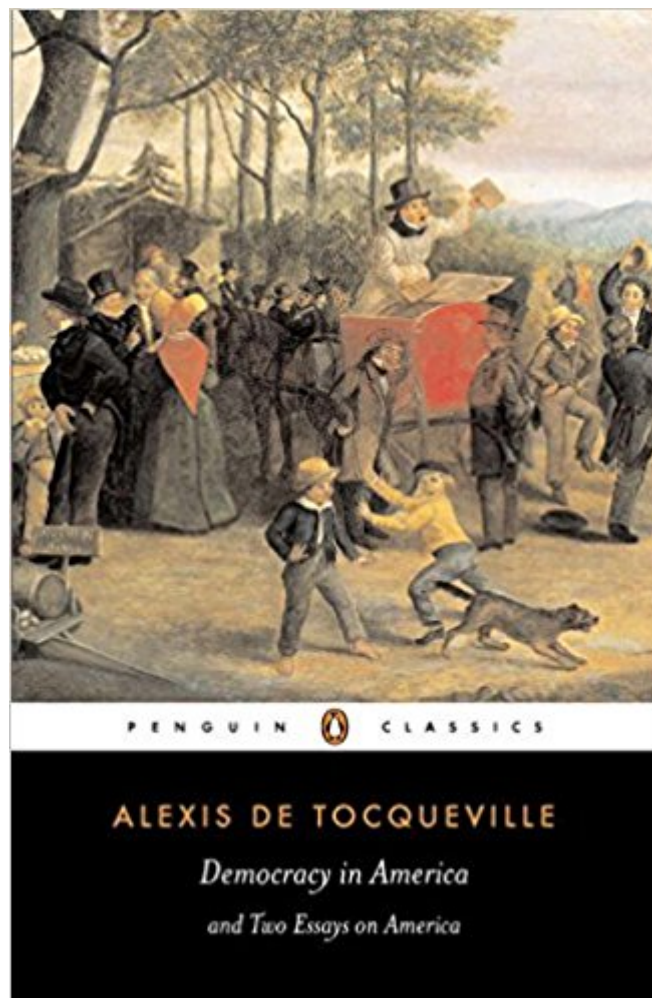




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Democracy In America And Two Essays On America (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A contemporary study of the early American nation and its evolving democracy, from a French aristocrat and sociologist. In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville, a young French aristocrat and ambitious civil servant, set out from post-revolutionary France on a journey across America that would take him 9 months and cover 7,000 miles. The result was *Democracy in America*, a subtle and prescient analysis of the life and institutions of 19th-century America. Tocqueville looked to the flourishing democratic system in America as a possible model for post-revolutionary France, believing that the egalitarian ideals it enshrined reflected the spirit of the age and even divine will. His study of the strengths and weaknesses of an evolving democratic society has been quoted by every American president since Eisenhower, and remains a key point of reference for any discussion of the American nation or the democratic system. This new edition is the only one that contains all Tocqueville's writings on America, including the rarely-translated *Two Weeks in the Wilderness*, an account of Tocqueville's travels in Michigan among the Iroquois, and *Excursion to Lake Oneida*. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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• “No better study of a nation’s institutions and culture than Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* has ever been written by a foreign observer.” • “The New York Times” • “The Bradley edition of Tocqueville’s classic is the best now available in English.” • “Charles A. Beard” • “Professor Bradley’s edition should remain the standard one for our time.” • “F. O. Matthiessen” With an Introduction by Alan Ryan

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59), a French sociologist and historian, was active in the law and served for a time as foreign minister. He also wrote *L’Ancien Régime*. Gerald Bevan is the translator. Issac Kramnick is Professor of Government at Cornell and edited *The Federalist Papers* for Penguin.

Although more than a century long, Tocqueville’s work keep echoing, inspiring our time. It is grateful to our founding father had invented a new form of government truly for people, by people and continue to pursuit a greater happiness in the future. A great work of the Tocqueville was also to write a detail manual of Democracy as reference regardless race, culture or geography as long as the government assures an absolute freedom to the people. America does not own Democracy. America proves there is a Democracy. Ironically, there are plenty of nations in the world today still insist that Democracy is not for them. Freedom of speech, religion and election are fancy terms instead of persecution, prisoment is common solution to whom pursuit those freedom. Nonetheless, there are many nations in the world inherits Tocqueville’s work to become a world power. It was a great work!

