

“Why Americans Are So Often Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity” by Alexis de Tocqueville

Are Americans Happy?

In 1831 a young Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States. The result was *Democracy in America*, which might still be the most profound analysis of American society and character available. A selection from this classic, "Why Americans Are So Often Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity," is the focus of this assignment.

1. PREVIEW ARTICLE (3-5 MINUTES)

BEFORE reading the essay, consider these questions:

Record your answers on loose-leaf paper.

- 1) In your experience, are Americans a happy people?
- 2) Is the legal, constitutional, and political equality of Americans more likely to lead them to be happy or unhappy?

2. TURN THE TITLE INTO ONE OR MORE QUESTIONS THAT WILL HELP YOU STAY FOCUSED WHILE YOU READ.

- a. According to Tocqueville, why are Americans so often restless in the midst of their prosperity?
- b. What does Tocqueville mean by “restless?” What would help ease this restlessness?

3. READ THE ARTICLE COMPLETELY WITHOUT UNDERLINING OR MARKING YOUR PAPER. JUST TRY TO COMPREHEND THE ARGUMENTS.

4. NOW READ THE ESSAY A SECOND TIME AND ANNOTATE YOUR HANDOUT AS YOU READ.

****USING ONLY YOUR PENCIL, UNDERLINE KEY PHRASES/SENTENCES, CIRCLE UNKNOWN WORDS, AND WRITE NOTES IN YOUR MARGINS.**

5. Consider these questions AFTER reading:

Record your answers on loose-leaf paper.

Interpretive Questions:

- 1) Does Tocqueville think that Americans are mistaken in desiring prosperity and equality?
- 2) Why does Tocqueville think there is a constant strife between the desires inspired by equality and the means it supplies to satisfy them?
- 3) According to Tocqueville, what is the sort of equality Americans long for?
- 4) Why does Tocqueville think men can achieve a satisfactory degree of liberty but not a satisfactory degree of equality?

Evaluative Questions:

- 1) Is Tocqueville right that equality leads to restlessness and unhappiness?
- 2) Can one be happy and still endlessly pursue greater prosperity?

6. SUMMARIZE THE ARTICLE – WHAT MESSAGE IS THE AUTHOR TRYING TO CONVEY? BE SURE TO STATE THE AUTHOR’S POINT OF VIEW; INCLUDE THE REASONS HE OFFERS TO EXPLAIN HIS PERSONAL STAND ON THE ISSUE.

7. NOW WRITE A JOURNAL RESPONSE WHICH MEANS REACT/RESPOND TO THE ARTICLE. CHOOSE SEVERAL KEY POINTS THE AUTHOR MAKES AND VOICE YOUR OPINION. TELL WHAT YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH AND WHY.