

democracy in america sparknotes

democracy in america sparknotes is an essential resource for students, educators, and anyone interested in understanding Alexis de Tocqueville's seminal work, "Democracy in America." This article provides a comprehensive summary and analysis, covering the main themes, historical context, and the enduring impact of Tocqueville's observations on American society. Readers will discover key insights into the strengths and challenges of democracy, the unique characteristics of American political life, and how Tocqueville's ideas continue to shape modern discussions about governance and civil society. The article also explores important subtopics like equality, liberty, the role of religion, and the potential threats to democratic stability. With clear explanations and structured sections, this guide ensures a thorough grasp of "Democracy in America," optimized for those seeking a concise yet in-depth overview. Continue reading to deepen your understanding, prepare for exams, or simply enrich your knowledge about one of the most influential texts in political philosophy.

- Overview of "Democracy in America"
- Historical Context and Purpose of Tocqueville's Work
- Main Themes in "Democracy in America"
- Analysis of American Political Institutions
- Equality, Liberty, and the Role of Religion
- Threats to Democracy in Tocqueville's Analysis
- Lasting Influence and Modern Relevance
- Key Takeaways

Overview of "Democracy in America"

"Democracy in America" by Alexis de Tocqueville is a foundational text that examines the nature of democracy as practiced in the United States during the early 19th century. Tocqueville, a French political thinker and historian, traveled extensively across America, observing the country's political, social, and cultural landscape. His work provides a nuanced analysis of American democracy, emphasizing its strengths, potential weaknesses, and the unique factors that distinguish it from other political systems. Through vivid descriptions and incisive commentary, Tocqueville explores the workings of American institutions, the spirit of equality, and the dynamics of civic life. "Democracy in America SparkNotes" serves as an accessible summary, distilling Tocqueville's complex ideas into clear, practical insights for readers of all backgrounds.

Historical Context and Purpose of Tocqueville's Work

Tocqueville's journey to America took place in 1831, during a period of rapid societal transformation. The United States had established itself as a young republic, and its democratic experiment was closely watched by European intellectuals. Tocqueville's primary objective was to study the American prison system, but his observations soon expanded to encompass the broader social and political fabric of the country. He sought to understand why democracy thrived in America and to identify the underlying principles that made it successful. This context is crucial for comprehending Tocqueville's motivations and the lasting relevance of his analysis. The political climate of the era, marked by debates over slavery, westward expansion, and growing industrialization, provided rich material for Tocqueville's reflections on democracy.

Main Themes in "Democracy in America"

Equality and Its Effects

One of the central themes of "Democracy in America" is the concept of equality. Tocqueville observed that Americans enjoyed a level of social and political equality unmatched elsewhere. He examined how equality shaped relationships, fostered individual ambition, and influenced the structure of government. Tocqueville warned, however, that the pursuit of absolute equality could lead to complacency or threaten individual freedoms if not balanced with other democratic values.

Liberty and Individualism

Liberty is another cornerstone of Tocqueville's analysis. He admired the strong sense of personal freedom in America, coupled with a spirit of individualism. Tocqueville noted that Americans were deeply invested in their own rights and pursued self-interest within the framework of laws and civic duties. This balance between liberty and responsibility was, for Tocqueville, a defining feature of American democracy.

Role of Religion and Morality

Tocqueville placed significant emphasis on the role of religion in American society. He argued that religious institutions provided a moral foundation, reinforcing democratic principles and deterring abuses of liberty. Religion in America, according to Tocqueville, supported the development of civic virtue without directly interfering in political affairs, which helped maintain social order and ethical standards.

Analysis of American Political Institutions

Local Government and Decentralization

Tocqueville praised the decentralized structure of American government, particularly the autonomy granted to local communities. He observed that townships and municipalities were empowered to make decisions affecting their residents, fostering a sense of civic engagement and responsibility. This structure allowed citizens to participate directly in governance, promoting democratic ideals at the grassroots level.

Checks and Balances

The American system of checks and balances was another subject of Tocqueville's admiration. He described how the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches prevented the concentration of authority and protected individual rights. Tocqueville warned that any erosion of these safeguards could endanger the democratic experiment.

Political Participation and Associations

Tocqueville noted the vibrancy of political life in America, marked by active participation in elections, public debates, and voluntary associations. He highlighted the importance of civic organizations in providing citizens with opportunities to collaborate and address common concerns. These associations not only strengthened democracy but also helped prevent the rise of tyranny by encouraging collective action and shared responsibility.

Equality, Liberty, and the Role of Religion

Balancing Equality and Freedom

Tocqueville argued that democracy's greatest challenge was balancing the desire for equality with the preservation of liberty. While equality promotes inclusiveness and fair treatment, excessive emphasis on uniformity can undermine personal freedoms. Tocqueville advocated for a system in which both values are respected, enabling citizens to participate in public life without sacrificing their autonomy.

Influence of Religion on Democratic Values

Religion played a stabilizing role in American democracy, according to Tocqueville. Religious beliefs did not dictate government policy but instead nurtured a culture of ethical conduct and mutual respect. Tocqueville saw religion as a check against individualism's excesses, encouraging citizens to act responsibly and support the common good.

- Equality fosters social cohesion and opportunity.
- Liberty empowers personal growth and innovation.
- Religion supports moral development and civic virtue.
- Balance of these elements is essential for a stable democracy.

Threats to Democracy in Tocqueville's Analysis

Tyranny of the Majority

Tocqueville's concept of the "tyranny of the majority" remains a critical warning for democratic societies. He cautioned that the will of the majority could suppress minority opinions and rights, leading to conformity and social pressure. Tocqueville urged safeguards such as judicial independence and constitutional protections to prevent the abuse of majority rule.

