

This 1835 Description of Europe Explains Modern America's Agitation

The other day I ran across a simple video from *The Perennial Plate*. The [two-minute film](#) featured Bryan Picard, chef and owner of "The Bite House" in Nova Scotia.

Like many of today's trendy restaurants, The Bite House capitalizes on locally grown food served in a gourmet fashion. The unique aspect of Picard's restaurant, however, is the setting. His restaurant is his house, which only seats 14 people in an evening.

As I watched the video, I started to laugh. Picard was so unassuming, so nonchalant, that it was hard for the producer to get much information out of him. Adjectives such as "simple" and "quiet" were as descriptive as things got.

Yet Picard's close-lipped stance doesn't seem to hurt his business any. As *The Perennial Plate* explains, it takes months to get a seat for one of Picard's meals. In fact, the restaurant is already booked for the [entire upcoming year](#) even though the season hasn't yet begun.

So what drives this overwhelming popularity?

Given various reviews of the restaurant, the great food is one reason. But the other major reason seems to be the hospitable, home-like nature of the restaurant. Customers are treated like guests. They are served what the host chooses. They are told what each course is and the elements that compose it. And they are treated to a relaxed, unhurried, comfortable atmosphere away from the cares of the world.

Unfortunately, that atmosphere is hard to find these days.

Many children live in a house with grandparents, a single parent, or a blended family instead of the intact, [two-parent home](#) which once reigned supreme. Those who have reached adulthood also find a stable home life a bit elusive, a fact particularly seen in the [decline of marriage](#) and the [transient work nature](#) of the younger generation. And when the stable, married, two-parent home does prevail, those who live in that house are often so busy with work, school, and activities, that a home where one can be quiet and get away from the world is non-existent.

Ironically, such a state is similar to one described by Alexis de Tocqueville in [Democracy in America](#) during the mid-1800s, only in that instance he was describing Europe, not America. The report wasn't what one might call glowing, either:

“In Europe almost all the disturbances of society arise from the irregularities of domestic life. To despise the natural bonds and legitimate pleasures of home, is to contract a taste for excesses, a restlessness of heart, and the evil of fluctuating desires. Agitated by the tumultuous passions which frequently disturb his dwelling, the European is galled by the obedience which the legislative powers of the State exact. But when the American retires from the turmoil of public life to the bosom of his family, he finds in it the image of order and of peace. There his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys are innocent and calm; and as he finds that an orderly life is the surest path to happiness, he accustoms himself without difficulty to moderate his opinions as well as his tastes. Whilst the European endeavors to forget his domestic troubles by agitating society, the American derives from his own home that love of order which he afterwards carries with him into public affairs.”

One glance at American culture today and it's easy to see an abundance of restlessness, societal disturbances, excesses, and fluctuating desires. In fact, the agitation which

Tocqueville once saw in Europe seems to have handily transplanted itself on modern American shores.

Is it possible that such agitation has come about through the decline of home and family? And does the popularity of Bryan Pickard's restaurant signal society's hidden desire for the simple security and innocent pleasures that an orderly home can bring?

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