

Constitution and Sovereignty in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

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The paper

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, I suggest, should be placed within the context of French political debates at the time over the meaning and value of democracy. In the early 1830s, the warmest supporters of the new-born July Monarchy maintained that limited suffrage was not in contradiction with democracy: modern democracy, they argued, meant equality before the law rather than equal access to political participation. To the paradoxical idea of a democracy deprived of self-government, Tocqueville responds with a militant and philosophically articulated defence of democratic procedures and the extension of suffrage. This paper reconstructs Tocqueville's argument for political democracy, considering both its polemical targets and its theoretical development throughout *Democracy in America*. In order to do so, the paper retraces Tocqueville's innovative uses of the notion of 'principle', current in French political language since Montesquieu. I show how, by rethinking this notion, Tocqueville elaborates an original conception of popular sovereignty and of the democratic constitution.