Alexis De Tocqueville was a French statesman and political theorist who came to America to examine the American prison system in the year 1835. However, while here and touring the country he began something far more interesting, a work known as *Democracy in America*. In the book*, Tocqueville captures the American character of the Jacksonian Era. Even though it is about our past one can still see elements of our modern character in the work. Even 175 years after it was first published there is a great deal about it that still resonates to this day. Here are some of my favorite Tocqueville quotes: On America’s youth as a nation, compared to Europe’s, “America is the only country in which we have been able to watch the natural and peaceful development of a society and

define the influence exerted by the origins upon the future of states. At the time when the European nations landed on the shores of the New World, the feature of their national characters were clearly set; each of them had a distinct appearance; and since they had already produced that level of civilization which leads men to a study of themselves, they have conveyed to us a faithful portrait of their opinions, customs, and laws. Fifteenth-century man is almost as well known to us as we are to ourselves. Thus American highlights what the ignorance or the barbarity of early times has concealed from our gaze." p.38

Comparing the change from established monarchies into democratic states, to established republics that fall under dictatorship. "When a monarchy gradually develops into a republic, the executive power retains the titles, honors, respect, and even money long after the reality of power has disappeared. The English, having beheaded one of their kings and dismissed another, still dropped to their knees before the successors of those princes. On the other hand, when republics fall beneath the yoke of one man, his power continues to appear simple, plain, and modest as if he had not become superior to everyone. When emperors exercised despotic control over the lives and fortunes of their fellow citizens, they were still addressed as Caesar and they were in the habit of dining without formality with their friends." p.143-4

On how things have changed with wealth and politics, nowadays we complain about the influence of money, but then it seems it appeared to be the opposite. "Nowadays, one can say that the wealthy classes of United States society stand entirely outside politics and that wealth, far from being an advantage, has become a real source of unpopularity and the obstacle to the achievement of power. The wealthy thus prefer to abandon the contest rather than tolerate the often unequal struggle against to poorest of their fellow citizens. Since they are unable to occupy a position in the public life similar to the one they enjoy in the private life, they renounce the former to concentrate upon the latter. They represent a private society at the heart of the state with its own tastes and pleasures." p.208

On the Europeans treatment of the Native Americans and the negative consequences for the latter, "The European introduced firearms, iron, and whiskey to the indigenous tribes of North America; they taught them to substitute our cloth for the barbaric clothes with which the simple Indians had been previously satisfied. Although acquiring new tastes, the Indians did not learn the skills necessary to satisfy them and they had to have recourse to the industry of the whites. In return for these goods, which they could not make for themselves, these wild tribes had nothing to offer but the rich furs still found in their forests. From that moment hunting not only their own needs but also the frivolous enthusiasms of Europeans." p.377

On Jackson and the American Republic, "Some Europeans have formed an opinion of General Jackson's possible influence over his country's affairs which appears most exaggerated to those who have seen events close hand. I have heard that General Jackson

has won battles, that he was a man of energy, prone to use of force by character and habit, covetous of power, and tyrannical by inclination. All that may be true but the inferences to be drawn from these truths are very wide of the mark. General Jackson is supposed to working for the institution of a military regime and the extension of central power, which would be a treat to regional liberties. In America, the time for such undertakings and the age of such men have not yet come: if General Jackson had wished for such domination, he would undoubtedly have forfeited his political position and jeopardized his life. So, he has not been rash enough to attempt it. Far from wishing to extend federal power, the present President belongs to the opposite party which aims to restrict this power to the clearest and most precise letter of the Constitution and which will never allow any interpretation to be favorable to the Union Government. Far from appearing as the champion of centralization, General Jackson the spokesman of regional jealousies; people's passion for decentralization (if I may put it so) carried to him the sovereign power. By constantly flattering these passions, he maintains his position and his popularity. General Jackson is the slave of the majority: he follows its every wish, desire, and half revealed instincts, or rather he guesses what it wants and takes the lead himself." p.461-2

On American behavior, "In the United States, there is very little difference of rank in civil society and none at all in political life. Thus, an American does not believe that he is obliged to show any particular considerations, nor does he dream of demanding any of himself. Since he fails to see that it is to his advantage eagerly to seek out the company of some of his fellow citizens, he has difficulty in imagining that his own company is unwelcome. Since he despises no one for their social status, he cannot imagine that anyone will despise him for the same reason and until he becomes aware of an insult, he does not believe that an insult was intended." p.658

