocqueville inaugurated a new course of investigation: he submitted lists of written questions to American friends seeking corroboration for his new insights. On October 1, he and Beaumont left Sparks a lengthy list of specific questions about the township (Tocqueville 1986, 29–33). Two months later, on December 2, writing from Cincinnati on a day when he queried Western informants about the New England township's influence there (Tocqueville 1971, 84–86), Tocqueville (1986, 36) politely pressed Sparks for answers:

> The further I travel from Massachusetts, Sir, the more acutely I experience the regret of not having made a longer visit. Nowhere, in the portions of the Union through which I have already traveled since my departure from Boston, have I found communal institutions that appear to me to approach those that operate with such vigor in New England.... It thus would have been of immense importance for me to study on the spot the principles, forms, and methods of action of this local government of which, for such a long time in France, we have felt the need and sought the model.

In the midst of his request for these answers, he peppered Sparks with a series of additional questions refined by two months of reflections and his reading of the *Town Officer*. His two sets of questions jointly probed five key issues about the township.

1. Its legal powers, including definition of its permissible functions, its executive powers, its ability to carry out its affairs without external interference from the State, and its status as a "corporation."
2. The relationship with other townships, either mandated or voluntary, in counties or in districts, relating to such objects as petitioning the legislature or constructing roads.

[7] We here encounter an early version of the difficulties posed by Tocqueville's shifting definitions of "democracy" that have bedeviled Tocquevillian scholars. In an indispensable article in this regard, Rosanvallon (1995, 148–51) describes how Tocqueville's vacillation in his varied meanings of the word—"never settled in his work"—separated him from the Doctrinaires, who clearly moved during the Restoration from "the political to the social" definition of democracy, by which, Rosanvallon says, they meant to indicate "modern egalitarian *society*." In the context of his analysis for Kergorlay of the move in their times "toward a [social] democracy without limits," Tocqueville here argued that communal political practices could create the requisite habits and legal ideas to retard the extraordinary haste with which that process was progressing. He sought to stabilize "democracy," not to resist it, as he clearly stated in his preceding sentences when he advised Kergorlay that they must accept its inevitable arrival, even though it surely would cause the eventual demise of their own estates, riches, and families.

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3. Its actuality. Was it only a model on paper or did its officers and laws in fact perform the assigned tasks?
4. The role of faction within it. Did political passions and inequalities in education, income, and political leadership skills thwart the fair and impartial functioning of the town assemblies and lead to oppression, intrigue, and turbulence?
5. The entanglement of church and state within it. Was there a religious influence in the selection of teachers and curriculum at the local schools? Were there electoral and tax requirements linking the town and its churches, as well as religious requirements for its inhabitants? Did this not establish "up to a certain point a *State religion* and entangle politics and religion in a mélange that Americans had seemed to make a point to avoid?" (37).

Sparks's answers, contained in his letter of February 2, 1832, and accompanying short treatise, "Observations by Jared Sparks on the Government of Towns in Massachusetts" (Adams 1898, 15–38), were received by Tocqueville just before he sailed for home from New York City on February 20. They provided satisfactory assurances on all points but one. The township was authentic: It did in practice what was said it would do on paper. It was able to transact business in public, without recourse to secret deliberation on sensitive points. It could moderate unruly passions. It could control faction. It could keep the educated citizen from becoming a source of unrest. And it could keep the poor from using their majority status to exploit the rich or deny them a voice in key decisions. But Sparks's single warning flag—in the area of the historic entanglement of church and state in New England (25)—confirmed the premonitions of the very mingling that Tocqueville had foreseen in his letter of December 2.

On October 7 and 10, Tocqueville also sent queries from Connecticut to Ernest de Chabrol, Ernest de Blosseville, and his father in France for information on the French Ministry of Interior, its administrative courts, and its internal functionings at all levels (Pierson [1938] 1996, 403–5). The thoughtful and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon of French "centralization" that his three informants provided in response should best be viewed, however, as documents that served to confirm, rather than edify, Tocqueville's thoughts in these matters. For despite his professed naiveté in his letters soliciting the three reports, he already possessed the powerful intuitions and ample knowledge evident in his detailed communal questions previously submitted to Sparks. His father's "Overview of French Administration" (Hervé de Tocqueville 1831) is particularly remarkable as a concise, unapologetic synopsis of France's system of administrative centralization, written by a one-time prefect and subsequent member in 1828–29 of the Martignac ministry's commission that had sought, unsuccessfully, to fashion a compromise among Martignac's highly restrictive electoral proposals, the Left's demands for more extensive suffrage, and the Right's resistance to elections of any kind (Mélonio [1993] 1998, 10; Monnet 1885, 363–70).

Following his son's suggested framework, Hervé divided his memoir into two distinct parts. In the first, he described the three levels of France's administrative structure in 1831—the department, the arrondissement, and the commune. For each component part, he graphically detailed the king's direct, personal mechanisms that gave him effective control over every aspect of local political life. The brilliantly conceived French monarchic administrative system extended checks, not balances, throughout France, with the checks designed to ensure that no action by any council at any of the three administrative levels could evade the king's control: "No deliberation of any municipal Council is valid unless it is approved by the prefect on the advice of the under-prefect" (Hervé de Tocqueville 1831, 35) captured the gist of his common refrain. The crown thus fixed the meeting times of all local councils and their meeting agendas; it restricted discussion to preapproved topics and curtailed all public proclamations and correspondence with other councils; it insisted that all council decisions be submitted to layers of royal scrutiny and control; and it retained the ultimate sanction of dissolving any council at any level at any time whose "deliberations might become a cause of perturbation for the State, department, arrondissement, or commune" (25). We can only fully appreciate the extraordinary reach of the tentacles of such a system—and the extent of the tutelage it instituted throughout France—when we recall that the king and his agents utilized these broad powers to supervise Councils whose every member they themselves had appointed! Hervé made no apologies, however, when he clarified the rationale for these multiple layers of oversight, saying that "without it, the intimate union of all of the parts of the State would not hesitate to be replaced [several words crossed out] by small republics" (25). In his second section, he clearly encapsulated as well the risks he saw in the changes wrought by the March 21st legislation:

> We are still ignorant as to what will be the consequences of the notable changes instituted since 1830. With the principle of election introduced into the formation of all of the councils, will it not inspire among the provincial bodies pretensions of independence difficult to curb. . . ? (38)

On January 24, 1832, in his final letter to Hervé from America, Tocqueville thanked his father for his report and shared a number of his writing strategies that he had been pondering during the preceding six weeks. His emerging view of his book called for him "to present only subjects that bore more or less direct connections to our social and political state [in France]" (Tocqueville 1998, 166). He proceeded to assert that he must write what he believed but added that "the entire truth is not wise to say," creating difficult choices "that I have constantly in mind." How far should he push his criticism of administrative centralization and his support for independent local political life? we can imagine as two such choices, knowing the status of each as an explosive political issue in France and knowing his own aspirations for a future political career. The answer, it will turn out, was very far, regardless of whose

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political beliefs, including those of his own father, he might offend in the process.

