

# Well, This 1835 Warning to America Was on Target

A passage from Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 classic *Democracy in America*. It's from chapter 6 entitled "What Sort Of Despotism Democratic Nations Have To Fear":

*"I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is **an innumerable multitude of men all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest** – his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not – he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country. **Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate.** That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; **but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood:** it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. **For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness:** it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances – **what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?** Thus it every day*

*renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range, **and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself.** The principle of equality has prepared men for these things: it has predisposed men to endure them, and oftentimes to look on them as benefits.*

Sound familiar?