

AN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

by

Austin Owens Kelly

HONORS THESIS

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Thesis Supervisor:

Vincent Bagnulo

Second Reader:

James Price

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DEDICATION

To those who have gone unheard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Vince Bangulo, Lecturer of Political Science, Texas State University, for your constant guidance through the mind of Alexis de Tocqueville. Since the beginning of your course in January of 2020 to now, you have introduced me to an incredible vocabulary of thought and consideration in relation to our current government in the United States, and have given me a political literacy that I had previously not known to exist. My understanding of my country has been forever elevated because of you.

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And of course, thank you Mom and Dad for your continuous support of my endeavors, and for making me do this thesis in the first place. Yes, you are right--this *will* look good on grad school applications.

ABSTRACT

2020 has been one of the most politically tumultuous years in recent history. Many young Americans have been left with a simple question: how did we get here? How did the United States wind up in the political sinkhole that it has fallen into? Austin Owens Kelly chooses to look for answers within Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 text *Democracy in America*, and chooses to explore his ideas and predictions on American democracy through the format of a one person show. Through intermittently playing both himself and Tocqueville, Kelly wishes to examine the French political theorist's observations and connect them to the real life events of 2020 leading into 2021.

CHARACTERS:

AUSTIN: A young artist.

TOCQUEVILLE: A French political theorist from the 1830s.

MOM (VOICEOVER): Austin's mom.

DAD (VOICEOVER): Austin's dad.

MIKKIE (VOICEOVER): Austin's friend and classmate.

SOPHIA (VOICEOVER): Austin's partner.

SETTING:

A place with a desk, a lamp, a chair, and a book.

NOTE:

Due to continuing concerns of COVID-19 at the time of development of this piece, the performance outlined in this script was written and edited to be captured and distributed digitally, as opposed to being performed in front of a live audience as initially conceived.

This piece was captured over the months of May and June of 2021 in San Marcos, Texas. Performance by Austin Ownes Kelly, direction by Kaycee Swierc. Additional audio featuring Jana Kelly, Brian Kelly, Micaela Lamas, and Sophia Goodin.

PROLOGUE:

We see a very simple scene in front of us--be it in a theatre, in a field, in a courthouse, in a bedroom. There is a desk, with a chair, with a lamp. A large book sits atop the desk, off to the side, as well as some loose pieces of paper with a couple of pens and pencils. A nice jacket is propped on the back of the chair.

AUSTIN stands in front of the desk.

Sighs.

Clasps his hands.

AUSTIN

Hi.

Hello.

Hi.

(chuckles)

I know this might be a bit more casual, than people were expecting, but uh...you know, I've been doing a lot of thinking about, um...about how I wanted to present this, this *thing*, to people, and--and I think that, especially with the sort of...political rollercoaster that we've been on, for the past year, and *continue* to be on, I felt like I just wanted to be...I dunno. *Forthright*, I guess. Open. Because I feel like--I dunno, I just...how did we get here? You know? How did we--what is the, the root cause of...of the effect that we've landed at? You know? How royally have we...screwed up this country?

Or have we really just been on the correct path this whole time? Is this just how this cruel country was fundamentally built to work?

I've been thinking about it a lot.

For those of you who don't know me, my name's Austin Kelly. I graduated May of 2021 from Texas State University with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre.

I had this idea...or well, really, I first *got* this idea back in spring semester of junior year, last year, um...and it started with this class that I took in the Honors College. It was a Poli Sci class called "Democracy in America", taught by Dr. Vince Bagnulo.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Incredible professor, incredible class, if you're in the Honors College at Texas State, I highly suggest you try to get a spot in it. But, when I first signed up for it, I was just doing it to, like...check a box. It was a gen ed that I needed, it was there, I signed up, I got a spot.

Had no idea what it was about, what it was gonna focus on, anything like that.

But anyways, I, I got into this class, "Democracy In America", and I eventually got sent the syllabus, and I started reading it, and I realized, like...

"Oh, this is, like...this is really interesting..." because the whole course was about covering one book--

He reaches over, grabs the book on the desk, holds it up.

This one, which--this is, like...this is *dangerous*, look at this thing, just--

He mimes tossing it like a tomahawk.

Dead. Y'know?

He places it in his lap and begins to absentmindedly flip through it.

But it's written by this guy, this, uh, this old French guy, named Alexis de Tocqueville. I'm not even gonna try to pronounce his name in French, because I haven't spoken accurate French since senior year of high school--but anyway, Tocqueville, he wrote this thing back in 1835. He was a politician, an aristocrat, a political thinker, from the early 1800s, after the French Revolution...

Austin's phone, on the desk, lights up with a phone call. He lunges across the desk and silences it.

Oh, my god, I am so sorry.

Christ, I could've sworn I turned it off.

I'm sure Kaitlin Hopkins *loves* the professionalism she's seeing right now. Good Lord.

Anyways, what was I--yeah, French Revolution.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

This was written a bit *after* the Revolution, this was during the time France was a constitutional monarchy. Which, you know--overthrowing a monarchy just to put a slightly less restrictive one in place, kinda weird, but, whatever. Tensions were rising, in France, and people were already beginning to see the sort of death of *aristocracy*, which is what France was, at the time.

And aristocracy was this very, like, fixed system, of, like, social hierarchy, where like...if you were an aristocrat, you were an aristocrat, if you were a worker, you were a worker, if you were a peasant, you were a peasant, with like...no opportunity for ebb and flow. Like, you were just sort of stuck with it. And that filtered into politics, and government, and all sorts of other stuff.

But, basically, the aristocrats in France were seeing this system coming to the cusp of being toppled over, and they were all, like, "Oh, *shit*. Like, we are so done, we're all gonna--*equality? Freedom?* What are you talking about, that's *horrible*, we're *so done!*"

But Tocqueville, he had taken a trip to America, just to, um...just to observe it. To observe the government, the society, the culture, y'know, just--the entire system that had been put into place as a *whole*. Because he could also see that aristocracy was kind of on the brink of extinction, and he said to himself, like "Okay, aristocracy's dead. Like--she's gone, there's no saving her. There's this whole sort of movement going on right now of democratic thinking, with emphasis on equality, and freedom, and those sorts of things, that nobody else has really done, in Europe."

"*However...*we've got this little baby country over here, the United States, who have been *doing* this whole democracy thing, or at least have been *trying* to...maybe we should observe and study them, just to see a real-world example of what a democratic society would look like, as well as predict what a democratic society could *end up* looking like, years and years and years down the line."

So, that's what he did. And he came back to France, and he wrote a book about it. And the whole purpose of the book was just to say, "Look, I get why you're panicking, I am too, just listen. This is what America's doing. Is it good? Maybe? Maybe not? Maybe it's complicated? Bottom line is: this is a practical, true example of what we are most likely going to become, and I've tracked out how things would most likely end up."

Austin hops down from the desk and begins to casually pace.

Because, *again*, as I said, people were sort of *terrified* of democracy, because so many people equated it to...to anarchy, and all sorts of other stuff. Also, people didn't want others to suddenly have the same rights and freedoms as they did.

As Austin continues to talk with the audience, he grabs the jacket from the back of the chair--a sort of 1830s-reminiscent style--and slowly puts it on. As he does so, his voice and posture slowly begin to morph and change.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

But Tocqueville, y'know, he was able to see what democracy truly was...at least, the American iteration of it...and, you know, really delve into and study every sort of facet of it...

As he straightens out the collar, the cuffs, it is apparent that Austin is no longer in the room. Alexis de Tocqueville is now mid-conversation with the audience.

TOCQUEVILLE

And it is not--it is not *perfect*, you know, it is not--that, that is not what I am saying at all, it of course has its pitfalls, and paradoxes, and contradictions, and all of that, but...I have been able to look at everything that America has done, and is currently *doing*, and come back with a very sound...*dissertation*, of what a democracy will look like, here.

Tocqueville stops. Stares out. Smiles.