TOCQUEVILLE'S "MIRACULOUS" TOWNSHIP IN THE 1835 *DEMOCRACY*

Tocqueville unveiled his discovery of the robust American strain of the transplanted European commune in a four-chapter unit in *Democracy in America*, volume 1, part 1, chapters 2–5, in which he traced its roots to Tudor England and made it the focal point of his work's principal political argument. Township government, he began, had insinuated the dogma of the sovereignty of the people "into the very heart of the Tudor monarchy" (*DA*, 29). Exported to the New World, old England's resilient local liberty then became the basis for New England's "singular" and "original" foundation (32), a rebirth that he highlighted with imagery of procreation and light mirroring his own creative efforts (28, 29, 32). Hazy mists concealed the truth of the origins of European civilization—the subject of Guizot's history; American civilization, in contrast, brought truth to light as it allowed observers "to specify the influence exerted by the point of departure on the future of states" (28). Properly differentiated and interpreted by one such intent observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, New England's rays of local governance might even serve to reillumine their depleted European source.

Drawn to America's shores in the early 1600s, Tocqueville's "civilized men" (27) were ardent, feisty, well-educated, and devout bourgeois Englishmen. Possessing a spirited love for freedom, they shamed their obsequious confreres of continental Europe, who, deprived of political life, were oblivious to "notions of true freedom" (42). Indeed it had been just those timid, conciliatory, legally attuned, and soon-to-be-religiously-deprived bourgeois Frenchmen who had sacrificed their local liberties to curry favor with and solidify the power of newly ascendant monarchs, making them heroes in Guizot's ([1828] 1997, 135, [1829–30] 1868, 86–87) lectures. Tocqueville's Anglo-Americans bore hearty witness to the fact that civilization's progress need not spawn partisans of absolute government. Thanks to communal government, they established local liberty in the American township, preserved it there "in secret" for almost 200 years (*DA*, 54), and then artfully deployed it at the time of the American Revolution to provide the nation as a whole with its own foundation in freedom ("the dogma of the sovereignty of the people came out from the township and took hold of the government"). Civilization, they demonstrated, could indeed lead to "the bourgeois and democratic freedom of which the history of the world had still not offered a complete model" (30).[8]

Placing his early New Englanders on a participatory pedestal, Tocqueville ascribed to them six defining acts of local liberty: they directly participated in enacting their own laws, they freely voted their taxes, they appointed a broad number of officials accountable to them, they made peace and war, they possessed individual freedom in their personal affairs, and they enjoyed the right to trial by jury. At the same time that they enjoyed rights, they also possessed "a more elevated and more complete idea of the duties of society toward its members" (41), leading them to provide for the poor, maintain their roads, keep sound order, and furnish universal public education. The English king's law might have ruled the colony as a whole, but "a republic [was] already very much alive in the township" (40).

In his desire to accentuate the contrast viewed "with profound astonishment" (42) by himself and other observers between American and French carriers of civilization, Tocqueville highlighted the manner in which the Puritans "marvelously combine[d] . . . the *spirit of religion* and the *spirit of freedom*" (43). In the political realm, the commune seethed with tension and struggle, often unleashed by men who sought to exploit the inherent malleability of its man-made principles, laws, and institutions. Such contention bred "independence, contempt for experience, and jealousy of every authority" (43). Tocqueville did not fear these qualities and the turmoil they produced—he welcomed them, despite their accompanying risks, since they fostered each man's natural creativity, intelligence, and capacity for bold action. But unlicensed and unregulated freedom, on its own, might end in chaos and anarchy unless a force of equivalent power could check it. For Tocqueville, religion provided this essential communal counterweight, since it established a realm in which "everything is classified, coordinated, foreseen, decided in advance" (43). Freedom and religion thus complemented each other, producing initiative and self-control, tempestuous challenge to authority and obedient respect for it, supreme energy and supreme order. Their delicate balance made communal liberty possible.

Tocqueville's glowing account of this early "Massachusetts miracle"[9] is overblown. Sparks, as we have seen, was the first to confirm the unseemly mix of religion and politics in Massachusetts:

> Their social and political organization partook of their ecclesiastical spirit, and the affairs of state and religion became mingled in a manner not very consistent with republican freedom or a wise administration of government. (Adams 1898, 25)

[8] The very imagery employed by Tocqueville—such as his portrayal here of the concealed gestation of American liberty—mirrors and trumps Guizot's ([1828] 1997, 183) own portrayal of the "silent and concealed work of centralization" in Europe during this same period. See Gannett 2003 for my argument that Tocqueville's rebuttal of Guizot in *Democracy in America* is an early example of his lifelong use of "riposte," a strategy through which he contested the theses of varied interlocutors, acknowledged and unacknowledged within his texts.

[9] Many "miracles" have been attributed to Massachusetts, but Tocqueville was perhaps the first to consider coining such a term for New England's founders. In his manuscript for *Democracy in America*, I:1:2, he first described the spirits of religion and liberty as "miraculously placed and incorporated one in the other in America" (Tocqueville 1833–40, Box 1), only subsequently to redefine this miraculous union as one achieved "marvelously."

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Tocqueville's subsequent readings of Marshall (1804, 108), Hutchinson ([1764] 1936, 24–25), and Pitkin (1828, 42) attested to the tension that often led the Puritans to reserve political life as the exclusive domain of church members.