Materialism and Complacency

Another threat identified by Tocqueville was the rise of materialism and complacency among citizens. He observed that the pursuit of wealth and comfort could distract individuals from civic duties and undermine democratic engagement. Tocqueville believed that a vibrant democracy required active participation and vigilance against the erosion of public spirit.

Centralization of Power

Tocqueville warned that excessive centralization of governmental authority could weaken local democracy and reduce individual initiative. He advocated for maintaining robust local institutions and encouraging citizen involvement to preserve the diversity and flexibility needed for a healthy democratic society.

Lasting Influence and Modern Relevance

"Democracy in America" continues to be a touchstone for scholars, policymakers, and citizens around

the world. Tocqueville's insights into the dynamics of American political life, the balance between equality and liberty, and the threats to democratic stability are frequently referenced in contemporary debates. The enduring relevance of his work lies in its ability to illuminate both the strengths and vulnerabilities of democratic systems. Students and readers draw upon "Democracy in America SparkNotes" to better understand the evolution of democratic ideals and their application in the modern era. Tocqueville's analysis provides valuable lessons for addressing current challenges, from polarization and civic disengagement to the preservation of constitutional freedoms.

Key Takeaways

- Tocqueville's observations provide a foundational understanding of American democracy.
- Equality, liberty, and the role of religion are central themes throughout the work.
- Active political participation and local autonomy are vital for democratic health.
- Safeguards against the tyranny of the majority and centralization of power are essential.
- "Democracy in America" remains relevant for analyzing contemporary political issues.

Q: What is the main focus of "Democracy in America"?

A: The main focus of "Democracy in America" is to analyze the political and social institutions of the United States, exploring how democracy operates in practice and its effects on society, equality, and governance.

Q: Why did Alexis de Tocqueville write "Democracy in America"?

A: Alexis de Tocqueville wrote "Democracy in America" after visiting the United States in 1831 to study its prison system. He expanded his research to examine the broader democratic society, aiming to understand why democracy succeeded in America and what lessons it offered for Europe.

Q: What is meant by the "tyranny of the majority"?

A: The "tyranny of the majority" refers to Tocqueville's warning that majority rule can sometimes suppress minority views and rights, potentially leading to conformity, social pressure, and the erosion of individual freedoms.

Q: How does religion influence democracy in America according to Tocqueville?

A: According to Tocqueville, religion provides a moral foundation for American democracy, supporting civic virtue and ethical conduct without directly controlling government policy, thus helping maintain social stability and responsible citizenship.

Q: What role do local governments play in Tocqueville's analysis?

A: Local governments play a crucial role in Tocqueville's analysis, as they foster civic engagement, allow for direct participation in governance, and maintain democratic ideals at the community level.

Q: What threats to democracy does Tocqueville identify?

A: Tocqueville identifies several threats to democracy, including the tyranny of the majority, materialism and complacency, and the centralization of governmental power, all of which could undermine democratic stability.

Q: Why is "Democracy in America" still relevant today?

A: "Democracy in America" remains relevant because it addresses enduring questions about equality, liberty, civic participation, and the challenges facing democratic societies, providing insights applicable to modern political discussions.

Q: How does Tocqueville describe the relationship between equality and liberty?

A: Tocqueville describes the relationship between equality and liberty as a dynamic balance, cautioning that too much emphasis on equality can threaten individual freedom, while both are necessary for a healthy democracy.

Q: What impact did Tocqueville's work have on political philosophy?

A: Tocqueville's work had a significant impact on political philosophy by offering a detailed and critical examination of democracy, influencing generations of scholars, leaders, and citizens in their understanding of democratic governance.

Q: What are the key themes summarized in "Democracy in America SparkNotes"?

A: The key themes summarized in "Democracy in America SparkNotes" include equality, liberty, the role of religion, local government, political participation, threats to democracy, and the lasting influence of Tocqueville's analysis.

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Democracy in America SparkNotes: A Concise Guide to Tocqueville's Masterpiece

Are you facing a mountain of reading for your political science class, or simply intrigued by Alexis de Tocqueville's seminal work, *Democracy in America*? This comprehensive guide offers a "SparkNotes" style overview, distilling the core arguments and key insights of this influential text. We'll explore Tocqueville's observations on American democracy in the 19th century, focusing on its strengths, weaknesses, and enduring relevance for understanding democratic societies today. Forget tedious summaries; this post provides a clear, concise, and engaging exploration of *Democracy in America*, perfectly tailored for busy students and curious readers alike.

Tocqueville's Journey and the Birth of a Classic

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat, embarked on a journey to the United States in 1831 to study its burgeoning penitentiary system. However, his observations transcended prisons, extending to encompass the entire American social and political landscape. His meticulous observations and insightful analysis resulted in *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes (1835 and 1840), which remains a cornerstone of political science and sociological thought. He wasn't just a passive observer; Tocqueville actively engaged with American society, interacting with individuals from various social strata and meticulously recording his impressions.

Key Themes Explored in *Democracy in America*

H2: The Tyranny of the Majority: This is arguably Tocqueville's most potent and enduring contribution. He warned against the potential for a democratic majority to suppress minority opinions and rights. In a society where the majority holds sway, the potential for oppression, albeit unintentional, becomes significant. He observed this tendency in America, noting the societal pressure to conform and the potential silencing of dissenting voices.

H2: Individualism and its Implications: Tocqueville recognized the rise of individualism as a defining characteristic of American democracy. While celebrating its potential for personal liberty, he also cautioned against its potential to foster isolation and weaken social bonds. This individualism, he argued, could lead to a kind of "soft despotism," where individuals become so focused on their own pursuits that they neglect their civic duties and allow the state to expand its power unchecked.