Continuing on that subject, "I have noticed many times that it is not an easy matter in the United States to convey to someone that his presence is unwelcome. To make that point, roundabout methods are not always enough. If I contradict an American at every turn, in order to show him that his conversation bores me, at every moment I see him making renewed efforts to convince me. If I remain obstinately silent, he imagines that I am reflecting deeply on the truths he is putting to me. When, at last, I escape his onslaught, he supposes that urgent business calls me elsewhere. This man will never grasp that he exasperates me unless I tell him so and I shall be unable to get rid of him except by becoming his mortal enemy." p.658-9

On Americans in foreign places, "Almost every American wishes to claim some connection by birth to the first founders of the colonies and America is awash, as far as I can see, with offshoots of great English families. When a wealthy American lands in Europe, his first concern is to surround himself with the luxuries of wealth; he has such great fear of being taken for the unsophisticated citizen of a democracy that he

seeks a hundred roundabout ways each day to advertise a fresh image of his opulence. He usually lodges in the most fashionable part of the town and has an endless stream of servants around him." p.660

On Americans with foreigners,"In their relations with foreigners, Americans seem irritated by the slightest criticism and appear greedy for praise. The flimsiest compliment pleases them and the most fulsome rarely manages to satisfy them; they plague you constantly to make praise themselves. Doubting their own worth, they could be said to need a constant illustration of it before their eyes. Their vanity is not only greedy, it is also restless and jealous. I grants nothing while making endless demands. It begs on moment and quarrels the next.If I say to an American that the country he lives in is beautiful, he answers: `True enough. There is not its like in the world!' I admire the freedom enjoyed by its citizens and he answers: `Freedom is indeed a priceless gift, but very few nations are worthy of enjoying it.' If I note the moral purity which prevails in the United States, he says: `I realize that a foreigner, struck by the corruption in all the other nations, will be surprised by the sight.' Finally, I leave him to his contemplation; but he comes back at me and refuses to leave me until he has prevailed upon me to repeat what I just said. A more intrusive and garrulous patriotism would be hard to imagine. It wearies even those who respect it." p.710

Tocqueville opens up an interesting perception to our country's past through eyes of a foreigner who was there. It is interesting both where he is right and wrong. There are times where he is extremely insightful about America and her future, such as predicting that the United States will continue to grow and expand to the other side of the continent. Other times he is very wrong, such as saying that the American government will continue to decentralize. I highly recommend this work for the incredible insights it offers into the era.*The work was actually published in two parts, one in 1835 and the other in 1840.

Alexis De Tocqueville was a brilliant young French aristocrat when he arrived on the Yankee shore in 1831. De Tocqueville came to America to research penal conditions in a report to be submitted to the French Government. De Tocqueville did much more than that! In his long, brilliant and sage book he looks at America in 1831. He points out American love for the practical, the religious community minded Americans who also enjoy making money in the volatile and exciting new nation. It would take several textbooks to explain and expound all DeDeTocqueville discovered on his eye opening trip to the USA.C-Span a few years ago devoted several programs to following his footsteps across our broad land. The book looks out how America works from township meetings, to the state and federal levels. His analysis of the US Constitution is erudite. His view of American morals and religion is worth reading. Any politician and informed citizen should read this classic.The Penguin edition is beautifully designed. Two chapters at the end of the book deal with De Tocqueville's visit to

the wilderness and his visit to Indians. De Tocqueville's analysis of slavery and how we treat our native Americans is incisive and on target! Democracy in America is one of the seminal books of the American experience.

Fantastic book. If you want an inside view of early American culture and politics, this is a great book. Tocqueville has the unbiased view of an outsider to give us a view of our country and her development. The fact that he visited as America was settling into her freedom and before the civil war, gives great perspective on the motivations of Americans. Some of his predictions are near prophetic but I think it was his objectivity that enabled that.

I found it somewhat difficult to read, and Tocqueville's predictions about America's future were incorrect and somewhat conflicting (understandable since it was written almost 200 years ago). Nevertheless, it is an important document in the history of America and was worth reading.

Too many folks have forgotten the history of the founding of their own country and what made it great. Alexis de Tocqueville explored that and offers wonderful insights to that history.

Once I required all my students to read this book. When the old Soviet Union still existed, this book and one other quintessential American book, THE FEDERALIST PAPERS, were "required reading" in the most prestigious classes at the university in Moscow. There are very good reasons why. The lessons in these two books are as fresh today as the day they were written. They can help explain "American exceptionalism."

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