Again, I want to thank you all for taking time out of this evening to join me here, in this, erm...*banquet*. Yes, again *banquet*, I want to stress, *not* a political gathering.

Because if this is a *banquet*, then we will not be arrested by the police. Which is always a good thing.

But before we get into what democracy as a societal system might look like for *us*, I need to explain just a little bit about the, uh...the *context* of United States' democracy. Because there are some very unique and specific reasons as to why America functions the way it does.

A title flashes, accompanied with sudden boisterous, orchestral music. The title reads...

OF THE POINT OF DEPARTURE AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ANGLO-AMERICANS:

Tocquville plants himself behind the desk,
bracing his hands against it.

TOCQUEVILLE

Now, there is something very unique about America that we need to address, here. Of course it is unique, we all know that. But, if you look at other countries here in Europe, you can attempt to trace back through the deep, saturated history of it, as a nation, and attempt to find the defining moment that was the sort of concrete “beginning” of the country.

However, it is very difficult to do that; you need to dig through centuries upon centuries of history, and it’s all very loose and messy, and it is hard to kind of...kind of pinpoint things.

But with America...we can *absolutely* pinpoint that moment. We have a very distinct moment where we can definitively say “this is the moment that births the country as we know it today.” And it was only a little less than two hundred years ago. We can very directly see the beginning of this nation, and we’ve never quite been able to do that before.

However, the one thing that is different from the birth of America and the birth of any other European country is that the settlers of America were coming from a pre-established society. A pre-established society that they all shared, from the beginning. So you have these various groups emigrating at various times, but they are all inherently linked together by their language, their general backgrounds--you do not really find that anywhere else in the world.

Tocquville begins to comfortably pace about
the room.

This linkage, this, this inherent tie to each other, is what makes America different from any other country in the world. It was because of this resemblance to each other that the colonies, as well as its people, naturally lended itself to democracy as a structure. The only effective way to procure land, the only effective way to establish townships, and laws, and all of these other things--the only way to effectively *do* that was from a democratic standpoint. And, a large part of that has to do with the kind of people who were going to America--there were no nobles just deciding to abandon healthy and established legacies. To insinuate that would be absurd.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

The people who came to these colonies were common people, you know? People who did not have very much, often people who were not having very much success in England. And a prominent group of those people, settling up in the North, were the Puritans, who were fleeing religious persecution in England, who wanted to live and worship in their own fashion. And this is where we received a lot of the founding principles still present in America, from this one group.

The Puritans, as a people, had such a heavy focus on equality. There was no rigid social hierarchy like they had encountered in England--they very deliberately established a sense of community amongst each other, in the laws that they created, through the lens of what God expected of them. They even--immediately, as soon as they arrived, they landed at Plymouth Rock, they wrote up and signed an act that said--wait a moment, let me find it--

Tocqueville sorts through the loose piece of paper on the desk, before plucking one from the pile and holding it up. He reads:

“We whose names are under written [. . .] having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honour of our King and country...”

I've been told these people were quite pious...

“...a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia;”

They did not land in Virginia. That is *not* correct.

“...do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic...”

Tocqueville physically indicates the importance of that statement, perhaps lifting a finger.

“...for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid: And by virtue hereof, do enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.”

Tocqueville places the paper back on the desk.

So, again, as you can see--from the *beginning*, democracy was involved.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

And these ideals spread like a fire through the rest of the colonies as they came to be developed, North *and* South.

Although, I must clarify--although they adopted democratic ideals, the southern colonies were still almost a sort of...mock aristocracy, in a way, because they were the ones who brought *slaves* to the colonies. But amongst the colonists themselves, there was still this predisposition to democracy.

Anyways.

Despite all of this, you can make the argument, sure, that they were still operating under a *sense* of monarchy...since the King still very much had control, within colonies, but there was still very much this sense of detachment and...well, *sovereignty* amongst the colonies. While they did follow the crown at the end of the day, they were still very much left to their own devices, and those devices were very much democratic in nature.

And this sovereignty--sovereignty of the *people*, amongst the states, still lives on to this day. And I know the phrase "sovereignty of the people" might sound a bit scary, perhaps even a bit barbaric--but America...this idea is not only fully realized, but it is fully *embraced*.

Why is that? Why are the Americans so...so *enthusiastic* about sovereignty? Where did it come from?

Revolution.

That is what catalyzed this philosophy being wholeheartedly adopted by the American people! Because, *beforehand*, they were serving the crown, so it was not *complete* sovereignty of the people, they had to sort of limit it to the civic level, and so forth--but when the Revolution came?

That was the entire leading force! That was the core belief at the head of that movement! These people were fighting back against their ruler and their mother country because they wanted the power to govern themselves *through* themselves. This one rebellion effectively solidified the, the, the *golden rule* of this country.

Now, the truly remarkable thing about this is how their government has formed, out of this. The way they have divided power, it is really interesting. Before they all came together as a country, they were all wholly independent of each other. Each colony, or *state*, really, had their own governments that pertained exclusively to them. So, when they came together to form a Union, a lot of them wanted to keep that.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

The federal government came *after* the state government, and the state governments still exist underneath the federal one. And underneath *that*, you start to break into counties, which then breaks into townships...so, we have this sort of...this sort of layered, multi-tiered system.

No, I agree, it is *very* convoluted. Who is the one who is really in control, here? Is it the states who have final say at the end of the day, or is it the overarching federal government? Who can overrule who? What is the *heirarchy*, here?

Believe it or not, there is not much of one at all. Which seems absolutely unbelievable, but it's true! Consider the state of Massachussets, for example. They have their laws and ordinances very explicitly open and available for people to review and to follow...and they just *do* it. The people *themselves* uphold the laws.

And sure, there are magistrates and people who are appointed to hold the law to the highest degree, in a court of sessions, and take punitive measures, and all that, but they-- here, in France, you have one administrative magistrate, in a town or city. The mayor. That's it.

But Massachussets?

Nineteen.

Nineteen! And they don't *depend* each other, they act independently. You go to America, and you do not see a presence of a central force, because it encompasses *everyone*. The people themselves follow the laws that are laid out for them. And if somebody does not, then everyone else takes the responsibility for discipline and punishment. They do not need anyone to enforce them. This ties back into the founding, the continual path of these democratic ideals that have been laid out--this is America's very unique *mores*. This is the natural, cultural predisposition that the American people have, and that is such a large factor as to why this country is able to work the way that it does. This speaks to the fact that--

The phone on the desk suddenly lights up with an incoming call. Tocqueville immediately goes silent, and his movement slows--almost as if he is entering a sort of fugue state. He doesn't directly acknowledge the phone, even as it continues to ring--does he realize where the noise is coming from?

...that...

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

...that, um...

His eyes, unfocused, slowly drift toward the direction of the still ringing phone. He has now fully slipped into a trance.

The phone stops.

He continues to stare blankly, completely gone.

A moment passes.

The phone begins to ring again.

PHONE CALL 1:

Tocqueville slowly walks to the ringing phone, eyes glazed over. He simply watches it for a moment. Suddenly, He picks it up. He taps answer. We hear dead air as he continues to hold it away from himself. He slowly, as if moving through water, raises it up to his ear. Who's truly occupying his body? Finally, he speaks.

AUSTIN

Hello?

MOM (V.O.)

What do you mean?

Austin, suddenly returned, lets out a sigh. He grabs the chair from behind the desk and slumps down in it.

AUSTIN

I dunno, I just...I don't really know if it's worth doing anymore, y'know?

MOM (V.O.)

Why not?

AUSTIN

It's just...like, I don't even know if I'm gonna be *able* to do it anymore, y'know? Like, we have...we have no idea what the world is gonna look like next April, let alone *next month*, so like--I dunno, I just--everything is...is *so up in the air*, right now, and, I can't...I can't feel comfortable in committing myself to anything in the future, right now, just because...I don't know.

I feel like this whole expereince has kind of cemented for me how unpredictable the future is, and like...y'know, why even try to start doing something when it might just get ripped out from under you, again?

MOM (V.O.)