H3: The Role of Associations: Tocqueville saw voluntary associations – churches, civic groups, and other organizations – as crucial counterweights to both the tyranny of the majority and the isolating effects of individualism. These associations fostered civic engagement, provided a platform for diverse voices, and built social capital, mitigating the negative consequences of an overly individualistic society.

H2: Equality and its Paradox: Tocqueville lauded the egalitarian nature of American society, noting the relative absence of rigid class distinctions compared to Europe. However, he also acknowledged the paradox of equality: While it fostered liberty and opportunity, it could also lead to a homogenization of culture and thought, potentially stifling creativity and innovation.

H2: The Role of Religion in American Society: Tocqueville extensively analyzed the role of religion in shaping American social and political life. He observed its importance in fostering morality, community cohesion, and social order. He didn't necessarily endorse any particular faith, but recognized its crucial role in a functioning democracy.

H2: Tocqueville's Lasting Legacy:

Democracy in America continues to resonate today because its insights into the dynamics of democratic societies remain remarkably relevant. Tocqueville's warnings about the tyranny of the majority, the dangers of unchecked individualism, and the importance of civic engagement are as pertinent now as they were in the 19th century. The book serves as a constant reminder of the fragility of democracy and the need for vigilance in protecting its core principles. His analysis serves as a valuable framework for understanding contemporary political challenges, including issues surrounding political polarization, social fragmentation, and the potential erosion of democratic norms.

Conclusion:

Democracy in America is not just a historical document; it is a living text that continues to offer valuable insights into the complexities of democratic societies. This SparkNotes-style guide has provided a framework for understanding its core arguments. However, for a complete appreciation of Tocqueville's masterpiece, reading the complete work is highly recommended. It offers profound observations that are essential for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and enduring challenges of democracy.

FAQs:

1. What is the central argument of Democracy in America? Tocqueville's central argument explores the nature of democracy in America, highlighting both its strengths (equality, liberty) and its potential weaknesses (tyranny of the majority, individualism).
2. What is the "tyranny of the majority"? This refers to the potential for a democratic majority to suppress the rights and voices of minorities.
3. How does Tocqueville view individualism? He views individualism as both a positive and negative force, appreciating its role in personal liberty but also warning about its potential to lead to social isolation and a weakening of civic bonds.

4. What role do associations play in Tocqueville's analysis? He sees voluntary associations as crucial for counteracting the negative effects of individualism and the tyranny of the majority, fostering civic engagement and social cohesion.

5. Why is Democracy in America still relevant today? Because its insights into the challenges and complexities of democratic societies remain strikingly relevant in the 21st century. Its exploration of themes such as political polarization and the fragility of democratic norms continues to resonate.

democracy in america sparknotes: Letters from America Alexis de Tocqueville, 2010 Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in the United States for the first time in May 1831, commissioned by the French government to study the American prison system. For the next nine months he and his companion, Gustave de Beaumont, traveled and observed not only prisons but also the political, economic, and social systems of the early republic. Along the way, they frequently reported back to friends and family members in France. This book presents the first translation of the complete letters Tocqueville wrote during that seminal journey, accompanied by excerpts from Beaumont's correspondence that provide details or different perspectives on the places, people, and American life and attitudes the travelers encountered. --from publisher description.

democracy in america sparknotes: Between the World and Me Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2015-07-14 #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER • NAMED ONE OF TIME'S TEN BEST NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE DECADE • PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST • NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD FINALIST • ONE OF OPRAH'S "BOOKS THAT HELP ME THROUGH" • NOW AN HBO ORIGINAL SPECIAL EVENT Hailed by Toni Morrison as "required reading," a bold and personal literary exploration of America's racial history by "the most important essayist in a generation and a writer who changed the national political conversation about race" (Rolling Stone) NAMED ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL BOOKS OF THE DECADE BY CNN • NAMED ONE OF PASTE'S BEST MEMOIRS OF THE DECADE • NAMED ONE OF THE TEN BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The New York Times Book Review • O: The Oprah Magazine • The Washington Post • People • Entertainment Weekly • Vogue • Los Angeles Times • San Francisco Chronicle • Chicago Tribune • New York • Newsday • Library Journal • Publishers Weekly In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation's history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of "race," a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden? Between the World and Me is Ta-Nehisi Coates's attempt to answer these questions in a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children's lives were taken as American plunder. Beautifully woven from personal narrative, reimagined history, and fresh, emotionally charged reportage, Between the World and Me clearly illuminates the past, bravely confronts our present, and offers a transcendent vision for a way forward.

democracy in america sparknotes: The Labor Question in America Rosanne Currarino, 2010-10-01 In The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age, Rosanne Currarino traces the struggle to define the nature of democratic life in an era of industrial strife. As Americans confronted the glaring disparity between democracy's promises of independence and prosperity and the grim realities of economic want and wage labor, they asked, What should constitute full participation in American society? What standard of living should citizens expect and

