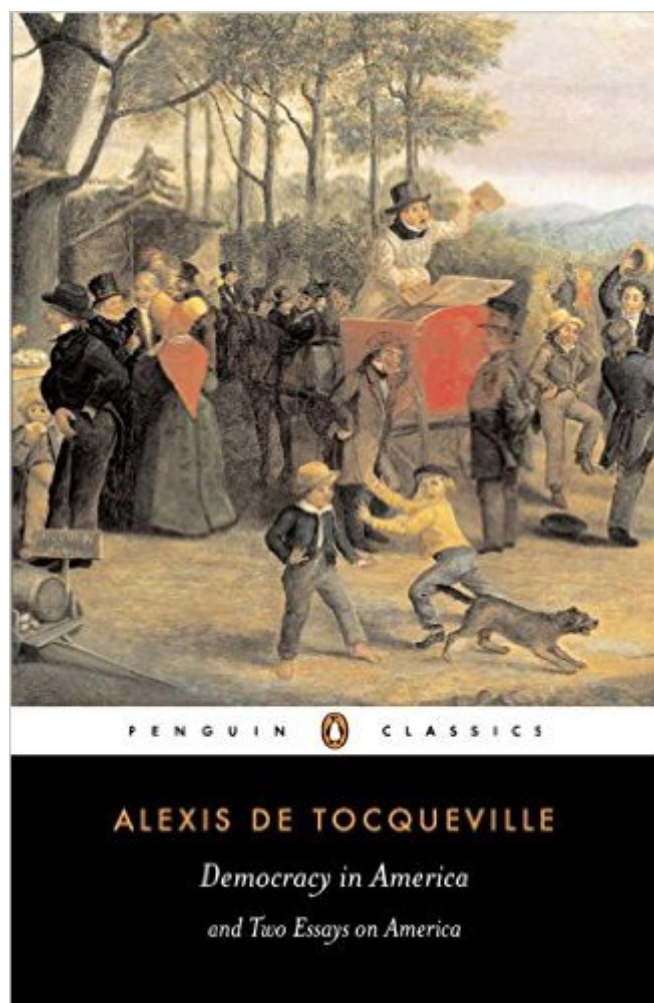


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Democracy In America (Penguin Classics)



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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Customer Reviews

Alexis de Tocqueville looks at the United States and examines its political, social, and cultural intricacies in *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA AND TWO ESSAYS ON AMERICA*. This edition of *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* is well introduced and translated by Gerald Bevan and Isaac Kramnick. This is not a basic travelogue of a French aristocrat -Intellect - statesman's journey through the American wilderness in a span of nine months, but it is a significant documentary that compares and contrasts European Aristocracy to American Democracy. At the time that Tocqueville wrote *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*, both Europe and the United States experienced an enormous shift in its political and social structure. On the US side, several events occurred, Andrew Jackson was president, the Anti-Slavery movement, Indian Removal commenced, immigration was on the rise, and the industrial age was emerging; for the French and European side, the Revolution of 1830 and autocracy took precedence as well as a radical shake-up of the social class. Possibly, for Tocqueville his travels to the United States served as a respite from France's revolutionary tendencies, and the opportunity to observe US history in the making. In terms of chronology, 55 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and 30 years before the Civil War. In essence, Tocqueville's accounts bear much significance to how the United States progressed, and where it was headed. Tocqueville writes and thinks in a Jeffersonian stance. With Bevan's translation, the book is readable. Throughout *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* Tocqueville suggests that productivity cannot occur while a man remains idle, and that action must take place in some form or another - the rule of law or through communication. No doubt, this annotates Jeffersonian politics and ideology.

This is a truly amazing book. As noted above, de Tocqueville predicted both American and Russian ascendancy over one hundred years before they actually occurred. However, beyond that, de Tocqueville applied a keen and discerning eye to then emergent trends in the United States and where they would lead. For example:--On Slavery...de Tocqueville noted the inherent problems with extracting work from people who themselves were not compensated for doing the work;--On North/South relations...de Tocqueville recognized that its reliance on slave labor put the South at a competitive advantage relative to the North in terms of developing a strong economic infrastructure;--On the fate of African Americans...de Tocqueville recognized that if revolution was to occur in the United States, the fate of African Americans would play critically in it because once the

process of giving people an equal stake in society was started it would have a self propagating effect;--On the status of women...de Tocqueville though he was more careful here to hedge his bets allowed for the idea that the power of equality would eventually include American women as well;--On the future...de Tocqueville perhaps at his most prescient recognized that equality could be a recipe for government either of the people or alternatively a dictatorship imposed on those same people. This last observation is perhaps still most salient for our times as we come to see that even an oligarchy can be a dictatorship. Maybe even all governments, however started, are ultimately destined to oligarchy, a status that will change only when enough of the right excluded demand a change and in so doing start the process all over again.

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