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Eric V. Snow November 25, 1992 HST 815 Dr. LoRomer Review of Tocqueville

Primary sources constitute the "raw material" historians use in writing history, such as eyewitness accounts, bureaucratic memoranda, journalists' reports in newspapers and magazines, memoirs by politicians, etc. Such sources, which contain their own biases, are then weighed and critiqued by historians, who, having their own agendas (albeit attempts to stay objective) write history using them. Tocqueville's Recollections, in which he describes his own personal experiences in the French Revolution of 1848 and the Second Republic, constitutes a very valuable primary source. His memoirs give the reader an excellent feel for the confusion and uncertainty involved in the 1848 revolution, but due to their episodic nature and being limited to mostly only what he experienced, it is hard to get an overall view of the 1848 Revolution in France through them alone.

Tocqueville's Memoirs make for particularly compelling reading due to his excellent writing, which especially holds the reader's interest due to the fascinating nature of the events themselves. Twice, as a legislator, Tocqueville personal<sup>ly</sup> experienced the Parisian mob entering the assembly hall where the legislature was seated in force, with the legislators getting expelled, dispersed, and/or physically intimidated. He suffered this indignity as a deputy in the Chamber of Deputies on February 24, 1848, and then again as a member of the National Assembly on May 15 of the same year (p. 54-55, 117-118). *AWA*

The overarching feeling one gets through Tocqueville of the 1848 Revolution in France from February to June is the enormous confusion, fear, and uncertainty that had overtaken most people, but especially those with property (p. 72, 94). In particular, the fear concerning the loyalty of the soldiers, whether it be the army, the National Guard, or the Guardes Mobiles, continually spooked the legislators, especially during the February Revolution and the June Days (p. 40, 42, 143). In particular, when street fighting was

occurring and barricades were getting erected and assaulted, nobody, including the elite, knew what was going on (a.k.a. "the fog of war" effect). Neither the legislators, nor the soldiers, and certainly not the workers, middle class or aristocrats, knew what really was happening, and would be gripped by fear. For example, even after several successful days of fighting the workers of Paris who objected to the closing of the National Workshops violently ("the June Days"), the National Assembly itself was seized by fear because of a rumor workers would try to take their building at night (p. 163-164).

Tocqueville, in particular, shows how small groups of people with a sense of discipline, order, courage, and resolution in a revolution are far more powerful than a <sup>much larger milling</sup> confused mass of workers, soldiers, or legislators. It took only <sup>about</sup> forty ~~Gu~~ardes Mobiles and a column of National Guards to totally clear the National Assembly's Hall of hundreds of workers on May 15 (p. 123). If a large group of National Guards had shown up a half hour earlier in the Chamber of Deputies on February 24, a Regency would have been proclaimed instead of a republic (p. 56-57).

Tocqueville's Recollections suffer from two basic weaknesses as a general account of the 1848 revolution in France. One is that the reader sees mostly only what Tocqueville himself experienced, and cannot easily sit back and get the overall view of the revolution. You see lots of trees, but not the whole forest. As a result, Tocqueville sees the June Days as decisive for the defeat of the Parisian workers' socialist cause (p. 165), but Jean Seignman in his 1848 The Romantic and Democratic Revolutions in Europe, with the benefit of hindsight, sees April 16, when the Provisional Government first called out troops against a workers' demonstration, and the April 23 elections, which elected an anti-socialist majority, as decisive (S., p. 225-226). Tocqueville sees the workers as totally united against the government and middle class (p. 70-71, 137, 74), but Peter Amann's article said a "very substantial minority of manual workers" sided with the government as well (A., p. 946).

Hence, while Tocqueville's Recollections is a valuable and very interesting primary source on the 1848 French Revolution, it cannot be considered a complete history of this event, as he himself stated (p. 79).