demand? Currarino traces the diverse efforts to answer to these questions, from the fledgling trade union movement to contests over immigration, from economic theory to popular literature, from legal debates to social reform. The contradictory answers that emerged—one stressing economic participation in a consumer society, the other emphasizing property ownership and self-reliance—remain pressing today as contemporary scholars, journalists, and social critics grapple with the meaning of democracy in post-industrial America.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Angels in America* Tony Kushner, 2017-04-13 America in the mid-1980s. In the midst of the AIDS crisis and a conservative Reagan administration, New Yorkers grapple with life and death, love and sex, heaven and hell. This edition, published alongside the major revival at the National Theatre in 2017, contains both plays, Part One: Millennium Approaches, and Part Two: Perestroika.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Democracy for Realists* Christopher H. Achen, Larry M. Bartels, 2017-08-29 Why our belief in government by the people is unrealistic—and what we can do about it Democracy for Realists assails the romantic folk-theory at the heart of contemporary thinking about democratic politics and government, and offers a provocative alternative view grounded in the actual human nature of democratic citizens. Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels deploy a wealth of social-scientific evidence, including ingenious original analyses of topics ranging from abortion politics and budget deficits to the Great Depression and shark attacks, to show that the familiar ideal of thoughtful citizens steering the ship of state from the voting booth is fundamentally misguided. They demonstrate that voters—even those who are well informed and politically engaged—mostly choose parties and candidates on the basis of social identities and partisan loyalties, not political issues. They also show that voters adjust their policy views and even their perceptions of basic matters of fact to match those loyalties. When parties are roughly evenly matched, elections often turn on irrelevant or misleading considerations such as economic spurts or downturns beyond the incumbents' control; the outcomes are essentially random. Thus, voters do not control the course of public policy, even indirectly. Achen and Bartels argue that democratic theory needs to be founded on identity groups and political parties, not on the preferences of individual voters. Now with new analysis of the 2016 elections, Democracy for Realists provides a powerful challenge to conventional thinking, pointing the way toward a fundamentally different understanding of the realities and potential of democratic government.

democracy in america sparknotes: *How Democracies Die* Steven Levitsky, Daniel Ziblatt, 2018-01-16 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • “Comprehensive, enlightening, and terrifyingly timely.”—The New York Times Book Review (Editors' Choice) WINNER OF THE GOLDSMITH BOOK PRIZE • SHORTLISTED FOR THE LIONEL GELBER PRIZE • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The Washington Post • Time • Foreign Affairs • WBUR • Paste Donald Trump's presidency has raised a question that many of us never thought we'd be asking: Is our democracy in danger? Harvard professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have spent more than twenty years studying the breakdown of democracies in Europe and Latin America, and they believe the answer is yes. Democracy no longer ends with a bang—in a revolution or military coup—but with a whimper: the slow, steady weakening of critical institutions, such as the judiciary and the press, and the gradual erosion of long-standing political norms. The good news is that there are several exit ramps on the road to authoritarianism. The bad news is that, by electing Trump, we have already passed the first one. Drawing on decades of research and a wide range of historical and global examples, from 1930s Europe to contemporary Hungary, Turkey, and Venezuela, to the American South during Jim Crow, Levitsky and Ziblatt show how democracies die—and how ours can be saved. Praise for *How Democracies Die* “What we desperately need is a sober, dispassionate look at the current state of affairs. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, two of the most respected scholars in the field of democracy studies, offer just that.”—The Washington Post “Where Levitsky and Ziblatt make their mark is in weaving together political science and historical analysis of both domestic and international democratic crises; in doing so, they expand the conversation beyond Trump and before him, to other countries and to the deep structure of American democracy and politics.”—Ezra Klein,

Vox "If you only read one book for the rest of the year, read *How Democracies Die*. . . .This is not a book for just Democrats or Republicans. It is a book for all Americans. It is nonpartisan. It is fact based. It is deeply rooted in history. . . . The best commentary on our politics, no contest."—Michael Morrell, former Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (via Twitter) "A smart and deeply informed book about the ways in which democracy is being undermined in dozens of countries around the world, and in ways that are perfectly legal."—Fareed Zakaria, CNN

democracy in america sparknotes: *The Submerged State* Suzanne Mettler, 2011-08-31 "Keep your government hands off my Medicare!" Such comments spotlight a central question animating Suzanne Mettler's provocative and timely book: why are many Americans unaware of government social benefits and so hostile to them in principle, even though they receive them? The Obama administration has been roundly criticized for its inability to convey how much it has accomplished for ordinary citizens. Mettler argues that this difficulty is not merely a failure of communication; rather it is endemic to the formidable presence of the "submerged state." In recent decades, federal policymakers have increasingly shunned the outright disbursing of benefits to individuals and families and favored instead less visible and more indirect incentives and subsidies, from tax breaks to payments for services to private companies. These submerged policies, Mettler shows, obscure the role of government and exaggerate that of the market. As a result, citizens are unaware not only of the benefits they receive, but of the massive advantages given to powerful interests, such as insurance companies and the financial industry. Neither do they realize that the policies of the submerged state shower their largest benefits on the most affluent Americans, exacerbating inequality. Mettler analyzes three Obama reforms—student aid, tax relief, and health care—to reveal the submerged state and its consequences, demonstrating how structurally difficult it is to enact policy reforms and even to obtain public recognition for achieving them. She concludes with recommendations for reform to help make hidden policies more visible and governance more comprehensible to all Americans. The sad truth is that many American citizens do not know how major social programs work—or even whether they benefit from them. Suzanne Mettler's important new book will bring government policies back to the surface and encourage citizens to reclaim their voice in the political process.

democracy in america sparknotes: *The Quiet American* Graham Greene, 2010-10-02 'The novel that I love the most is *The Quiet American*' Ian McEwan, Sunday Times bestselling author of *Lessons Into the intrigue and violence of 1950s Saigon comes CIA agent Alden Pyle, a young idealistic American sent to promote democracy through a mysterious 'Third Force'.* As Pyle's naive optimism starts to cause bloodshed, his friend Fowler, a cynical foreign correspondent, finds it hard to stand aside and watch. But even as Fowler intervenes he wonders why: for the greater good, or something altogether more complicated? WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ZADIE SMITH **One of the BBC's 100 Novels That Shaped Our World**

democracy in america sparknotes: *American Government 3e* Glen Krutz, Sylvie Waskiewicz, 2023-05-12 Black & white print. *American Government 3e* aligns with the topics and objectives of many government courses. Faculty involved in the project have endeavored to make government workings, issues, debates, and impacts meaningful and memorable to students while maintaining the conceptual coverage and rigor inherent in the subject. With this objective in mind, the content of this textbook has been developed and arranged to provide a logical progression from the fundamental principles of institutional design at the founding, to avenues of political participation, to thorough coverage of the political structures that constitute American government. The book builds upon what students have already learned and emphasizes connections between topics as well as between theory and applications. The goal of each section is to enable students not just to recognize concepts, but to work with them in ways that will be useful in later courses, future careers, and as engaged citizens. In order to help students understand the ways that government, society, and individuals interconnect, the revision includes more examples and details regarding the lived experiences of diverse groups and communities within the United States. The authors and reviewers sought to strike a balance between confronting the negative and harmful elements of