Well, I mean...just because you can't do it the way you first *thought* you were gonna do it doesn't mean that you *can't* do it. Right?

Austin rubs his eyes meditatively.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

No, yeah, you're right.

MOM (V.O.)

You're quitting before you've even started.

AUSTIN

No, I--I know that--

MOM (V.O.)

I don't think that's really...fair.

AUSTIN

I just--*mom*, I--

A long beat

I don't know.

I don't know.

I just feel so...

Lost. Right now.

MOM (V.O.)

I do too.

We *all* kind of do, right now.

A long beat

I just think this is a really cool thing, that you came up with, and I think there's--you should still try to find some way to do it. I don't want you to miss out on this, just because you decided you couldn't do it.

Also, this would be a really good thing for when you're applying to grad school, if you're still thinking / about doing that--

AUSTIN

No, yeah, I--I know.

I'm just--god, I'm so...*angry*. You know? Like, I'm just--the fact that this is still going on, and like--this whole thing should've been over with by now.

MOM (V.O.)

Well, / I mean--

AUSTIN

And it's because people aren't--it's so aggravating. People aren't doing what we're being told to do. It's like everybody's just starting to forget the fact there's still a fucking *pandemic* going on--and literally nobody in power is doing *anything* about it! And, like, I *knew* that Trump wasn't gonna fuckin' do anything but it still just--it *enrages* me! We're in this hole, now, that we can't get out of, and we'll *never* get out of, because of like a good five to ten percent of people who don't have any cognitive functioning beyond their own perception of life, and the government is just letting them endanger everybody. Because, y'know, "America". "It's my right to do this, nobody can tell me what to do, even when it's actively harming others". I mean, look at what's going on in Atlanta, right now, with, with, with the mayor trying to--to put in the--to enforce the mask mandate, but the governor is bursting in saying "Oh, she can't tell you what to do, go ahead, spread it everywhere and make the whole situation worse, because it's your right as an American."

I'm just--I'm so...*pissed!* I'm--

I've never felt this much, just...*wrath*. In my life, before. And it's just...shutting me down, because I can't...I can't *do* anything...

A long beat

DAD (V.O.)

Well...that's a whole other issue, right? And I think a lot of people are kinda in the same boat as you. I mean--I'm pissed, too. This whole thing is just...ridiculous.

I think what you're mother's trying to say, Austin, is...you're right. We don't know what Spring Semester is gonna look like, we don't know what *Fall* Semester is gonna look like...whatever. But the flip side of that is things *could* be better by then.

AUSTIN

I...can't bring myself to believe that. I'm sorry.

DAD (V.O.)

I--okay. That's...*fair*. But, look--just because you can't do it the way you first thought, that doesn't mean you can't do it at all. Right?

DAD (V.O., CONT'D)

I mean, that's kind of where we're all at, right now. We're all...y'know...*adapting* to this new situation that we're all sort of stuck in. And I'm sure that there's some way for you to do this thing, regardless of whether you're in person or not.

MOM (V.O.)

I just think you have these resources that are available to you, and I think you should...I think it would be smart for you to use them. 'Cause when else are you gonna be able to do this?

A beat

AUSTIN

No, I know.

MOM (V.O.)

If anything, just...get the forms in, have the little...facetime, zoom, whatever, with the guy who's running it, and...you can just figure it out from there. You don't have to know what it's gonna look like right now, you can figure it out as it goes along.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

A beat.

MOM

And grad school.

Dad bursts into laughter.

AUSTIN

Yes, I know. I--I agree. Yeah.

A title flashes, accompanied with sudden boisterous, orchestral music. The title reads...

HOW ONE CAN SAY STRICTLY THAT IN THE UNITED STATES THE PEOPLE GOVERN:

Austin hangs up and returns the phone to the desk as the music plays, snapping back into Tocqueville. The title disappears.

TOCQUEVILLE

Now, as I was saying--in America, it is truly the people who govern. They elect their representatives every year, they are the ones who choose who writes the law, who executes it, who oversees it--it is all *them*. The people are the ones who, at the end of the day, hold the true power here. They are the one who rule.

Well, *most* of them, that is. The *majority*. They, overall, are the ones who most affect the way that the country is run.

Now, that does lead to a certain question...there is still left a *minority*, no? Well, of course there is--there has to be a minority in a majority-rule system--but what happens to *them*? The minority? They are still a part of the citizenry, where is their voice?

Well, in a country that so heavily relies on the majority, they are almost left out. This is the *tyranny of the majority*--the complete stronghold that the majority has over its government and its policies, due truly to its numbers. And, if left totally and completely unchecked...this could lead to some possible danger. No? If this majority is harmful, or dangerous, and is left to blaze brazenly forward without any sort of hinderance--if this majority is playing into the wrong hands, it could be quite catastrophic. At that point, what is the difference between a majority and an emperor?

I, personally, don't see much of one. In order for a majority rule to be truly just, it needs something to somewhat inhibit it so that it allows time to moderate itself. It cannot be left to run loose and possibly get out of hand.

There is one thing that I admittedly hate about America, and it is the very existence of this concept--tyranny of the majority. People think that it is freedom or equality that one should hate, no; I hate that there is no guarantee against tyranny.

If someone, or perhaps a *group* of someones from a minority group faces some sort of injustice in a society such as this, who are they to go to? They cannot turn to public opinion, that is a part of the majority. They cannot turn to the legislative, they represent the majority. The executive? The armed forces? The jury? *The majority*.

To put it quite simply, they are done for!

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

This is one of the major issues that needs to be addressed in America specifically. They need to fix it. Because it can become something *so* powerful and *so* harmful and *so* dangerous. The door is open, and anyone may walk through it if they so please. They just have not noticed it yet.

However, I would say that the Americans have set themselves up in a...in a relatively amicable scenario to combat tyranny of the majority, and they are in this position for one main reason. Sure, one has their lawyers, their, their juries, and all of that, that is definitely useful, but the one certain facet that keeps America from succumbing to the tyranny of the majority is its lack of administrative centralization.

Again, as I said before, we have two main types of centralization in a democratic system-- governmental centralization, and administrative centralization. Governmental involves the workings of the entire nation as a whole, country-wide. Administrative involves the workings of a singular, individual state or township. In America, there is a very sizeable governmental centralization, but almost no administrative centralization.

A country that has both under its thumb will bring its people to its knees. A country like America that has one but not the other is considerably tempered.

A centralized government has its absolute power at the national level, that is true. It may order its citizens on general matters as it pleases. However, it is separated from the inner workings of an individual township. The administrative level. Because, frankly, a centralized national government does not have the time nor the energy to dictate the intricacies of how a state shall enact its own, individual needs. Allowing a decentralized administrative level allows the power to be more equally exerted amongst its citizens at the most base, most *important* level. While general laws may loom over one's head, the laws that most thoroughly and greatly affect the individual may be more equally decided upon.

And I must admit...there is an elephant in the room, here. Yes? I keep speaking of minority, majority, all of that, but there are some sizeable minorities in the United States that do not really...they do not apply here, for various reasons.

And I believe we all know why.

In this little Declaration of Independence, that the Americans have, they have the line, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." And for the most part, the Americans very much abide by that rule, and apply it to its citizenry.

Well...except for the slaves. And that may seem like an obtuse observation, but it is still one that must be made.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

And for that matter, the same stands for the, the tribes of indigenous people occupying those lands, that...that the Anglo-Americans are actively attempting to wipe out. I suppose that they do not fall under that rule either.

A little *strange*, no? And for some reason, the Americans do not--they refuse to acknowledge it.

It really is a bit...*shocking*, quite frankly, what white Americans have done to these two groups of people. One looks at the black population currently occupying the United States--these are a people who were stolen from their home country, actively stripped of their own culture, their own language--you meet a black man in America, today, and he has no idea where he comes from! The white man has taken every effort to purge it from their peoples' collective memory! He has no home to call his own, no sense of lineage, or history, he is crippled. The only thing he knows is that he is a slave. And that is it. And it is heartbreaking. And when he is freed, and tries to integrate himself into society, it actively rebukes him in response. He cannot win no matter what he does. His mere existence in that country guarantees his loss.