Choosing to focus his discussion on religion's positive role in circumscribing individual freedom, Tocqueville pushed aside the inconveniences posed by this evidence of New England's blurred institutional boundaries, as he artfully made his persuasive case for religion and liberty's seamless merger in the early township. He quickly sought to establish his own impartiality by chastising certain of the Puritans' moral laws as "bizarre or tyrannical" (*DA*, 39). He then used more liberal political compacts—such as those of Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor in Connecticut and of Rhode Island—from which to generalize that all political life in the whole of New England was "completely democratic and republican" during this period (40), suppressing the potent contrary evidence from the Massachusetts of Sparks, Marshall, Hutchinson, and Pitkin. He highlighted the universal consent required in New England's founding compacts (35n) while failing to mention that in the case of New Haven, for instance, the compact itself restricted participation to church members (*The Code of 1650* [1821] 1999, 117–18; Pitkin 1828, 46). He drew heavily for support for his arguments upon the histories of Puritan apologists such as Cotton Mather, whose *Magnalia Christi Americana* of 1702 was itself a work of persuasion designed to exonerate Puritan elders, including his own father and grandfather, of charges of intolerance that threatened the renewal of Massachusetts's charter after the passage of the Toleration Act in England in 1689. Tocqueville featured Mather as his preferred New England historian (*DA*, 686–88) since they pursued parallel objectives in their respective projects: to demonstrate how religious zeal abetted political freedom in the early New England township.[10]

Having separated his discussion of the commune's liberal "body of political laws" (39) into a single compartment untainted by religious zeal, Tocqueville reintroduced at the end of his section the positive influence of the churches in instituting universal public education. The Puritans' commitment to universal education was crucial to resisting Satan's wiles (41); in Tocqueville's account, it provided the philosophical basis for the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, wherein "each individual is therefore supposed to be as enlightened, as virtuous, as strong as any other of those like him" (61). Such belief in every man's abilities and virtue led to two practical results: the right of every inhabitant to vote and the duty of every inhabitant to accept township office when called upon (61). Despite considerable personal ambivalence in this matter of universal participation (Tocqueville 1990a, 46n), Tocqueville highlighted its status as a fundamental New England principle.

Tocqueville's early New England township displayed further "miraculous" powers, beyond the mutual support of politics and religion and the universal participation of its citizens. It owed its existence to an unprecedented combination of nature and history, making it a unique hybrid in political thought, with even communal freedom possessing a natural basis (*DA*, 57).[11] It both avoided and embraced representative institutions, conducting public affairs "in the public square and within the general assembly of citizens," as in Athens (40), but also quickly forming representative institutions such as the General Court of Connecticut, which promulgated *The Code of 1650* ([1821] 1999) and imposed its terms upon the citizenry. And it managed both to support and to forestall the Revolution (*DA*, 54, 65), artfully shifting its role in line with the exigencies of the times.

Tocqueville's opening unit on the commune built steadily during I:1:5 to its climactic section—"On the Political Effects of Administrative Decentralization in the United States"—which culminated with his rejection of the standard French endorsement of administrative centralization as a praiseworthy "conquest" of the Revolution (92, 692). Having traced Tocqueville's dismay at the tendency of Europe's centralized monarchies to stifle local independence and initiative—in both Tudor England and Bourbon France—we are not surprised that he approached the topic with heightened animation. Indeed, in a letter of June 15, 1834, containing advice on Tocqueville's manuscript, his brother Édouard criticized Alexis' injection of his personal sentiments into this section of his text:

> . . . You appear too much on the scene, you descend into the lists armed with your personal opinion; you apply your principles to France, you engage in politics. . . . You judge when you must allow the reader to judge. (Schleifer 1983, 32; Tocqueville 1990a, 69n).

Tocqueville began this climactic section by famously distinguishing between governmental centralization and administrative centralization (*DA*, 82–83): The former was positive and indeed indispensable in matters

[10] I thank one of the *Review*'s anonymous reviewers for his/her eloquent effort to clarify the reasons for Tocqueville's misreading of the early Puritans: "[Tocqueville] was blind to the fact that the political forms they developed were rooted in Calvin's notion of covenant, *and in no way confirmed Pascal's notion of different modalities of experience*, the latter of which provided Tocqueville with a basis for the claim that religion and politics are two distinct domains of experience." I am not finally persuaded that this explains Tocqueville's misreading, however, since he appears to choose to ignore the contrary evidence provided by Sparks's explicit warning in his short treatise and the various strident denunciations of the illiberal aspects of Puritan political life offered by several of his historical sources, especially Marshall (1804, 108).

[11] In their introduction to Tocqueville 2000, Mansfield and Winthrop (2000, xxvi) argue that Tocqueville is best seen as a writer who privileged history over human nature in his new political science, eschewing both classical and earlier modern liberal arguments that granted broad sway to enduring natural attributes. Such a view takes insufficient account, I believe, of the frequency with which Tocqueville did make recourse to nature, as in his views of man's natural right of association, his "invincible inclination" to religion (*DA*, 284), his instinctive tastes for both liberty and equality, and his natural sociability. Tocqueville conceived of the township as "the sole association that is so much in nature that everywhere men are gathered, [it] forms by itself" (57); in his discussion of communal freedom, he emphasized its spontaneous eruption (*elle naît en quelque sorte d'elle-même*), unaided, at least in its initial stages, by human effort or planning (57).

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affecting the general interest such as national security, foreign diplomacy, and a unified justice system, while the latter was negative and readily dispensable in affairs best addressed by local districts. Perhaps because of his brother's cautionary comments, he presented a well-balanced argument. America, he believed, had "overstepped the limits of sound reason" by granting too much independence to its feisty, local, independent municipalities (85); he proceeded to argue that a special brand of government official should be posted in each American county to bring judicial action against townships that exceeded their rightful powers (85n). He then cataloged the township's administrative success stories, all attributable to the increased energy and patriotism felt by residents connected to the public interest: more numerous and efficient schools, more responsive churches, better-maintained highways, better vigilance and help to police on crime, universal assistance in the suppression of smuggling, and prompter fire response (87, 91, 691). Tocqueville did not view private initiative as the magical answer to these local problems; rather, he emphasized public–private partnerships, situated at the township level, where local neighbors could provide the wisdom and vigilance both to aid and to restrain the local administration (90). He did not seek an end to governmental centralization, only to excessive governmental administration. By concentrating administration at the local level, America increased "the force that the state administers" 100-fold (87), more than compensating for its less tidy and less skillful operations.

