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ATT: Book Notes

Mr. Lamb;

On Alexis de Tocqueville. Let me present another perspective. In Americas great Universities, bastions of "Western Civilization", de Tocqueville is placed high in the pantheon of American myth-makers. His generous praise of the American character portrayed in his work, Democracy in America, as the essential component in the making of the American democratic experiment is the stuff of myth making, big time. It is akin to the feel-good myth making aptness of Hollywood whose Western cinemas depicted the settling and/or "conquest" of the West, a figmented image wholly devoid of black people.

As Americas premier myth maker he only told one side of the story. What about his views on the institution of slavery? You and your guest never once mentioned if he had an opinion on the dehumanizing treatment of those displaced Africans who suffered at the hands of these same Americans he ennobled. He exculpated the dark side of the American character, stressing the nation building myth that excludes blacks and other people of color that arrests efforts to expunge the racists bugbear from that very character he extolled and a chance to become whole.

Your discussion of de Tocqueville's work and the commentaries of others about his work completely ignored the total circumstances that infused the milieu in which he found himself. He traveled in America when "Cotton was King"; 1831 witnessed the year of Nat Turner's rampage, a frightful fight for human liberty against those blameless whites; when Andrew Jackson was conducting his genocidal incursions against the Seminoles and his "Jacksonian Democracy" supported white appropriation of Cherokee lands. He had also engaged in the Creek War of 1813 and 1814 which took two thirds of their territory.

These and other events including the fervent debate over the issue of slavery or freedom of the Africans were widely discussed and broadly herald and had to be known to de Tocqueville. The American Declaration declared that all men are created equal, de Tocqueville obviously applied this to white men only, blotting out the problem of race; -the offensive side of the myth he

May/97
No problem with your
paragysic reappraisal
of de Tocqueville. Thought
March 12, 1995
I'd remind you of
another point of view,
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conveniently veiled. Did he ever have a hint or awareness that in the not too distant future these Americans would fight each other in a horrific Civil War?

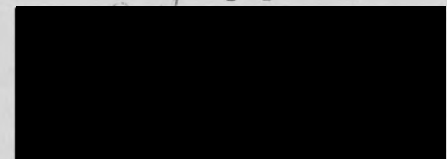
Mr. Ryan surmises that de Tocqueville would not have fared well in todays America. His aristocratic proclivities questioned the wisdom of allowing the masses to rule unfettered. (However, he was no different in this regard to Aristotle who proclaimed that democratic rule by the masses was the worse form of governing.) His attitude about mass rule was also very similar to those of the "Founding Father's" who were concerned about protecting minority rights which in their purview were the rights of white male property owners against a potential majority takeover of their assets.

De Tocqueville's qualms about the 'Tyranny of the Majority' appears to be exemplified by Gingrich's Republican majority. Yet, it was Lincoln's Republican majorities that passed the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. The journey towards the fulfillment of the American Democratic experiment was laid down in large extent with the ratification of these amendments, and passage of the Civil Rights laws of 1866 and 1875, events that could very well be the fodder of myth making.

My concern is that de Tocqueville's myth making conjoined with other American created mythologies, i.e., "Melting pot", "Color blind society", "Black inferiority", "With Liberty and Justice for All", "Statue of Liberty", "E PLURIBUS UNUM", befogs the irrational behavior white Americans direct toward blacks and helps forment a highly volatile complex state of human affairs not easily resolved.

The puzzling predicament faced by Americans, however, is of mans own making, and the stories the majority tell is the way they want the story told.

Cordially yours,

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CC: Young adults