And the situation with the indigenous peoples is just as horrid.

You have these groups of people who have been living in their own communities, by their own governances, on this land that they have coexisted with for *centuries*, thriving as their own independent communities--when all of a sudden, white Europeans barge in, with guns, and diseases, and all sorts of other things, and they scatter them. Completely! They drive them away from their homes, they...they disperse their families, obscure their traditions, interrupt the chain of their memories, force them to change all of their habits...they have placed them under this cruel, oppressive tyranny. And it has *infuriated* these people, and for good reason! I do not blame them!

Listen, let us be honest, for a moment. Yes? Let us...the current system in America as it pertains to race. The current iteration it is in?

It is not going to last.

It is going to snap and crumble! It is not sustainable, by any means--there are so many tensions present already. It is so close to a tipping point, because, there is, it is--people are not blind. People are not stupid.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

The current oppressed peoples in America can see what is happening, they are experiencing it first-hand--and, you know what, more and more white people are beginning to wake up to it as well! Not a *lot*, but there are still some that are starting to, to catch on to the, uh...the *hypocrisy*, here, and--

The phone rings. Tocqueville slowly looks over to it, less confused than before. He begins to slip into the same fugue state, eyes going glassy.

PHONE CALL 2:

The phone rings again. And again. And again.
AUSTIN suddenly picks it up and answers it.

Hey.

AUSTIN

They just tear gassed us.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

We can hear panicked voices in the background,
followed by occasional pops. Austin
immediately straightens up in his seat.

What?

AUSTIN

It *fucking* hurts, I can't--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

She suddenly falls into a coughing fit. Austin
stands up and walks out from behind the desk.

Oh my god, I--are you *okay*?

AUSTIN

Yeah, I'm fine--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Did anybody else get hit?

AUSTIN

No, it--it just went out over the crowd, we were near the back, it just--oh my God--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Holy shit, I--get *outta* there, you / need to--

AUSTIN

No, we are, we're leaving, we're leaving right now--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

We hear someone talking, but it's hard to make
out.

MIKKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(to unseen person)

Wait, *where*?

AUSTIN
Okay, just--milk, make sure to do the milk thing if--is it in / your eyes?

MIKKIE (V.O.)
(snapping)
Yes, Austin, I know, we know what to do, just--hold on, we're getting to the car...

Austin clamps his mouth shut. A few more moment of muffled sound--voices, rapid footsteps, stifled coughing.

Eventually, we hear car doors pop open and then slam shut, the environmental sound immediately cutting out. Seatbelts, car engine, etcetera. Someone asks something, but we can't make it out.

Yeah, I'm good. It just--it stings, a little--

AUSTIN
Are you in the car?

MIKKIE (V.O.)
Hold on--
(to Austin)
Yeah, we are.

AUSTIN
Roll down the windows.

MIKKIE (V.O.)
Um--we will in a second, we need to get out of here first.

AUSTIN
Do you guys have a safe way to get out?

MIKKIE (V.O.)
No, yeah, we're good, things are pretty--it's not that crazy over here, we mostly got out of it.

AUSTIN

Okay.

Did they--

What...happened?

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Literally nothing. Literally *fucking* nothing, we were just standing there, we weren't doing any--we were *completely peaceful*, and then they just...they started shooting at us. Without warning. Just...

AUSTIN

(a sigh)

Oh my god...

Austin slumps back down into his chair.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

UGH! *God*, I just...

AUSTIN

(whispered)

Jesus Christ...

Are you *sure* everybody's okay?

MIKKIE (V.O.)

(controlled)

Yes. We're fine. We were more towards the back, they shot it out at the front. We just got hit with the wind and, like...picked up some of the edges of it. People at the front had to do all of the--wash eyes out with milk, and water, and stuff, / but we--

AUSTIN

Oh my god.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

It just kind of hurts, and it's--it's a little hard to breathe.

AUSTIN

You guys should roll / down the wind--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Yes, I know, you said that already.

AUSTIN

I--sorry.

A beat. We can hear Mikkie is on the verge of tears, *furious* tears.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

I mean, I--

I have never been this fucking angry in my life. Like, I'm just--

Literally, there was this guy, this, like, this fifty-year-old guy, who was just standing alone, and then out of *nowhere*, like, five cops just--they *descended* on him, and like, tackled him to the ground--

AUSTIN

Just for standing there?

MIKKIE (V.O.)

I don't--no, there was no reason behind it, they just *did* it. And all of us immediately just rushed over and started screaming at them, trying to...yelling at them to get off of him, to let him go. And then one of them shoved me back--

AUSTIN

Are you serious?

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Yes! Hard, like he was trying to...to knock me over, or something! And I just--all I could do was just scream "don't FUCKING touch me"...

But they--we managed to scare them off, though, and let the guy go. There was a lot of us, so I guess they just...

AUSTIN

That's good. That's...

Thank god.

A long beat.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Literally, all we're asking is for them to stop killing us.

Like, that's *it*. That's *all* we want.

AUSTIN

And that they take some goddamn responsibility for themselves.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Yeah, that they hold their own people accountable.

Like, how is that unreasonable? At all?

AUSTIN

It's not--

MIKKIE (V.O.)

And then their response is to just double down harder and, just...*attack* us, and brutalize us even more--

AUSTIN

They respond by committing literal fucking warcrimes on their own citizens.

A long beat.

MIKKIE (V.O.)

Like, there's no reforming this.

The *entire thing* is broken beyond repair.

Boisterous orchestral music bursts in, almost interrupting. A title card flashes. It reads:

ON INDIVIDUALISM IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES:

Tocqueville begins to gently pace, really starting to get caught up in the momentum of these ideas.

TOCQUEVILLE

Now, we reach a very interesting topic, here. This idea of, of freedom and equality. And its coexistence. You ask an American about this, and they reply, “Oh, of course they coexist. That is how it is supposed to be done! Freedom and equality, hand in hand! Brothers to the end!”

However, it’s very interesting, you see, it is very easy to look at both of these ideas, separately, and say, “Well, if you were to truly have one, you would absolutely *have* to sacrifice some of the other. If one were to have *true* freedom in a society, there is no possible way to guarantee true equality to prosper. If true freedom exists, who or what may stop someone from exerting power over others? And, in the inverse, if one were to have true *equality* in a society, there is no possible way for *freedom* to truly exist--in order to guarantee equality, there would have to be some form of control, however minimal.” You know, it is almost a sort of paradox in a way, is it not? This idea of a perfect balance between the two.

And yet, Americans have *such a heavy stress* on both of these ideals. What makes America different from other countries in the world? “Freedom and equality”, that is what they always say, yes?

However...strangely enough...I feel that America does a relatively good job with it. I think that somehow, they are able to make it work. They are able to have a coexistence. Because it very much is possible! I feel that it is incorrect to assume that you cannot have both, I think that you absolutely can--if I am to provide a bit of an *extreme* example, here, let me illustrate.

Let me say that...all citizens concur in the government, and they all have an equal right to concur in it. Are you all with me so far?

At that point, with no one differing from each other, no one will be able to exercise a sort of feared tyrannical power over others; people will be perfectly free because they are all perfectly equal, and even further, people will be perfectly equal because they are all perfectly free. I realize that we begin to circle ourselves a little bit near the end, there, but that is precisely the point--we reach a stasis.

However, *regardless* of this, I can say with confidence that while Americans think freedom is all well and good, they are absolutely *devoted* to equality.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

They *love* it.

They revere freedom, sure, but they will desparately claw for equality at any chance they can get.

Alright. *Why?* What makes equality *so much more* desirable, what is so great about it?

It comes down to this: the observable positives of freedom are gradual and far reaching. The observable positives of equality are almost immediate. And, on the other side of things, the negatives of equality take centuries to reveal themselves, while the negatives of freedom will leap at you without hesitation. Freedom may eventually lend itself to sublime pleasures for some, while equality provides a multitude of everyday enjoyments to all.