Concluding his 1835 *Democracy*, Tocqueville argued that America's republican institutions possessed a good chance for a long future, since they melded republican characteristics at both the local and the national levels (*DA*, 381). "The country par excellence of provincial and township government" (380), America benefited from the infusion of its traditional habits of local governance into the ideas, opinions, mores, and laws of the nation as a whole. Tocqueville's circle of republican liberties—in which local vitality led to national order, making possible more local vitality—produced his final township miracle, one that again defied conventional political wisdom. Vast territorial size, he claimed, contributed to democracy's success in America in two mutually supportive ways—it thwarted the ready imposition of a central administration, and it fostered among the people a desire to pursue their own provincial and township freedoms.[12]

TOCQUEVILLE'S INVESTIGATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNE

The acclaim that greeted Tocqueville after the publication in January 1835 of *Democracy in America*, volume 1, fed the dual flames of his literary and political ambitions—ever fused in his mind as complementary means to fulfill his societal duty. "I have always placed action above all else," he would tell Kergorlay in 1837, adding, however, that when the path to "*action*" was blocked, he could usefully pursue "*thought*," since immaterial ideas had demonstrated repeatedly for 300 years their own ability to move the world (Tocqueville 1977, 1:479). Tocqueville's "action" agenda consisted of his flirtation in November 1836 with a run for provincial council as a candidate from the canton of Beaumont-Hague, his unsuccessful campaign in 1837 for national deputy from the arrondissement of Valognes, and his successful candidacy in 1839 for that same position. His program of "thought" gave precedence to his "monomania" (Tocqueville 1954, 309) with the second volume of *Democracy in America*, but led first to his publication in 1835–36 of two journal articles, both of which testified to his continuing communal reflections.

In his *Memoir on Pauperism*, written between January and April 1835 (Tocqueville 1989, 117n) and published in Cherbourg a short distance from his ancestral chateau, possibly to burnish his local credentials as an expert on social problems (Drescher 1968, ln), Tocqueville denounced the English welfare system. He traced the system's origins to a tyrannical act by a Tudor monarch—namely, Henry VIII's abrupt seizure of the same convents that had long served as the centers of the nation's private relief system. Elizabeth I instituted the great Poor Law of 1601 to address the needs of the nation's unattended poor. Her system reflected the Tudors' centralizing spirit, as she required every English commune to appoint commissioners who would assign and collect an arbitrary communal tax to pay for the needs of each parish's poor (Tocqueville 1997, 52). Tocqueville hated both the Tudors' cavalier overturning of a national institution and their penchant to impose a governmental solution upon a problem best addressed by private initiative. He proceeded to highlight two unintended consequences of these Tudor policies that further poisoned English communal life: the effective imprisonment of the poor within their local parishes and the breakdown of trust caused by the spying of local residents on their neighbors to lessen their own welfare burden (62–63).[13]

In his 1836 essay for John Stuart Mill's *London and Westminster Review*, "Political and Social Condition of France," Tocqueville urged the English to protect their communal institutions and to modify their landowning patterns so as to forestall both excessive centralization

[12] For further assessments of Tocqueville's township in *Democracy in America*, see Wolin 2001, 211–21, and Lamberti 1992, 916–19.

[13] Only after completing his article does Tocqueville appear to have studied the new Poor Law Amendment Act in detail (for this dating, see Drescher 1964a, 80n); in his notes (Tocqueville 1988, 205–9), he wrote approvingly of the manner in which the new English system combined three elements—executive appointments, elections of local officials, and judicial appeal—to produce "an active but not a tyrannical" centralized administrative system (206). Drescher (1964a, 81) sees this new respect for the Poor Law Act as the "trigger [for] a second revolution in Tocqueville's thought"; I disagree, seeing it as a continuation of the same sophisticated assessment of local government that he had applied to the New England township. Tocqueville (1988, 206) indeed articulates this link between his studies in his notes: "Let us stop a moment to look at this organization which is characteristic of the English race, and which can be seen again in almost all of the institutions created by it in the New World."

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and revolution, never uncoupled in his thought. Traditionally, in England and France, local liberty had best been preserved by aristocratic institutions:

> It may perhaps be laid down as a general truth, that there is nothing more favorable to the establishment and durability of a system of municipal and provincial institutions independent of the general government than a territorial aristocracy. (Tocqueville [1836] 1862, 233)

But such aristocracy had no place in modern times, leading Tocqueville to dismiss it as a viable safeguard for liberty. In its stead, he offered a democratic lineage and philosophical basis for a French "democratic liberty" that could also forcefully challenge, rather than timidly abet, the central government. He placed the origins of such liberty in the same French commune portrayed by Guizot in his lectures: "Never did the spirit of democratic liberty show itself with more energy, and I would almost say more savagely, than in the French *communes* of the Middle Ages" (244). Building upon, but now correcting portions of, Guizot's own history, he proceeded to chronicle the brief heyday in France of such bourgeois "democratic liberty" and its subsequent extinction in the fifteenth century (248), its preservation by alternative aristocratic carriers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and its reemergence and transformation during the eighteenth century into "the modern, the democratic, and, I venture to say, the only just notion of liberty" (247). Such democratic liberty owed its "just" character to its adaptation to the emerging equality of conditions, described in detail in the essay's opening analysis of French civil society and harking back to Tocqueville's (1988, 27, 28) acknowledgment in his 1828 letter to Beaumont of the same "natural," "rational" equality in the early English commune. Propelled by men's hunger for equality, this new variant of an old passion reemerged in the eighteenth century as a potent viral antibody to France's potent central government, forcing even kings to acknowledge its power (Tocqueville [1836] 1862, 248). Since the French monarchy "had destroyed even the semblance of a local government" in the towns and provinces (243), liberty lacked the intermediate institutions to sustain and nurture it, accounting for its intermittent, capricious, and often contradictory character (249). By emphasizing "the great utility of popular institutions" for sustaining liberty over time (250), Tocqueville encouraged his English audience to recognize and capitalize upon their own local assets.