American government, history, and current events, while demonstrating progress in overcoming them. In doing so, the approach seeks to provide instructors with ample opportunities to open discussions, extend and update concepts, and drive deeper engagement.

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democracy in america sparknotes: The Right to Vote Alexander Keyssar, 2009-06-30 Originally published in 2000, *The Right to Vote* was widely hailed as a magisterial account of the evolution of suffrage from the American Revolution to the end of the twentieth century. In this revised and updated edition, Keyssar carries the story forward, from the disputed presidential contest of 2000 through the 2008 campaign and the election of Barack Obama. *The Right to Vote* is a sweeping reinterpretation of American political history as well as a meditation on the meaning of democracy in contemporary American life.

democracy in america sparknotes: American Political History: A Very Short Introduction Donald T. Critchlow, 2015-01-14 The Founding Fathers who drafted the United States Constitution in 1787 distrusted political parties, popular democracy, centralized government, and a strong executive office. Yet the country's national politics have historically included all those features. In *American Political History: A Very Short Introduction*, Donald Critchlow takes on this contradiction between original theory and actual practice. This brief, accessible book explores the nature of the two-party system, key turning points in American political history, representative presidential and congressional elections, struggles to expand the electorate, and critical social protest and third-party movements. The volume emphasizes the continuity of a liberal tradition challenged by partisan divide, war, and periodic economic turmoil. *American Political History: A Very Short Introduction* explores the emergence of a democratic political culture within a republican form of government, showing the mobilization and extension of the mass electorate over the lifespan of the country. In a nation characterized by great racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, American democracy has proven extraordinarily durable. Individual parties have risen and fallen, but the dominance of the two-party system persists. Fierce debates over the meaning of the U.S. Constitution have created profound divisions within the parties and among voters, but a belief in the importance of constitutional order persists among political leaders and voters. Americans have been deeply divided about the extent of federal power, slavery, the meaning of citizenship, immigration policy, civil rights, and a range of economic, financial, and social policies. New immigrants, racial minorities, and women have joined the electorate and the debates. But American political history, with its deep social divisions, bellicose rhetoric, and antagonistic partisanship provides valuable lessons about the meaning and viability of democracy in the early 21st century. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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democracy in america sparknotes: *On Tyranny* Timothy Snyder, 2017-03-02 **NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER** 'A sort of survival book, a sort of symptom-diagnosis manual in terms of losing your democracy and what tyranny and authoritarianism look like up close' Rachel Maddow 'These 128 pages are a brief primer in every important thing we might have learned from the history of the last century, and all that we appear to have forgotten' Observer History does not repeat, but it does instruct. In the twentieth century, European democracies collapsed into fascism, Nazism and communism. These were movements in which a leader or a party claimed to give voice to the people, promised to protect them from global existential threats, and rejected reason in favour of myth. European history shows us that societies can break, democracies can fall, ethics can collapse, and ordinary people can find themselves in unimaginable circumstances. History can familiarise, and it can warn. Today, we are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to totalitarianism in the twentieth century. But when the political order seems imperilled, our advantage is that we can learn from their experience to resist the advance of tyranny. Now is a good time to do so.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Prisms of the People* Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa, 2021-07-12 Grassroots organizing and collective action have always been fundamental to American democracy but have been burgeoning since the 2016 election, as people struggle to make their voices heard in this moment of societal upheaval. Unfortunately much of that action has not had the kind of impact participants might want, especially among movements representing the poor and marginalized who often have the most at stake when it comes to rights and equality. Yet, some instances of collective action have succeeded. What's the difference between a movement that wins victories for its constituents, and one that fails? What are the factors that make collective action powerful? *Prisms of the People* addresses those questions and more. Using data from six movement organizations—including a coalition that organized a 104-day protest in Phoenix in 2010 and another that helped restore voting rights to the formerly incarcerated in Virginia—Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa show that the power of successful movements most often is rooted in their ability to act as “prisms of the people,” turning participation into political power just as prisms transform white light into rainbows. Understanding the organizational design choices that shape the people, their leaders, and their strategies can help us understand how grassroots groups achieve their goals. Linking strong scholarship to a deep understanding of the needs and outlook of activists, *Prisms of the People* is the perfect book for our moment—for understanding what's happening and propelling it forward.