Equality is the most immediate virtue to be felt. And, once more, Americans *love it* for that. They are almost pushed to the point of delirium over it at times. Freedom is still often considered, but equality is demanded.

I want to sort of--I want to switch topics, here, for a moment, to talk about something else that I believe is important. Another sort of trend that has emerged not only within America, but also I believe modern society as a whole--but it is very observable in America, nonetheless--it is the idea of...of *individualism*. And I want to make something perfectly clear from the beginning--this is not *selfishness*. Our forefathers had selfishness, we have individualism, and I will explain the difference, because it is important.

Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self that brings one to relate everything to oneself alone; to prefer oneself to everything.

Individualism is a reflective and peacable sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate oneself from the mass of those like them and to withdraw one side with their family and their friends, so that after having thus created a little society for their own use, they willingly abandon society at large to itself.

It is quite easy to confuse the two upon first hearing their names, but that is the important difference between them. Selfishness is born from a blind instinct, individualism is born from a skewed judgement. Selfishness is inherent, individualism is learned. And within democratic societies, individualism is predisposed to fester uninhibited.

And the reason for this is the *equality of conditions* in a democracy, as I explained once before. When there is no fixed social heirarchy, when there is this inherent...*fluidity*, present, there almost becomes this...this *detached-ness* that can develop within certain individuals.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

One can so easily rise into wealth and prosperity, one can so easily fall into poverty and nothingness, there's almost this sort of belief of...“Oh, well, really, what is the use? Why would I want to...why would I want to participate in a society that, really, doesn't have much of a care for me? I am just one in a sea of many. I am disposable. Who will care if I rise? Who will care if I fall? It could all change within an instant.”

So, what one will often do, in situations like these, is one will sort of...accumulate whatever sort of stasis they need or desire, and then they will essentially turn their back on the society they have such a sizeable footing in. Because what matters if they have a voice in their society? At the end of the day, they are just one person, they cannot do much. They cannot actually *change* things. So, they just develop this...this kind of *complacency*, almost. And they create their own little self-sufficient society amongst those they care for, and close off to everything. You know? “To hell with the world, I will create my own little paradise over here.”

And that is *dangerously* easy to buy into. How do you combat that? What is the--how do you overcome that feeling, that instinct?

La doctrine de l'intérêt bien entendu. The doctrine of self-interest well understood.

Really, in a way, it is empathy. But it is an empathy that stems from a certain train of thought. It is the understanding that pursuing one's own self-interest is well and good. There is no reason to sacrifice that, or to look down upon it. However, it is the recognition that one's self-interest may very often intersect or even reflect the self-interest of others. It is this sense of shared self-interest that motivates one not only to pursue their own, but to make small sacrifices to aid others in their own pursuits.

If that is not a democratic philosophy, than I have no idea what is.

And this is a *highly lauded* philosophy in America! You see it everywhere, it is *so* present within their society. And sure, as I mentioned before, it leads to small sacrifices, but it is such a common part of their culture, there. Small sacrifices are simply that--small. And they do not do it for any sense of higher honor, any sort of exalted virtue...no. They do it because it is simply efficient. They do it because it is the most useful for all of their fellow citizens, as well as themselves. Does it allow them to pursue the path to the most lofty heights of pleasure and success? No. But it provides a satisfactory security, for oneself as well as others. It produces the greatest net contentedness.

This is how Americans combat individualism.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

Because it is *so* easy to fall into pure self-interest and to turn your back on the rest of society. It is not your responsibility to affect the lives of others, so why bother? However, self-interest well understood *recognizes* that it is not your responsibility, and it suggests that you do it regardless.

Because you are much more alike your fellow citizens than you may believe, and at the end of the day, it will benefit the most.

The phone rings. Tocqueville slips back into the trance, even smoother than before. The transition between consciousnesses is becoming more and more streamlined--*easier*, almost. He walks to the desk and picks up the phone. He taps answer.

PHONE CALL 3:

Hello?

AUSTIN

Hi.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

A long pause.

Hi.

AUSTIN

A long pause.

I mean, I don't even...

SOPHIA (V.O.)

A long pause.

No.

AUSTIN

I know.

Austin sits down and sighs heavily, rubbing his eyes.

I think I've already sort of...surpassed panic and have immediately just gone to, like...gone numb. Like, I don't...

SOPHIA (V.O.)

What do we do? Like--I mean, I *know* what we can do, but like--

AUSTIN

No, I know. Exactly.

I just--the fact that...that one woman...the fact that / there's so much--

SOPHIA (V.O.)

So many people's safety depended on her.

AUSTIN

Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I hate it. You know? I hate that...that so much was resting on the back of a singular, elderly woman. So many peoples' human rights were only a security because of...

Silence.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

Are you okay?

A beat.

AUSTIN

No.

He chuckles half-heartedly. Tosses his hands in the air.

But, I mean...y'know. So.

I mean are *you* okay? Like--

SOPHIA (V.O.)

No.

A silence.

AUSTIN

I mean, we're just--we're fucked, y'know? Like--

SOPHIA (V.O.)

Don't say that--

AUSTIN

But we are, though. Like, they're just gonna--they're gonna shove some fascist in, in her place, and then it's just gonna be open season on everybody. Literally unless you're a straight, cis, white, wealthy male, you'll--it's gonna be--we're gonna become a fuckin' George Orwell novel.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

Austin you can't say that.

AUSTIN

But that's what's gonna *happen*, though.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

No, we don't know that.

AUSTIN

Okay, but, like...*come on*. Y'know? Like--in what world are they--McConnel is already talking about how they're gonna have a nomination within the week, because he's a fucking hypocrite / and a--

SOPHIA (V.O.)

We can't just give up, though.

We can't.

AUSTIN

I'm not, I'm just--I'm being *realistic*, here.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

We can't just sit back and...and lie in remiss, because we're "doomed", or whatever, we need to keep fighting against it--

AUSTIN

Yeah, but what is fighting against it gonna do in this situation? Like what is signing a petition gonna do, here? Like--and I'm not--I've already signed it, I'm not just like--

SOPHIA (V.O.)

Okay.

AUSTIN

But like, what good is that gonna do when they're just gonna throw it out? Like--we have an entire administration right now that is just flat out ignoring the people it's intended to serve. There is no sense of...of, of responsibility, of service, of--they are *not listening to us*. They have not listened to us *then*, they are not going to listen to us *now*, they aren't gonna listen to us in the *future*. They're not gonna see this little digital list of signatures and say "Oh, maybe we should wait on a nomination like we were pushing so hard to do four years ago when a black democrat was in office trying to do the same exact thing", they're just gonna 'x' out of it and then swear in the next fucking Hermann Goring.

Like...unless we quite literally set fire to the supreme court, which isn't gonna happen, there's nothing that we can actually do, here.

We're completely powerless.

A pause.

SOPHIA (V.O.)

I just...I feel like I can do *more*. Y'know?

A beat.

AUSTIN

What do you mean?

SOPHIA (V.O.)

Like--I'm not--I'm not doing enough, I feel like.

AUSTIN

Sophia, what can you realistically do more of in this situation?

SOPHIA (V.O.)

I don't know, I just--

I feel like I should be doing more.

AUSTIN

You're already doing a lot.

And again, like...there's only so much we can actually *do*, here.

Boisterous orchestral music bursts in. It's a little louder than before, and there's something slightly off about it. A title card flashes, reading:

WHAT KIND OF DESPOTISM DEMOCRATIC NATIONS HAVE TO FEAR:

TOCQUEVILLE

Now. There is a question that I believe many of you have been asking yourselves as we have been continuing along, here. Especially as we have started to talk about...about slightly darker things. And I have asked myself this question before, too, and have had a few years to really ruminate on it.

Is tyranny possible in democracy? Can it sprout? Can it live? Can it flourish?

The answer is obviously yes; any society can fall into tyranny, in a myriad of ways. There is always a chance for things to fall into a...a *despotism*, of sorts.