From 1835 to 1837, Tocqueville expanded his studies of the commune through conversations, readings, firsthand observations, and probes by friends undertaken at his behest. On June 8 and 14, 1835, during his travels in England, he conducted interviews with the London lawyer Sutton Sharpe on the workings of the English commune, or parish, asking many of the same communal questions he had explored so fruitfully with Jared Sparks in America, with particular emphasis on the parish's participatory mechanisms and judicial constraints that provided checks on its activities in the absence of direct central administration (Tocqueville 1988, 233–38, 1991, 480–89). In early 1836, Tocqueville requested and received an in-depth study from Reeve that highlighted the popular administration of London parishes as so many "small democracies" (Schleifer 1983, 33–36); he responded on April 17, with reference back to his own trip to England of the previous summer, that Reeve's report provided "the entire confirmation of my ideas in this matter" (Tocqueville 1954, 29).[14] On July 27, 1836, during a visit to Switzerland, he explained to Corcelle that Switzerland's diminished civic life resulted from the urban bourgeoisie's imposition of "a small bourgeois centralization . . . equivalent to our royal centralization" that stifled communal liberty and erased local accountability (Tocqueville 1985a, 108); he subsequently studied the checkered history of the independent Swiss canton and its unsettled status within a federal form of government (Tocqueville 1991, 615–32). On August 1, during the same Swiss sojourn, he read Machiavelli's 1507 report of his posting to Germany, noting the many "benefits of communal liberty" that Machiavelli had found among the German "free towns" (Tocqueville 1989, 541–43). Writing to Kergorlay four days later, he expressed in passionate terms his response to the same communal investigation of northern Italy based on his reading of Machiavelli's *History of Florence* (Tocqueville 1989, 543–50) upon which we have already commented. In the medieval Florentine republic, he told Kergorlay, he found the immense political vitality and consequent explosive economic growth that he would have expected in a local republic, unchecked, however, by religion owing to superstition in the lower classes and skepticism in the upper—"in a word the evils of barbarism and high civilization united together" (Tocqueville 1977, 1: 390). The resulting vice, violence, and scorn for the laws, combined with the extraordinary political corruption of the Medicis, rendered moderate, balanced liberty untenable in Florence. Writing to Beaumont on September 22, 1836, Tocqueville (1967, 166–67) reported that a "revolution" was visibly taking place in his cousin, Le Peletier d'Aunay, and might reasonably take place in many others as well: The more d'Aunay "savor[ed] provincial liberty and the consideration that it [gave] to all those who [were] its representatives," the more his love of centralization was being transformed into "a reasoned taste for the independence of localities." Two weeks later, testing the political waters for his own candidacy in Normandy, he reported to Corcelle a whiff of resurgent communal vitality in that province, thanks to the renewed experience of local elections mandated by the 1831 communal election laws and the subsequent departmental reforms of 1833: "It is not the

[14] The essential work on Tocqueville's English probes remains Drescher's *Tocqueville and England*, although one should supplement it with the introduction and detailed notes to Tocqueville's (1991, 1398–1472) texts provided by Lise Queffélec. Queffélec's introduction and notes are also the indispensable guide for Tocqueville's subsequent Swiss investigations (1473–84). Both Drescher and Queffélec recognize the importance of Tocqueville's interest in communal affairs, with Drescher (1964a, 30) stating that after returning from America, Tocqueville "thenceforth would seek for the key to the political attitudes of every country in local government and public administration."

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elected, it's especially the *candidates* that impart this movement to the machine," he declared (Tocqueville 1983, 74).

Tocqueville most clearly explained the purpose and relevance of these continuing communal probes in his remarkable letter to Kergorlay of October 10, 1836. Offering practical advice for a philosophical and political voyage that Kergorlay was making in Germany, he concisely summarized the methodological tools he himself had used so effectively in his own field investigations (Tocqueville 1977, 1: 408–9). Chiefly, he sought Kergorlay's help in gaining precise intelligence on a topic of the greatest personal importance: "the Prussian *provincial* and *communal* system, as well as . . . the limits of centalization" (408). Provincial and communal liberties flourished in Prussia, he believed, because the nation's authoritarian rulers liberally granted their subjects "all the secondary liberties that can be compatible with absolute monarchy," while denying them "political *great liberty*" (407–8). The absolute Prussian government thought it was mollifying its people through such a strategy; Tocqueville however, thought it was unknowingly issuing its own death warrant, since the people were gaining local political expertise and skills that eventually would lead them to obtain national liberty, peacefully (*sans secousse*) and in due course. Most importantly in our consideration of Tocqueville's communal thought, he believed that the Prussian experience might allow him to "attack with advantage French centralization" since France's own "antiliberal" rulers could be convinced to make local reforms only if they were presented with arguments based upon an absolutist (i.e., Prussian) rather than a republican or semirepublican (i.e., American) model (408). In Tocqueville's long view, secondary local liberties granted unwittingly by the French government would sharpen the people's political skills, build their political understanding, and eventually inspire them to procure the moderate, balanced constitutional government that alone could assure "*great liberty.*"

On two occasions in the following year, Tocqueville injected his strategic vision into the political arena, although he chose in both cases to confront with a hammer the central government's suffocating administrative power, rather than to attempt to coopt it with a velvet glove. On June 23 and August 27, 1837, he published letters on Algeria in which he predicted that anarchy would result unless France halted its forcible attempts to impose a tabula rasa in that country "with no regard for law and rights" (Tocqueville 2001, 15), followed by its efforts to institute a rationalized French central bureaucracy in the vacuum thus created. Later that fall, announcing on October 14 his candidacy for national deputy to the small college of privileged electors of Valognes, he stated his principal rationale for seeking office, adding that it predated and was reinforced by his American travels: to advance liberty so as to counter the government's "absolute power [that] will never create anything in France except an eternal succession of servitude and anarchy" (Tocqueville 1985b, 42). The spirit of liberty must be extended—slowly, gradually, with infinite caution—and "fortif[ied] daily by frequent and peaceful exercise" (43). In arguing for a potentially tempestuous local liberty to a people craving order from a government all too happy to grant it, Tocqueville showed his courage, if not his electoral viability.

