

Tocqueville: Love of Equality Leads to Hatred

It's said that some of the fiercest fights in academia are over the narrowest of differences. It seems that Alexis de Tocqueville saw the same problem developing within democracy as the quest for equality grew. A French aristocrat, he came to America in the early 1800s and studied it extensively, composing his reflections in *Democracy in America* (Vol. 1 1835, Vol. 2 1840).

In *Democracy in America* he warns that the drive for equality ultimately will tear people apart as they actually become more equal.

"The hatred that men bear to privilege increases in proportion as privileges become fewer and less considerable, so that democratic passions would seem to burn most fiercely just when they have least fuel. I have already given the reason for this phenomenon. When all conditions are unequal, no inequality is so great as to offend the eye, whereas the slightest dissimilarity is odious in the midst of general uniformity; the more complete this uniformity is, the more insupportable the sight of such a difference becomes. Hence it is natural that the love of equality should constantly increase together with equality itself, and that it should grow by what it feeds on."

These days it appears that there is much truth to his reflections. Increasingly, any hint of differences in our society is odious and must be remedied. The quest for equality has already morphed into a quest for equity, for equal outcomes. As Tocqueville argues, this quest feeds upon itself until it devours all before it.

Unfortunately, inequality is the state of the world and

nature. And therein lies the root of the hatred and anger. Like Sisyphus cursed for eternity to roll a rock up a hill only to have it roll down again, so too is the impossible task of establishing equality.