However, with democracy specifically, it gets a bit complicated.

A despotism in America, or rather, in *any* democracy, will not be a Caesar. It will not be a Nero. These tyrannies wielded great power over many, with the sole power resting upon the shoulders of a single man. However, as a whole, it was very...*vague*, in its power. Yes, this emperor could wield his penultimate power over his citizenry, but it was very rarely surveying the intricacies of each individual; it was violent, but in a sense, restricted.

It seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without torturing them.

Allow me to explain.

Democracy, not just as a society, but as a *governmental system--especially* in America--is much more than just one man. It is an entire system that branches into multiple units. It has the power to dive much, *much* deeper into a citizen's everyday life. Combine this with the fact that as equality grows in a society, mores becomes milder, more humane. Tempered. Simple.

A democratic despotism will not manifest itself as a tyrant; it will materialize as a board of schoolmasters.

I recognize that this might sound strange and possibly foreign, but that is because it very much *is*--we have never encountered something like this before. This is entirely new to us. The type of despotism that we could witness in a democratic society would be unlike anything else we have ever encountered. It is not even despotism, it--I cannot find the correct word for it. I am unsure the correct word even *exists* at the moment. However, I must try to define it, since I cannot name it.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

In a society truly equal, a true sea of people purely like each other, individualism will run *rampant*. People will turn in on themselves and their own interests and pursuits, leaving the rest of society to their own whims. Individuals exist beside each other, not with each other. They are together as equal, but alone and powerless through self-isolation.

Presiding above this sea of people is the overseeing, almost paternal government. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It keeps its citizenry content, and nothing more. It advocates for its citizens' individual happinesses, but it is the sole provider of that happiness. It conducts, secures, directs, regulates everything--can it not take away entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?

And so begins the slow erasure of free will, little by little. It confines choice to smaller things--you may choose which product to purchase, which business to engage with, and so on and so forth, but we are the ones who have allowed you to. We are the ones who regulate it, we are the ones who have established these choices *for* you. Yes, you may vote for a representative that you see fit--take your choice of the ones that we have provided. And the people will allow this--they will be so focused on their own little worlds that they have built for themselves, so involved in their own focus of pleasure, that it will go by virtually unnoticed.

Before long, the arm of this sovereign body extends over society as a whole; once again, with the illusion of free choice and free will, but not true. And one by one, it will start to implement a thin yet ever-reaching network of rules--small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules, that an individual will not be able to overcome amongst a sea of others. It does not tyrannize a people; it hinders them, compromises them, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces them to being nothing more than a herd of timid animals of which the government is the shepherd.

And this will happen because we, as human beings, while having an innate desire to be free, also carry an inherent wish to be led. And we strive to satisfy both at the same time. And so we create a system where we are ruled by an all-powerful, fully centralized sovereign, but it is one that we choose as a citizenry. And we comfort ourselves, because we still hold the power. Of course we do.

A long pause.

Right?

It is in this slow shift to voluntary obedience and servitude where the danger truly lies. Because obedience will be easier. Fighting back is not worth it. It is futile, and it is exhausting.

TOCQUEVILLE (CONT'D)

We will shift to fully, *willfully* allowing ourselves to be overtaken, regardless of how bad it may get. Because what else are we to do? We hold no real power, this far down the line. And what does it matter, if one can retreat to their own little corner, with their own little circle of people, to pursue one's own little interests uninhibited? What matters of the world around us?

It is also difficult to conceive how men who have entirely renounced the habit of directing themselves could succeed at choosing well those who will lead them; and one will not make anyone believe that a liberal, energetic, and wise government can ever issue from the suffrage of a people of servants.

This is how a democracy will crumble. It will be slow, and gradual, but it will be almost irreversible. With the correct people elected into power within this system, a country could be potentially brought to its knees. Be it through the realization and revolt of its citizens, or through the complete and utter submission of its citizens to a single master.

I feel that, left unchecked, this future could very much materialize. If we do not keep watch, if we do not remain vigilant and aware, we could potentially--

There is a sudden commotion offscreen--doors slamming open, and heavy footsteps. Tocqueville's focus immediately snaps to it.

What is--

Oh. Hello, gentlemen. Is there, um...is there something that we can assist you with?

More commotion. Tocqueville reacts.

Wait, wait a moment, I--this is only a banquet, officers, this is--you are barging in on--you are making assumptions, here! You need to--

Rapid footsteps begin to approach. Tocqueville reflexively begins to back up, recoiling.

Now, just a moment, don't--stop! There isn't any reason to--

Sudden, blaring static. We suddenly cut into:

PHONE CALL 5:

A video montage. We hear and see chaos. News clips and videos of June/July BLM protests leading to police brutality. Unidentified federal agents in Portland. Secret Service teargassing protestors in DC to clear a path for Trump's photo op. Audio clips of Trump's calls for law and order. The insurrection on the Capitol.

Violence.

Cruelty.

Despotism.

Fascism.

We see Austin curled up in a ball on the ground, crumpled jacket tossed to the side, desperately trying to block out the harsh collage of noise. The collage slowly begins to fade, leaving the singular sound of the phone ringing.

And ringing.

And ringing.

And ringing.

Austin, without looking, quickly grabs the phone from the desk and taps answer before placing it away from him on the floor, receding back into himself.

His own voice answers through the speaker.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Hey.

Um...

I just, uh, I--I just wanted to call...um, and say, um...

AUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm scared.

I...I am really...*really* scared.

Um...

And, I'm unsure...I mean, for a lot of reasons, obviously, but...just, like...

This whole thing. This whole...this whole thing is going to be...*so different*, depending on...what happens in November?

Like, this--the *whole feeling* of this piece is going to be drastically different depending on what happens with the election.

Um...

And like, even--

Even regardless of that, like, I'm just...terrified of what's going to happen in November.

Um...

Like, I'll--I'll lay awake, at night, sometimes, just thinking about...what could happen. Like, regardless. Regardless of who wins, like, there is going to be...*chaos*.

I mean--there--I, I, I just know it, I know there's going to be chaos, and...like...I keep telling myself that like, if, if I just--I'm, I'm just gonna stay in my apartment, and like things are eventually gonna blow over, but like, I...

I'm living in a red state! Y'know? And, like, yeah, San Marcos is, like...for the most part blue, but like...I mean the other day, there was--there was a Trump parade that came down the street. Y'know? Like, it's--

I am so scared.

I'm *so* scared.

As...as a queer, autistic person, I am so scared of what is going to happen, I...

I am in real danger.

Austin very slowly begins to unfurl. He stares at the ground, hunched over, listening.

AUSTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And, my *friends* are in real danger.

The *entire world* is in real danger, y'know? Um...

And I just--

Austin slowly begins to sit up, resting on his knees. He continues to stare down at the ground.

I don't know what I'm gonna do.

And...I know that...y'know, *you* are gonna be...on the other side of things, hopefully. Whatever that may *be*. But, I just...

I need some...I dunno if it's *reassurance*, or, just...*something*, y'know? I--

What happens?

Tell me what happens.

Because I really need to know.

And I need to prepare myself...for...whatever happens.

Because...

I'm not ready right now.

At all.

A long, long pause. Dead air crackles through the speaker. Finally, Austin takes a deep breath.

AUSTIN

Okay.

Yeah. Yeah, I can, um...

I can tell you what happens. Yeah.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

The, um--the first thing you need to know is that the day before the election, you are going to experience the worst anxiety that you have ever felt in your entire life. You will be...absolutely...*crippled*. You will not be able to get out of bed...you will not be able to, to *eat*...you will not be able to do *anything*.

And, then, as is...as is often the case, with you, when faced with extreme stress or possible trauma, your body and your brain will simply...shut it all down. You will numb it all into nothing. You will replace the terror, and rage, and hurt, and restlessness, and grief, and you will replace it all with *empty*.

Because it is easier to survive with empty.

You will watch the live coverage with your friends, in 421. It will be much closer than it should be, and you will know that that should terrify you, but the only thing you'll be able to find inside you is empty.