TOCQUEVILLE'S EXPANDED VIEW OF DESPOTISM AND ITS NECESSARY ANTIDOTES IN THE 1840 *DEMOCRACY*

During the period of these continuing investigations, reflections, and political activities, Tocqueville was simultaneously engaged in the writing of *Democracy in America*, volume 2. By the time of his trip to Switzerland in the summer of 1836, for example, he had planned to complete his first draft of part 1 on equality's influence on America's intellectual ideas (Tocqueville 1967, 160). In November 1836, six weeks after his letter of inquiry to Kergorlay in Germany, he announced to Reeve that he had been working on his book "day and night" for almost a year and that he was planning a "great voyage" of his own to Germany within a year (Tocqueville 1954, 35–36), presumably to probe for himself, after his book's completion, the interplay of national and local liberties that he had described to Kergorlay and already woven into his book's initial drafts, at times even with reference to Germany (see Tocqueville 1990b, 49n). Given the persistence of Tocqueville's communal interests, we are not surprised that they were never far from the surface of his book, forming one key component of "the political side of the work that I must never allow entirely to slip from view" (92n). In two cases, Tocqueville addressed the commune directly, explicitly in the short chapter that treated the role of "free institutions" in combating individualism (*DA*, II:2:4), and implicitly in his long-planned grand finale—part 4—in which he explored the ramifications for political society of equality's influence in the civil sphere on men's ideas (part 1), sentiments (part 2), and mores (part 3).

Tocqueville's treatment of the commune in II:2:4 consists of two parallel essays written in two stages. He drafted the first in fall 1836, when he was most actively engaged in his communal investigations, and wrote the second in 1838, when he revised his text and chose to personify his expanded vision of democratic despotism in a cunning figure who shrewdly "chang[ed] the natural sense of words" (*DA*, 485) by redefining citizenship as a condition of isolation from one's fellows and obedience to one's ruler. For his definitive text, he simply placed the two essays in succession, one (1836) after the other (1838).

While the subject of a shift in Tocqueville's perspective during his writing of Volume Two has elicited a lively scholarly exchange, dubbed the "two *Democracies*" debate,[15] I am more interested here in what I

[15] Drescher (1964b, 202) has been the most forceful proponent of the thesis that a break took place between the two volumes of *Democracy in America* due to "an intrusion of new social facts which led to new perspectives." Lamberti popularized the notion with his book title in 1989, although he chose to emphasize a different point of rupture,

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believe are the close connections binding his 1836 chapter draft both to America and to his European communal investigations. In that early draft, Tocqueville focused on America and its success in combating democracy's isolating tendencies by building sentiments of cross-cultural, cross-class communal collaboration. The Americans, he began, constructed "a political life in each of the limbs [of the body of the nation]" and thereby "multiplied infinitely for its citizens the opportunities to act in concert," thus binding society by making all individuals "feel at each instant that they depend upon one another" (Tocqueville 1836–39, 5).[16] American "municipal liberty," operating with a multiplier effect upon citizens already placed in "a permanent manner" in proximity to each other, allowed them to discover "the tight tie [that] unites private interest to the general interest" (5[b]). It thus accomplished what "political great liberty" could never accomplish, since the latter only brought together a nation's "principal citizens," and in very brief encounters at that (5). The local "elective system" made class barriers disappear, since the wealthiest citizens, recognizing that they depended for political support upon the poorest, learned to hide "almost all of the passions that divide men . . . carefully at the bottom of [their] hearts," especially pride, scorn, and egoism (7). It broke down cultural barriers, too, as the most "enlightened" members of each canton applied themselves daily to discover "new secrets to create public riches," with the goal that they could then "deliver them to their fellow-citizens in order to merit their [political] favor" (7). "It's not the elected magistrate that makes Democracies prosper," he concluded in a comment that mirrored his October 7, 1836, assertion to Corcelle (Tocqueville 1983, 74), "but they prosper because the magistrate is elected" (7[b]). With these arguments, Tocqueville grafted current and past European communal lessons, confirmed by his readings and travels in summer and fall 1836, to his American focal point to document the political roots of American democracy.

In his culminating part 4 of *Democracy in America*, volume 2, written in 1838, Tocqueville expanded his critique of the Faustian trade-off demanded by democratic despots of their all-too-compliant citizens, a trade-off reminiscent of Guizot's own sell-off of local liberties in his lectures a decade earlier: They countenanced private bourgeois activity and comfort in return for the voluntary relinquishment of public responsibilities, all in the name of building the central state. Writing to Beaumont on July 8, 1838, when he was in the heart of this writing, he indicated that he had managed to achieve a vantage point "very much higher" than that from which he had treated the topic of administrative centralization in volume 1. There he had seen administrative centralization as a subsuming by the central government of local political life, consisting "especially of replacing the secondary powers by the central power." With his new vision, he told Beaumont, he could now elevate that analysis by presenting a far more frightening portrait of the death of the citizen, caused by

> the state successively seizing everything, injecting itself on all sides in the place of the individual or putting the individual in tutelage, governing, regimenting, *rendering uniform* all things and all persons. (Tocqueville 1967, 311).

As Tocqueville extended his view of the manifold ways in which a despotic state could insinuate its despotic tentacles within civil society, he also broadened his portrayal of the antidotes needed to combat such a state, with his expanded list of remedies to his expanded democratic threat appearing in his next-to-last chapter, II:4:7. There he highlighted "secondary bodies formed temporarily of plain citizens," a "provincial assembly," and the need for "elective officials" (*DA*, 667), and he broadened his civil remedies to include powerful associations—"very opulent, very influential, very strong beings—in a word, aristocratic persons" (668)—now marshaled to resist the new despot's insidious appropriation of men's minds and souls. Tocqueville's final word on liberty emphasized its resistant, watchful, and, yes, combative qualities, all needed to counter that despot (673). With his new tableau, Tocqueville (1990b, 265n, 270n) hoped to "jolt" (*frapper*) the senses of his fellow citizens in the July Monarchy. As we have seen repeatedly in our study, Tocqueville thus promoted liberty's invigorating tumult over general indifference and apathy, be it induced by tyrannical Tudors, French monarchic tutors, absolute Napoleons, or limited and visionless middle-class July Monarchists.