democracy in america sparknotes: *How the South Won the Civil War* Heather Cox Richardson, 2020-03-12 Named one of The Washington Post's 50 Notable Works of Nonfiction While

the North prevailed in the Civil War, ending slavery and giving the country a new birth of freedom, Heather Cox Richardson argues in this provocative work that democracy's blood-soaked victory was ephemeral. The system that had sustained the defeated South moved westward and there established a foothold. It was a natural fit. Settlers from the East had for decades been pushing into the West, where the seizure of Mexican lands at the end of the Mexican-American War and treatment of Native Americans cemented racial hierarchies. The South and West equally depended on extractive industries-cotton in the former and mining, cattle, and oil in the latter-giving rise a new birth of white male oligarchy, despite the guarantees provided by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, and the economic opportunities afforded by expansion. To reveal why this happened, *How the South Won the Civil War* traces the story of the American paradox, the competing claims of equality and subordination woven into the nation's fabric and identity. At the nation's founding, it was the Eastern yeoman farmer who galvanized and symbolized the American Revolution. After the Civil War, that mantle was assumed by the Western cowboy, singlehandedly defending his land against barbarians and savages as well as from a rapacious government. New states entered the Union in the late nineteenth century and western and southern leaders found yet more common ground. As resources and people streamed into the West during the New Deal and World War II, the region's influence grew. Movement Conservatives, led by westerners Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, claimed to embody cowboy individualism and worked with Dixiecrats to embrace the ideology of the Confederacy. Richardson's searing book seizes upon the soul of the country and its ongoing struggle to provide equal opportunity to all. Debunking the myth that the Civil War released the nation from the grip of oligarchy, expunging the sins of the Founding, it reveals how and why the Old South not only survived in the West, but thrived.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Selling the American Way* Laura A. Belmonte, 2013-03-01 In 1955, the United States Information Agency published a lavishly illustrated booklet called *My America*. Assembled ostensibly to document the basic elements of a free dynamic society, the booklet emphasized cultural diversity, political freedom, and social mobility and made no mention of McCarthyism or the Cold War. Though hyperbolic, *My America* was, as Laura A. Belmonte shows, merely one of hundreds of pamphlets from this era written and distributed in an organized attempt to forge a collective defense of the American way of life. *Selling the American Way* examines the context, content, and reception of U.S. propaganda during the early Cold War. Determined to protect democratic capitalism and undercut communism, U.S. information experts defined the national interest not only in geopolitical, economic, and military terms. Through radio shows, films, and publications, they also propagated a carefully constructed cultural narrative of freedom, progress, and abundance as a means of protecting national security. Not simply a one-way look at propaganda as it is produced, the book is a subtle investigation of how U.S. propaganda was received abroad and at home and how criticism of it by Congress and successive presidential administrations contributed to its modification.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Waves of Democracy* John Markoff, 1996-02-07 *Waves of Democracy* looks at two centuries of history of democratization as a series of multicontinental episodes in which social movements and elite power holders in many countries converged to reorganize political systems. Democracy is defined and redefined in these episodes. John Markoff examines several ways in which governing elites of national states mimic each other and ways in which social movements and elites interact. There is no other book written for undergraduates that looks at democracy over such a broad sweep of time and across so many countries and cultures.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Closing of the American Mind* Allan Bloom, 2008-06-30 The brilliant, controversial, bestselling critique of American culture that "hits with the approximate force and effect of electroshock therapy" (*The New York Times*)—now featuring a new afterword by Andrew Ferguson in a twenty-fifth anniversary edition. In 1987, eminent political philosopher Allan Bloom published *The Closing of the American Mind*, an appraisal of contemporary America that "hits with the approximate force and effect of electroshock therapy" (*The New York Times*) and has not only been vindicated, but has also become more urgent today. In clear, spirited prose, Bloom argues

that the social and political crises of contemporary America are part of a larger intellectual crisis: the result of a dangerous narrowing of curiosity and exploration by the university elites. Now, in this twenty-fifth anniversary edition, acclaimed author and journalist Andrew Ferguson contributes a new essay that describes why Bloom's argument caused such a furor at publication and why our culture so deeply resists its truths today.

democracy in america sparknotes: Democracy and the Market Adam Przeworski, 1991-07-26 The quest for freedom from hunger and repression has triggered in recent years a dramatic, worldwide reform of political and economic systems. Never have so many people enjoyed, or at least experimented with democratic institutions. However, many strategies for economic development in Eastern Europe and Latin America have failed with the result that entire economic systems on both continents are being transformed. This major book analyzes recent transitions to democracy and market-oriented economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Drawing in a quite distinctive way on models derived from political philosophy, economics, and game theory, Professor Przeworski also considers specific data on individual countries. Among the questions raised by the book are: What should we expect from these experiments in democracy and market economy? What new economic systems will emerge? Will these transitions result in new democracies or old dictatorships?

democracy in america sparknotes: Bowling Alone: Revised and Updated Robert D. Putnam, 2020-10-13 Updated to include a new chapter about the influence of social media and the Internet—the 20th anniversary edition of *Bowling Alone* remains a seminal work of social analysis, and its examination of what happened to our sense of community remains more relevant than ever in today's fractured America. Twenty years ago, Robert D. Putnam made a seemingly simple observation: once we bowled in leagues, usually after work; but no longer. This seemingly small phenomenon symbolized a significant social change that became the basis of the acclaimed bestseller, *Bowling Alone*, which *The Washington Post* called "a very important book" and Putnam, "the de Tocqueville of our generation." *Bowling Alone* surveyed in detail Americans' changing behavior over the decades, showing how we had become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and social structures, whether it's with the PTA, church, clubs, political parties, or bowling leagues. In the revised edition of his classic work, Putnam shows how our shrinking access to the "social capital" that is the reward of communal activity and community sharing still poses a serious threat to our civic and personal health, and how these consequences have a new resonance for our divided country today. He includes critical new material on the pervasive influence of social media and the internet, which has introduced previously unthinkable opportunities for social connection—as well as unprecedented levels of alienation and isolation. At the time of its publication, Putnam's then-groundbreaking work showed how social bonds are the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction, and how the loss of social capital is felt in critical ways, acting as a strong predictor of crime rates and other measures of neighborhood quality of life, and affecting our health in other ways. While the ways in which we connect, or become disconnected, have changed over the decades, his central argument remains as powerful and urgent as ever: mending our frayed social capital is key to preserving the very fabric of our society.