You'll play some games together, once you realize results *truly will not be coming in*, that night, just to distract yourselves from it all, if anything.

Before you leave to go to bed, you'll talk to Michael.

She'll be terrified. Right where you were the morning before.

And through talking her through it, you'll realize that there is nothing currently on fire right here, right now. And you'll tell her to take solace in that. And you'll repeat that to yourself that night as you go to sleep.

Days will pass without an answer. And you'll respond with empty.

The Saturday that the race is finally called, you'll be standing in line at Jo's Cafe. It will come down to Pennsylvania, just as they've been saying, and it'll finally be claimed. There will be an immediate shallow wave of release that washes over you, but nothing immediately more.

And then that night, when you finally lay down to go to sleep, the empty will suddenly and finally explode into full. And the full will suddenly and finally explode into overflowing.

And you will weep.

And more and more days will pass immediately afterwards where nothing is on fire. And you'll start to believe that maybe it'll stay that way.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

And then on the morning of January 6th, 2021, there will be an attempted coup at the Capitol in Washington D.C. A mob of people will forcefully break their way into the building and swarm it like rats, looking for any Senators or Congresspeople they can find. You'll see handcuffs. You'll see weapons. You'll see carnage.

And at first you're surprised. Horrified, even. Scared.

But then you're not. You're just empty again, as you always are, because you realize, *of course* this is happening. This was always *going* to happen, it's *stupid* to be surprised at this, you know? It's--this is the final conclusion of the past four years. How did we not see this coming? This is what happens when you just let fascism run completely unchecked in the mainstream, when you treat it like a valid ideology. Of course there'll be an armed coup on the Capitol, there's no--

And then of course, no one is held accountable. Because we as a country are completely incapable of that. As we always will be.

And then...time will start to pass...weeks...*months*...and you'll start to see things returning to...*normal*.

And that'll--that'll confuse you. Because--because you thought that we, we as a country had suddenly learned that...that normal wasn't okay. Normal was broken. Normal was unhealthy. Normal was hurting people, *killing* people, for years, and decades, and centuries. You thought that we had all finally realized that, we had, we had all had a spotlight shown on the ugly, festering underbelly of this country, of this system, and had truly had a reckoning with it for the first time in recent years. You thought people actually *got* that.

But you watch while people suddenly drop their microscopes and go back to blissful ignorance. You see people breathe a sigh of relief, and then just leave. Despite the fact that there was--there was *so much more left to do*, people just turn a blind, blissful eye once more and go on about their lives. And you see people shooting down rightful critiques of things, and silencing those that are still suffering under this oppressive system that *still hasn't been fixed*, that is already falling back into the shadows, and people are starting to just ignore it again. And you *know* that they know about it, that's the worst part, you *know* that they aren't just blissfully unaware, because everybody was there when it was shoved into the limelight so successfully. It was put into a place where people *couldn't* ignore it anymore, and people saw it for what it was whether they wanted to or *not*, and yet they still go back to *normal*.

As if nothing had happened.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

And it makes you just want to stand up and, and, and break things, and shove people's faces into it, and just, and--and scream, "What the fuck is *happening*? Are you all idiots? How are you not..."

How?

Because as the months go by, you look around, and you see that what's actually happening in the White House, and the Senate, and in Congress *now* isn't all that different than what was happening before. We're still reopening for-profit migrant camps and putting children in them, the very same ones that Trump helped open--or no, sorry, *overflow facilities*. My apologies for getting the words wrong. Uh, we're still actively bombing civilians in middle eastern countries, just, you know, keeping our war crime streak going nice and strong. What else? Let's see. We're still denying visas to those impacted by Trump's muslim travel ban. We still have Louis DeJoy in office, the guy who tried to literally kill the United States Postal Service so Trump could win a second term. We still have Trump's tax breaks for billionaires in place. We're continuing construction on the border wall, for christ's sake.

And this isn't even getting into all of the things that Biden and other democrats promised to do if elected that they've just completely spat on. For instance, the minimum wage hike, that Biden has the full capability to implement but refuses to because the parliamentarian doesn't agree with it. We tried adding in an ammendment in the covid relief bill, but we had *eight* democrats vote against it. Love that video, by the way, of Kyrsten Sinema voting no on the bill. Oh, our first openly bisexual Senator, doing a cute little thumbs down to deny the Americans she represents a livable wage. Representation is *so* important.

Anways, what else...oh, Biden's refused to implement a nationwide mask mandate. No executive orders on police de-militarization. He hasn't canceled *any* student debt. No gun reform bill like he promised when he was campaigning. Oh, oh my god, I *love* how \$2000 went down to \$1400 in an attempt to appeal to republican congress members only to have not a single one vote for it. I mean...the list goes on. And I know this isn't just Biden's fault, I know that, it's also the Democrats' fault, and the Republicans' fault, and basically everybody who's in power. We've successfully locked ourselves in a stalemate, even *with* a majority in place, so that nothing actually changes.

And I mean, the worst part of it is, you see the same people who were condemning the Trump administration for these things actively *defending* the Biden administration for these things. The amount of tweets I've seen attempting to defend the "overflow facilities" is ridiculous!

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

These were the same people who were calling Trump a nazi just a few months before, and now they're actively defending our current government just because they're blue now, and they aren't *vocally* racist, or sexist, or homophobic, or ablesit. Because if they're open about it, that's what makes them bad, right? It's harder to actually *ignore* their actions that way.

And this isn't even about my stupid fuckin' commie politics, alright? I can sing all day about universal healthcare and universal income and you can debate me on it all you want, that's not what this is about. The thing that I've realized is that the reason we're here--the reason that we're still stuck here is because this is the way we've always been built to function. The reason our so-called "representatives" can simply choose not to represent us, and our wants, and our needs, is because that's the way our system has been designed from the beginning.

And it hasn't changed! It truly hasn't changed. People always say "Oh, just use the power of your vote!" 5.2 million people in America are disenfranchised and still do not possess the right to vote due to felony charges *alone*. This isn't even taking into account the people who can't vote due to other voter restriction laws. And you know who these laws usually target and affect? Low-income, BIPOC populations. Wanna know something else? You cannot vote if you do not have a proper street address. Unhoused people can't vote. Indigenous people, if they live on a reservation? They don't have street addresses. So, oh, it's not because you're indigenous, it's because you don't have a street address. Sorry, can't vote. And this isn't even going into the topic of what living on a modern day reservation is like, that's a whole other conversation altogether, but the hoops that lawmakers continue to jump through in order to disenfranchise vulnerable communities *to this day* is absolutely astounding.

And--oh my god, the electoral college. Do not even get me *started* on the electoral college. We all know that it's fucked up, we all know that it needs to go, that it has its discrepancies and logical fallacies, but you wanna know why it exists in the first place? Literally, this is straight out of my college textbook, Pearson Higher Education, for United States Government; the reason why the electoral college was created was because the wealthy founders did not trust the common people to actually vote. They wanted the power to vote to remain in the hands of the wealthy and powerful. They did not trust the common people to vote for themselves.

Just think about that for a second. Does that sound like a democracy to you?

And see, that's the one thing that kind of pisses me off about this book. Tocqueville says some great stuff about what he saw in America, and what a democracy truly was, and how it functioned, but he's writing all of this stuff under such a restrictive lens.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Because while he was fairly liberal for his time, he was still a cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, wealthy, white French guy. While a lot better than other people at the time, he was still racist, misogynistic--oh my god, the chapters he has on American women's place in society in this thing? Christ. It is so--but this is all to say, yes he saw democracy in America, but he saw the democracy built for wealthy white men.

If you take into account the entire population of America at the time, or even at the time of its founding, you see that this system, this society was never built with the majority in mind! It's a false sense of equality, it's a restrictive system that only a select few can participate in!

You look at the true definition of democracy, and then you look at what we've been doing since the beginning--we've never had a democracy at all!

Austin takes a breath to continue, but goes still, processing what he's just said. A long pause as he buffers. Finally, in a whisper:

...Fuck.