HABERMAS' AND ARENDT'S RESPONSES TO TOCQUEVILLE'S POLITICAL VECTOR

Jürgen Habermas was the first of the new wave of civil society theorists to engage these reflections of Tocqueville. He did so both implicitly, without reference to Tocqueville, in his historical account of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in mideighteenth-century France, and explicitly, in his

placing it between part 3 and part 4 of volume 2. Schleifer (1992, 197–99) offers a rebuttal to Drescher's claims by signaling particular passages in Tocqueville's drafts and text of volume 1 that presage parallel arguments in volume 2, most importantly with respect to administrative centralization and its connections to egalitarian social conditions and to despotism. For my own view that Tocqueville's vision and rhetorical strategy did shift in volume 2, but in ways and for reasons that have not fully been recognized, and for my use of these dual essays to help elucidate that shift, see Gannett 2003.

[16] This and the ensuing excerpts from the earliest draft of Tocqueville's chapter can be found in his "Manuscript Notes and Drafts" or "Rubbish" of 1836–39, lodged at Yale's Beinecke Library, beginning on the unnumbered fifth page of his folder for II:2:4, where it is headed by three proposed titles: "Of Several Particular Methods Used by the Americans to Combat Isolation and Egoism," "How the Americans Combat the Tendency that Causes Men to Isolate Themselves through Municipal Institutions and the Spirit of Association," and "Of the Doctrine of Utility that Democratic Liberty Causes to be Understood." It continues for five pages, with the relevant sections traceable in Nolla's text (Tocqueville 1990b), beginning on page 101 with "*Les Américains ont combattu par la liberté. . .*" and concluding on page 102 with the final phrase, "*. . .on prend enfin l'habitude et le goût de les servir*." This early draft did not include the two paragraphs indicated by Nolla, on page 102, note m, as being omitted even from Tocqueville's "original working manuscript." I use [b] to refer to the back side of one of Tocqueville's pages of notes.

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praise for Tocqueville's role in 1848 in crafting a "liberalist apologetic" that redefined that bourgeois sphere to make it a more "realistic" arena of contention that could both enlarge and diversify public participation (Habermas [1962] 1991, 67–71, 129–40, with quotes on 130–31). In his applause for Tocqueville as a contemporary counterpoint to the young Marx, Habermas showed how both thinkers divined the essential weakness of the emerging bourgeois model of the public sphere (its propensity to suppress conflict and rationalize bourgeois political domination, in keeping with Guizot's historical philosophy and political leadership during the July Monarchy) and how they similarly recognized and sought to challenge the power of Napoleon III's suffocating state apparatus. But Tocqueville did not seek to smash that bureaucratic-military machinery, as did Marx; rather, he championed in opposition to it the creation of those "associations of plain citizens," formulated as we saw in his penultimate chapter of the *Democracy*, volume 2, that "can compose very rich, influential, and powerful bodies, in other words, aristocratic bodies" (Habermas [1962] 1991, 137). Through his writings and 1848 speeches to the National Assembly, Tocqueville triggered a reappraisal of the bourgeois conception of an elite, restricted public sphere; by doing so, he helped to save it, in Habermas' view, from its conceptual thinness and susceptibility to despotic manipulation.

In *On Revolution*, published a year later, Hannah Arendt similarly engaged Tocqueville as a major dialogical presence. "Following Tocqueville's insights" that portrayed equality as a "[frequent] danger to freedom," Arendt ([1963] 1990, 30) sought to provide more precise referents for this generic danger: She thus criticized the modern revolutionaries' concurrent drives to meet "the urgent [social] needs of the people" (60), to satisfy private welfare through the "pursuit of happiness" (115–40), and to safeguard civil liberties at the expense of the establishment of a foundation of freedom, "that is, the foundation of a body politic which guarantees the space where freedom can appear" (125). Sidetracked by their pursuit of such objectives, they neglected the original source of their revolutionary inspiration, namely, the insistence upon each individual's right to participate in public affairs.

Arendt's public space is a *political* realm of freedom. Framing her discussion with references to Tocqueville's own treatment of the New England township (166, 176 [n. 64]), she placed the township at the center of this space, both historically and conceptually. There, it embodied "an entirely new concept of power and authority" (166), providing a "working reality" for freedom by which she meant a recognized means for the legitimate election of delegates to a Constitutional Convention and a reservoir of practical experience in generating bonds of trust through mutual promises that would aid those delegates in framing their state and national constitutions. The towns of New England alone numbered 550 in 1776, she stated, thus demonstrating the "extraordinary degree of political articulation of the country" as a whole (306 [n. 46]); their proliferation ensured the widespread suffusion of that "elementary grammar of political action and its more complicated syntax . . . of human power" (173), which for Arendt consisted of mutual pledges and promises. As Tocqueville (*DA*, 42) cited Winthrop on freedom, Arendt ([1963] 1990, 309 [n. 58]) cited Winthrop on freedom. As Tocqueville (*DA*, 40) cited Connecticut's earliest constitution, Arendt ([1963] 1990, 176 [n. 63]) made glowing reference to the same document. And as Tocqueville (*DA*, 43) emphasized the "marvelous" combination of religion and freedom in the early township, Arendt ([1963] 1990, 172, 308–9) also highlighted the influence of Puritan covenant theology upon early New England political thought and structures, although she took pains to distance her argument from that aspect of those covenants that could lead to inequality and exclusion.

But Arendt's conception of the New England township's role in promoting freedom ultimately diverged in important respects from Tocqueville's view. Her principal emphasis was on the political act of foundation through which men mutually pledged and bound themselves together "for the purpose of action" (175). Tocqueville's township was less a point of embarkation based on a defining initial contract than a "primary school" (*DA*, 57) where citizens learned the skills and gained the habits of discussion and decision-making essential to freedom. For Arendt ([1963] 1990, 279) her public act of binding was enacted by "those few from all walks of life" who cared more for public participation than for private happiness. Tocqueville saw his township as a catalyst for majority participation, both politically in its assemblies and socially and economically through the ripple effects it created throughout society as a whole, as he stated in *Democracy in America*, volume 1:

> This agitation, constantly reborn, that the government of democracy has introduced into the political world, passes afterwards into civil society . . . it spreads a restive energy throughout the whole social body, a superabundant force, an energy that never exists without it, and which, however little circumstances may be favorable, can bring forth marvels. (*DA*, 233–34)