democracy in america sparknotes: *The Confessions of J. J. Rousseau* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1790

democracy in america sparknotes: *The Story of America* Jill Lepore, 2012 Harvard historian and New Yorker staff writer Jill Lepore investigates American origin stories -- from John Smith's account of the founding of Jamestown in 1607 to Barack Obama's 2009 inaugural address -- to show how American democracy is bound up with the history of print.

democracy in america sparknotes: *The Tyranny of Merit* Michael J. Sandel, 2020-09-10 A TLS, GUARDIAN AND NEW STATESMAN BOOK OF THE YEAR 2020 The new bestseller from the acclaimed author of *Justice* and one of the world's most popular philosophers Astute, insightful, and empathetic...A crucial book for this moment Tara Westover, author of *Educated* These are dangerous times for democracy. We live in an age of winners and losers, where the odds are stacked in favour

of the already fortunate. Stalled social mobility and entrenched inequality give the lie to the promise that you can make it if you try. And the consequence is a brew of anger and frustration that has fuelled populist protest, with the triumph of Brexit and election of Donald Trump. Michael J. Sandel argues that to overcome the polarized politics of our time, we must rethink the attitudes toward success and failure that have accompanied globalisation and rising inequality. Sandel highlights the hubris a meritocracy generates among the winners and the harsh judgement it imposes on those left behind. He offers an alternative way of thinking about success - more attentive to the role of luck in human affairs, more conducive to an ethic of humility, and more hospitable to a politics of the common good.

democracy in america sparknotes: Democracy David A. Moss, 2017-02-21 A Foreign Affairs Best Book of the Year “This absolutely splendid book is a triumph on every level. A first-rate history of the United States, it is beautifully written, deeply researched, and filled with entertaining stories. For anyone who wants to see our democracy flourish, this is the book to read.” —Doris Kearns Goodwin To all who say our democracy is broken—riven by partisanship, undermined by extremism, corrupted by wealth—history offers hope. Democracy’s nineteen cases, honed in David Moss’s popular course at Harvard and taught at the Library of Congress, in state capitols, and at hundreds of high schools across the country, take us from Alexander Hamilton’s debates in the run up to the Constitutional Convention to Citizens United. Each one presents a pivotal moment in U.S. history and raises questions facing key decision makers at the time: Should the delegates support Madison’s proposal for a congressional veto over state laws? Should Lincoln resupply Fort Sumter? Should Florida lawmakers approve or reject the Equal Rights Amendment? Should corporations have a right to free speech? Moss invites us to engage in the passionate debates that are crucial to a healthy society. “Engagingly written, well researched, rich in content and context...Moss believes that fierce political conflicts can be constructive if they are mediated by shared ideals.” —Glenn C. Altschuler, Huffington Post “Gives us the facts of key controversies in our history—from the adoption of the constitution to Citizens United—and invites readers to decide for themselves...A valuable resource for civic education.” —Michael Sandel, author of Justice

democracy in america sparknotes: American Empire Joshua Freeman, 2012-08-02 A compelling look at the movements and developments that propelled America to world dominance In this landmark work, acclaimed historian Joshua Freeman has created an epic portrait of a nation both galvanized by change and driven by conflict. Beginning in 1945, the economic juggernaut awakened by World War II transformed a country once defined by its regional character into a uniform and cohesive power and set the stage for the United States’ rise to global dominance. Meanwhile, Freeman locates the profound tragedy that has shaped the path of American civic life, unfolding how the civil rights and labor movements worked for decades to enlarge the rights of millions of Americans, only to watch power ultimately slip from individual citizens to private corporations. Moving through McCarthyism and Vietnam, from the Great Society to Morning in America, Joshua Freeman’s sweeping story of a nation’s rise reveals forces at play that will continue to affect the future role of American influence and might in the greater world.

democracy in america sparknotes: The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville Alexis de Tocqueville, 1896

democracy in america sparknotes: The Death of Common Sense Philip K. Howard, 2011-05-03 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER “We need a new idea of how to govern. The current system is broken. Law is supposed to be a framework for humans to make choices, not the replacement for free choice.” So notes Philip K. Howard in the new Afterword to his explosive manifesto *The Death of Common Sense*. Here Howard offers nothing less than a fresh, lucid, practical operating system for modern democracy. America is drowning—in law, lawsuits, and nearly endless red tape. Before acting or making a decision, we often abandon our best instincts. We pause, we worry, we equivocate, and then we divert our energy into trying to protect ourselves. Filled with one too many examples of bureaucratic overreach, *The Death of Common Sense* demonstrates how we—and our country—can at last get back on track.

democracy in america sparknotes: Freedom in America William Muir, 2011-07-11 If you want students to really understand the concept of power, moving beyond a survey book's quick discussion of Laswell's who gets what and how, Muir's thoughtful *Freedom in America* might be the book for you. Exploring the words and ideas of such thinkers as Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Tocqueville, Muir discusses the nature and limits of three types of power—coercive, reciprocal, and moral—and then uses this framework to explain how American political institutions work. If looking for an alternative to a long survey text—or itching to get students grappling with *The Federalist Papers* or *Democracy in America* with more of a payoff—Muir's meditation on power and personal freedom is a gateway for students to take their study of politics to the next level. His inductive style, engaging students with well-chosen and masterfully written stories, lets him draw out and distill key lessons without being preachy. Read a chapter and decide if this page turner is for you.

democracy in america sparknotes: Civil Disobedience Henry David Thoreau, 2009-01-01 Thoreau wrote *Civil Disobedience* in 1849. It argues the superiority of the individual conscience over acquiescence to government. Thoreau was inspired to write in response to slavery and the Mexican-American war. He believed that people could not be made agents of injustice if they were governed by their own consciences.