It--I, um...

A silent title fades up over Austin, reading:

GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT:

Austin stands, silent. Unmoving. He stays there for a very long time.

He slowly looks over at the book.

Stares.

He glances back at the crumpled up jacket on the floor.

Stares.

He picks up the book and slowly flips through it, eventually finding a passage. He reads aloud.

AUSTIN

I should wish, before leaving forever the course I have just traveled, to be able to embrace with one last regard all the diverse features that mark the face of the new world, and finally judge the general influence that equality will exert on the lot of men; but the difficulty of such an undertaking arrests me; confronted with so great an object I feel my sight becoming blurred and my reason wavering.

The new society that I sought to depict and that I wish to judge is only being born. Time has not yet fixed its form; the great revolution that created it still endures, and in what is happening in our day it is almost impossible to discern what will pass away with the revolution itself and what will remain after it.

The world that is arising is still half entangled in the debris of the world that is falling, and in the midst of the immense confusion that human affairs presents, no one can say what will remain standing of aged institutions and old mores and what of them in the end will disappear.

With the past no longer shedding light on the future, the mind advances in darkness.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this picture so vast, so new, so confused, I already glimpse some principal features being sketched and I point them out:

I see that goods and evils are split equally enough in the world. Great wealth is disappearing; the number of small fortunes is increasing; desires and enjoyments are multiplying; there is no longer extraordinary prosperity or irremediable misery. Each individual is isolated and weak; society is agile, far-seeing, and strong.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

All the bonds of race, of class, of native land slacken; the great bond of humanity draws tighter.

I let my regard wander over this innumerable crowd composed of similar beings, in which nothing is elevated and nothing lowered. The spectacle of this universal uniformity saddens and chills me, and I am tempted to regret the society that is no longer.

When the world was filled with very great and very small men, very rich and very poor, very learned and very ignorant, I turned my regard away from the second and attached it only to the first, and this delighted my view; but I understand that this pleasure was born of my weakness: it is because I cannot see all that surrounds me at the same time that I am permitted to choose in this way and to set apart among so many objects those it pleases me to contemplate. It is not the same with the all-powerful and eternal Being whose eye necessarily envelops the sum of things and who sees distinctly, though at once, the whole human race and each man.

It is natural to believe that what most satisfies the regard of this creator and preserver of men is not the singular prosperity of some, but the greatest well-being of all: what seems to me decadence is therefore progress in his eyes; what wounds me is agreeable to him.

Equality is perhaps less elevated; but it is more just, and its justice makes for its greatness and beauty.

I strive to enter into this point of view, and it is from there that I seek to consider and judge human things.

No one on earth can yet assert in an absolute and general manner that the new state of societies is superior to the former state; but it is already easy to see that it is different.

One must therefore take care in judging the societies being born by ideas one has drawn from those that are no longer. That would be unjust, for these societies, differing enormously between themselves, are not comparable.

It would scarcely be more reasonable to demand of men of our time the particular virtues that flowed from the social state of their ancestors, since that social state itself has fallen and has confusedly carried away in its fall all the goods and evils brought with it.

But these things are still badly understood in our day.

It is no longer a question of retaining the particular advantages that inequality of conditions procures for men, but of securing the new goods that equality can offer them.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

We ought not to strain to make ourselves like our fathers, but strive to attain the kind of greatness and happiness that is proper to us.

As for myself, having come to the final stage of my course, to discover from afar, but at once, all the diverse objects that I had contemplated separately in advancing, I feel full of fears and full of hopes. I see great perils that it is possible to ward off; great evils that one can avoid or restrain, and I become more and more firm in the belief that to be honest and prosperous, it is still enough for democratic nations to wish it.

Providence has not created the human race either entirely independent or perfectly slave. It traces, it is true, a fatal circle around each man that he cannot leave; but within its vast limits man is powerful and free.

Nations of our day cannot have it that conditions within them are not equal; but it depends on them whether equality leads them to servitude or freedom, to enlightenment or barbarism, to misery or prosperity.

Austin stares at the book in silence. Closes it.

He looks up and out.

Okay.

I think I get it.

I mean, a lot of that sounds really nice. Y'know?

Democracy...like, a truly--not just a governmental system, but a truly democratic society...it's not perfect. It's never *gonna* be perfect. It's always gonna have flaws, and fallacies, and loopholes, and...and whatever...

But it's the *best option we've got*.

It's the most just. It's what benefits the most people. It's what *looks out* for the most people.

I think we've been getting closer and closer to it, actually.

I just think, that...y'know, the closer we've been getting, and the more we--we've been realizing more and more how far away from it we were in the first place.

And that's why we've been so angry. Because we've felt lied to.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

We *have* been lied to.

But I think we...we all know, deep down, that democracy is what we need. That it's our best bet. And that's why we've been fighting so goddamn hard to get it.

And it hurts, because--because it seems like we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Y'know? Like, before, a lot of us were still in the dark, but over decades and decades and decades, *centuries* of stumbling through in the darkness, we've finally gotten that speck of light. And it's been getting closer, and closer, and closer, and we've been clawing for it. And now that it's so close, it's just like...

Why can't we just fucking have it?

Like, we're almost there.

And then another roadblock gets shoved in our way. And we have to yell at the people who put the roadblock there to remove it. And if they refuse to, we have to take our sledgehammers to it. And sometimes, they'll try and build additional sections to the tunnel, making it longer, which leaves even more of a road to trudge down.

And it's fucking *exhausting*.

It's so exhausting, and it gets to you. It starts to feel like you'll never get there, just because right after you manage to clamber over the obstacle right in front of you, there'll be ten more waiting for you just ahead. And sometimes there *are*.

And sometimes it just seems like they might as well just seal up the tunnel completely. Not like it would make a difference anyway, right? You were never actually gonna get there in the first place.

But the light is *right there*.

You're staring it *right in the face*.

So we need to fight for it. Because, oh my god, we *so desperately* need it. We need it to survive. And it will be hard, and it will be tiring, and it will be infuriating.

But you won't be the only one on this journey.

When your arms get tired, when your knees buckle, when you can no longer crawl through the dirt of this trench that we're wading in, someone will be there to carry you.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

So many people will be. And at some point, you'll come across someone else who's succumbed to it all, and you'll be the one to pick *them* up. You'll be the one to get them to the finish line.

As humans, we have empathy hard-wired into our genes. Into our neurochemistry. The entire reason societies were created, thousands and thousands of years ago, was to help and care for each other. To create a support net. Not only for others, but also for yourself.

We, as humans, function the best when we have something to fall back on, and when we give that something to someone else. It's our most natural state of being.

In natural disasters, we don't turn to chaos and violence and selfishness and destruction.

No.

We turn to love. We turn to compassion. We turn to assistance. We turn to however we can help our fellow human being.

That is the essence...at least in *my* opinion...of democratic thinking.

I think democracy isn't just about making your own voice heard. It's about making sure everybody else's are. And making sure that they are able to get the same support and care that *you* deserve.

And while American Democracy itself isn't quite within that definition...at least, not *yet*...I think we're starting to take the right steps towards it. Even if we *are* sort of...having to force the arms of those in power, occasionally.

So...yeah. I know how we got here. We've always *been* here.

But I also know where we deserve to be.

Austin sits for a long time, contemplating. He reaches for his phone. Dials. Holds it up to his ear.

Waits.

Hi, Mom.

Yeah, I'm, um...I'm doing alright.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

No, yeah, I just, uh...I've been thinking a lot about what you and dad said about my thesis, and um...I think...

I think I'm actually gonna do it.

No, yeah, I think I *have* to do it.

Like, not even in an obligatory way, or anything, like...I think I have to do it for *me*. Y'know?

Yeah, there's just...there's so many thoughts racing through my brain right now, twenty four seven, and...I think I need to let them out somehow.

Yeah. I think it *will* help.

Austin stares outward, phone still up to his ear.
Not necessarily relieved, but contented.

Fade to black.

END OF SHOW