Arendt ([1963] 1990, 182) defined "association" in a precise and carefully limited fashion: "the gathering-together of people for a specified political purpose"; she relegated other forms of association to a social sphere that she argued must be rigorously segregated from the political one (Cohen and Arato 1992, 190–92). Political associations—both permanent and voluntary—comprised, of course, two essential sectors in Tocqueville's associational frame, but he believed that they both encouraged and were supported by voluntary civic groups and the informal socializing facilitated by the bevy of small private groups in democratic society. Finally, Arendt ([1963] 1990, 261) placed her hopes for the reclamation of the "lost treasure" of the revolutionary tradition—its legacy of political participation—in revolutionary councils that constituted "the only entirely new and entirely spontaneous institution in revolutionary history." Tocqueville, on the other hand, saw township government itself as a continuing viable

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incubator for "local liberties," one that he sought to retransport from America to Europe—in spirit, if not in every practical detail—as the principal catalyst for local participation and accountability in a properly balanced system of French local and national government.[17]

CONCLUSION

I have directed attention in this paper to what I see as the neglected first sector of Tocqueville's participatory quadrant, that of the township or commune that he found flourishing in America, where "the law has established in each province, in each city, and so to speak in each village, small associations having local administration as an object" (*DA*, 494). Such "township freedom," Tocqueville claimed, "is in a way born of itself" as citizens pursued their natural right of administering their own local affairs (57). Tocqueville did not romanticize his township as a panacea to problems of civic participation; indeed, he recognized that its particular brand of local liberty could, at times, be repressive and "full of prejudices" (Tocqueville 1990b, 248n), with "the trials of freedom" it experienced eliciting the disdain of the more sophisticated, more "enlightened" larger society (*DA*, 57). He did not advocate a potent local system of townships as a substitute for a strong central government; indeed, he supported a healthy measure of such governmental centralization, telling Eugène Stoffels in October 1836: "What I want is a central government energetic in its own sphere of action" (Tocqueville 1985a, 113). Nor, *pace* Arendt, did he expect that the township would operate in splendid isolation from the other sectors of his associational frame: Indeed, each sector had a complementary role to play in his larger associational vision as it intersected with religion, state and national governments, and the other associational groups. With his finely tuned political sense, honed by his practice of politics in an era of unstable regimes and vacillating communal powers, as well as with his aristocratic confidence "that the real can still be distinguished from the fake" (Cantor 2000, 118n), Tocqueville carefully weighed during his lifetime the shifting factors that could solidify national "great liberty" with the aid of secondary local liberties. Working within a nation that was fundamentally suspicious of and hostile to associations of any kind, he deployed practical sophistication and shrewd flexibility in his quest to forge a multifaceted political life for his era's new democracies.

Tocqueville (1990b, 106–7) provided a telling example of his flexibility in a small chapter for the 1840 *Democracy* that he drafted but did not finally use in the book: "On the Manner in Which the American Governments Act Toward Associations." In it, he distinguished the American governments' approach to civil associations from that of their single central counterpart in England. Lacking powerful aristocratic associations, American governments often recognized the need to extend their own role and "loan[ed] to certain associations the support of the State or even instruct[ed] the State to take their places." Central governments need not automatically usurp associational incentive or authority, Tocqueville thus argued, provided that they remain mindful of their proper role of giving short-term "*help*," not commanding long-term "*obedience.*" "The greatest art of government in democratic countries," he asserted, in what I take to embody both his life's credo and his supreme challenge to all democrats, "consists of carefully disentangling circumstances and acting according to what they require" (107).

In highly diverse settings in America today, citizens have effectively responded to Tocqueville's challenge and forged contemporary prototypes of township-style government, based on their recognition of the need to act "according to what [circumstances] require." Their projects range from inner-city "community organizing" (e.g., Eig 2001, Osborn 2002, and Warren, Mark R. 2001) to rural and mountain "collaborative stakeholder" models for managing forests, wetlands, rivers, lakes, wildlife, and other natural assets (Sagoff 1999, 171, 163) to suburban initiatives for targeted tax referendums to protect wet and farmlands so as to resist urban sprawl. Within the New England township itself, one shrewd observer has suggested ways for it to experiment with new, technologically innovative mechanisms that might increase the relative participatory weight of ordinary, moderate, uninformed citizens, while decreasing that of those "informed minorities," "committed activists," and "quarrelsome blowhards" who have often obstructed town business (Fiorina 1999, 412–17). Such civic fine-tuning within the township and imaginative recreation of its principles outside it are examples, I believe, of Tocqueville's "greatest art" and of the ingenuity and vitality at the communal level that are indispensable to spurring renewed citizen participation.

Tocqueville's model township can be writ large in many settings. His township insists upon local engagement, respecting the ability of each and every citizen from a clearly defined geographic area to participate directly in decisions affecting his or her life. It enjoys a unique source of citizen motivation: Not owing to simple altruism, or to pure self-interest, individuals participate for reasons of dignity and self-respect, choosing to exercise their natural right of administering their own affairs. The township respects the sober and sensible mandate of the majority. It authorizes taxes to be raised to support locally endorsed projects. It appoints a broad number of officials to enact its wishes, expecting all of its members to be prepared to serve in such capacities. It recognizes each citizen's ability to be independent and self-asserting: As such, it views local liberty as invigorating and stimulating, even tempestuous, at times. Finally, as a "permanent" association, the township recognizes its unique standing as an institutional embodiment of a *process* of self-government: Thus, it envisions different levels of commitment and responsibility from its members, and evaluates its collective

[17] For a more broadly based discussion of Arendt's probable reliance on Tocqueville for aspects of her political and social theory, as well as for a thoughtful assessment of Tocqueville's own associational frame, see Pitkin 1998, 115–27. Reinhardt (1997, 145) characterizes Arendt's project as a "quest for political purity," stating that "the politics she theorizes is as narrow and limited as it is mobile and plural."

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accomplishments in different ways, than do voluntary political, voluntary civic, or small private associations.

"When I say municipal institutions," Massachusetts Senator Gray had counseled Tocqueville during his Boston sojourn in 1831, "I wish to speak not of the forms but of the very spirit that gives them life" (Tocqueville 1971, 45). "But [that spirit, exemplified in the habit of dealing with all matters by discussion leading to majority decisions]," he concluded in a message that the young Frenchman took to heart and proceeded to make reverberate among aspiring democrats worldwide, "alone makes governments that are truly free."

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