democracy in america sparknotes: Last Best Hope George Packer, 2021 Acclaimed National Book Award-winning author George Packer diagnoses America's descent into a failed state, and envisions a path toward overcoming injustices, paralyses, and divides. How, in a few decades, did the United States transform from a broadly prosperous middle-class country, with relatively healthy institutions and competent leaders, to a nation defined by discredited elites, hollowed-out institutions, and blatant inequalities—feared and pitied by our friends, mocked and sabotaged by our adversaries, first in the world in Covid cases and deaths, and led in recent years by an incompetent authoritarian bigot? *Last Best Hope* is a bracing account of our current crisis and of how a new era of civic revitalization may bring it to an end. Combining reportage with historical narrative, autobiography, and political analysis, Packer depicts and assesses the four inadequate narratives that dominate American public life: Libertarian America, which imagines a nation of individuals responsible for their own fate, and serves the interests of corporations and the wealthy; Cosmopolitan America, the ideology of Silicon Valley and the professional elite, which celebrates globalization and leaves many American communities behind; Diverse America, which defines citizens as members of large identity groups that have inflicted or suffered oppression; and White America, a shallow nationalism that fears the contamination of non-whites and treachery of coastal elites, and poses the greatest threat to democracy in our lifetime. At a time when many fear that the American experiment in self-government may collapse, or, in Abraham Lincoln's words, die by suicide, Packer shows that none of these narratives can sustain American democracy. To point a better way forward, he looks back at previous eras of crisis to discover the resources for invigorating self-government. Combining trenchant social analysis with a vibrant and stinging essayistic voice and a deep knowledge of America's past and present, *Last Best Hope* is an essential contribution to the literature of national self-examination the times demand.

democracy in america sparknotes: The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order Samuel P. Huntington, 2007-05-31 The classic study of post-Cold War international relations, more relevant than ever in the post-9/11 world, with a new foreword by Zbigniew Brzezinski. Since its initial publication, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* has become a classic work of international relations and one of the most influential books ever written about foreign affairs. An insightful and powerful analysis of the forces driving global politics, it is as indispensable to our understanding of American foreign policy today as the day it was published. As former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski says in his new foreword to the book, it “has earned a place on the shelf of only about a dozen or so truly enduring works that provide the quintessential insights necessary for a broad understanding of world affairs in our time.” Samuel Huntington explains how clashes between civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace but also how an international order based on civilizations is the best safeguard against war. Events since

the publication of the book have proved the wisdom of that analysis. The 9/11 attacks and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the threat of civilizations but have also shown how vital international cross-civilization cooperation is to restoring peace. As ideological distinctions among nations have been replaced by cultural differences, world politics has been reconfigured. Across the globe, new conflicts—and new cooperation—have replaced the old order of the Cold War era. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order explains how the population explosion in Muslim countries and the economic rise of East Asia are changing global politics. These developments challenge Western dominance, promote opposition to supposedly “universal” Western ideals, and intensify intercivilization conflict over such issues as nuclear proliferation, immigration, human rights, and democracy. The Muslim population surge has led to many small wars throughout Eurasia, and the rise of China could lead to a global war of civilizations. Huntington offers a strategy for the West to preserve its unique culture and emphasizes the need for people everywhere to learn to coexist in a complex, multipolar, multicivilizational world.

democracy in america sparknotes: *On Liberty* John Stuart Mill, 2016-08-05 In his much quoted, seminal work, *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill attempts to establish standards for the relationship between authority and liberty. He emphasizes the importance of individuality which he conceived as a prerequisite to the higher pleasures—the summum bonum of Utilitarianism. Published in 1859, *On Liberty* presents one of the most eloquent defenses of individual freedom and is perhaps the most widely-read liberal argument in support of the value of liberty.

democracy in america sparknotes: *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies* Samuel Handlin, 2017-07-26 This book develops a new political-institutional explanation of South America's 'two lefts' and the divergent fates of the region's democratic regimes.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Gangs of America* Ted Nace, 2005-09-11 'Gangs of America' traces the evolution of the corporation, one of the core institutions of the modern world. It ties political debates about multi-national trade agreements, financial scandals and scores of other specific issues into the narrative account.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Fortress America* Elaine Tyler May, 2017-12-12 An award-winning historian argues that America's obsession with security imperils our democracy in this compelling portrait of cultural anxiety (Mary L. Dudziak, author of *War Time*). For the last sixty years, fear has seeped into every area of American life: Americans own more guns than citizens of any other country, sequester themselves in gated communities, and retreat from public spaces. And yet, crime rates have plummeted, making life in America safer than ever. Why, then, are Americans so afraid—and where does this fear lead to? In this remarkable work of social history, Elaine Tyler May demonstrates how our obsession with security has made citizens fear each other and distrust the government, making America less safe and less democratic. *Fortress America* charts the rise of a muscular national culture, undercutting the common good. Instead of a thriving democracy of engaged citizens, we have become a paranoid, bunkered, militarized, and divided vigilante nation.

democracy in america sparknotes: *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* Juan J. Linz, Alfred Stepan, 1996-08-16 5. Actors and contexts

democracy in america sparknotes: *Political Culture and Public Opinion* Arthur Asa Berger, 1989-01-01

democracy in america sparknotes: *Democracy in America* Alexis De Tocqueville, 2009-01-01 Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (*De la démocratie en Amérique*) is a classic text detailing the United States of the 1830s, showing a primarily favorable view by Tocqueville as he compares it to his native France. Considered to be an important account of the U.S. democratic system, it has become a classic work in the fields of political science and history. It quickly became popular in both the United States and Europe. *Democracy in America* was first published as two volumes, one in 1835 and the other in 1840; both are included in this edition.