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Modesto, CA 95350

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Mr. Brian Lamb

C-Span - Tocqueville Programs

400 North Capitol NW

Suite 650

Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Sir,

Your Tocqueville programs are the best. I say this with great assurance because the local bookstores are always "out" of Democracy in America, as well as Mr. Pierson's book Tocqueville in America. This tells me that people are buying and reading these great books. And all the accolades belong to you, Sir.

Now, let me share with you my experience with Tocqueville. Like you, I have been impressed with writers — especially historians and sociologists — quoting him so often. Also, the number of books inspired by his work keeps growing. My particular favorites are Gunnar Myrdahl's The American Dilemma, and Robert Bellah's Habits of the Heart.

My direct and personal connection with Tocqueville happened quite serendipitously. I am a retired junior college research librarian and a

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book lover who cherishes ideas. I belong to a member-driven study group in this community called MICE (Modesto Institute for Continued Learning). About eight years ago, the curriculum chairman of this group called me and asked me to do a five week stint on American Literature. My reply was, "Yes, I can do that."

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Then Peggy said hesitantly, "From - the - point - of - view - of - a - foreigner" her voice trailed off.

I said, "O — ooo — oh — OH!" (Tocqueville came to mind in a flash). Yes-s, I can do that."

The ideas that surfaced were "civic virtue", "individualism" and the black man in America. The list of books fell into place - it seemed - automatically:

Tocqueville, Alexis de. Democracy in America

Franklin, Benjamin. Autobiography

Twain, Mark. The Gilded Age

Dos Passos, John. USA Trilogy: 42 Parallel;
1919; The Big Money

Wright, Richard. Native Son.

Week one. Background, education and purpose of Tocqueville's trip to America.

Although, from his Aristocratic perspective, Tocqueville felt that liberty and equality were incompatible, he admired the equality of condition he observed here - equality of social condition. He used the word "individualism" to describe this

condition — a word he coined and about which he had misgivings. Individualism saps the virtue of public life and "the habits of the heart" are lost in the process. He valued the collective temperament found in Aristocratic societies. Nevertheless, he felt the march of democracy was inevitable, irrevocable and all inclusive from here on out — an historical inevitability.

Week two. Benjamin Franklin and "civic virtue".

Who better than Franklin can represent "civic virtue"? The list of his achievements are intimidating. He participated in drafting the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He was a statesman, an inventor, a scientist, a publisher, a citizen and activist. The list of organizations and institutions established by him — too many to count. He would be comfortable with today's market economy. Franklin, along with the founding fathers, breathed life into the democracy which won the admiration and enthusiastic support of Tocqueville. They were kindred spirits.

Week three. The Gilded Age which was written with Charles Dudley Warner describes a democracy fifty years later — whether individualism?

Acquiring wealth became a dominant driving force in this young democracy. Corrupt politicians, involved in land speculation at the expense of the average man, started way back then. Our carefully drawn democracy was showing some chinks.

Both Twain and Tocqueville liked spirited women. Laura and Ruth were emancipated. Their lives took quite different turns. Laura inadvertently became the lobbyist for a corrupt politician. Her life turned out badly. Ruth, a Quaker, pursued a career in medicine. Her life was fulfilled.

The pursuit of personal goals, with all of its competing interests, is the way of "individualism."

Whether "the habits of the heart?"

Week four. Richard Wright and the condition of the black man one hundred years later.

Tocqueville felt pessimistic about the future of the brutalized black man in America. Native Son portrays the raw visceral feelings of fear, hate, rage, guilt, pain and loathing so vividly. The helplessness and the hopelessness were there still, one hundred years later. Rage is necessary to affect a revolutionary conscience but slow in coming. His insights were correct.

Week five. USA - "individualism" is revisited full-blown in the 1930's - when I was an undergraduate - one hundred years after Tocqueville's trip.

Dos Passos presents a splendid array of characters representing every facet of American life. Some new occupations are emerging: aviation industry, public relations, interior decorating, labor leaders, relief workers and movie stars.

The new technologies ^{served} ~~served~~ most as characters in his novels - the Newsreel and the Camera - fascinating

inventions — reflecting visually and audibly the life of the times were skillfully introduced in his writing.

Interesting sketches of public personalities made them memorable, i.e., J.P. Morgan — and his "magpie's eyes". Biographical sketches illuminated history in action.

USA has been characterized as the speech of the people. "Individualism" burst into a thousand points of light. And the end is not in sight. Characters like the J. Ward Moorehouses are alive and well and still turning language inside out. Destiny seems to be controlled by the drift of society as a whole — whether "the habits of the heart"? I wonder how Tocqueville would respond.

It was an interesting five weeks. Your Tocqueville programs took me down memory lane, Sir. Great memories. Thank you very much, from another book lover.

Appreciatively,

P.S. I am currently playing with the idea of doing American History From the Point of View of a World Class Gossip, Gore Vidal. The series will include: Burr, Lincoln, 1876, Empire, Hollywood, and Washington, D.C.

P.P.S. Can you believe a librarian who does not type? Here I am. My telephone number [REDACTED]