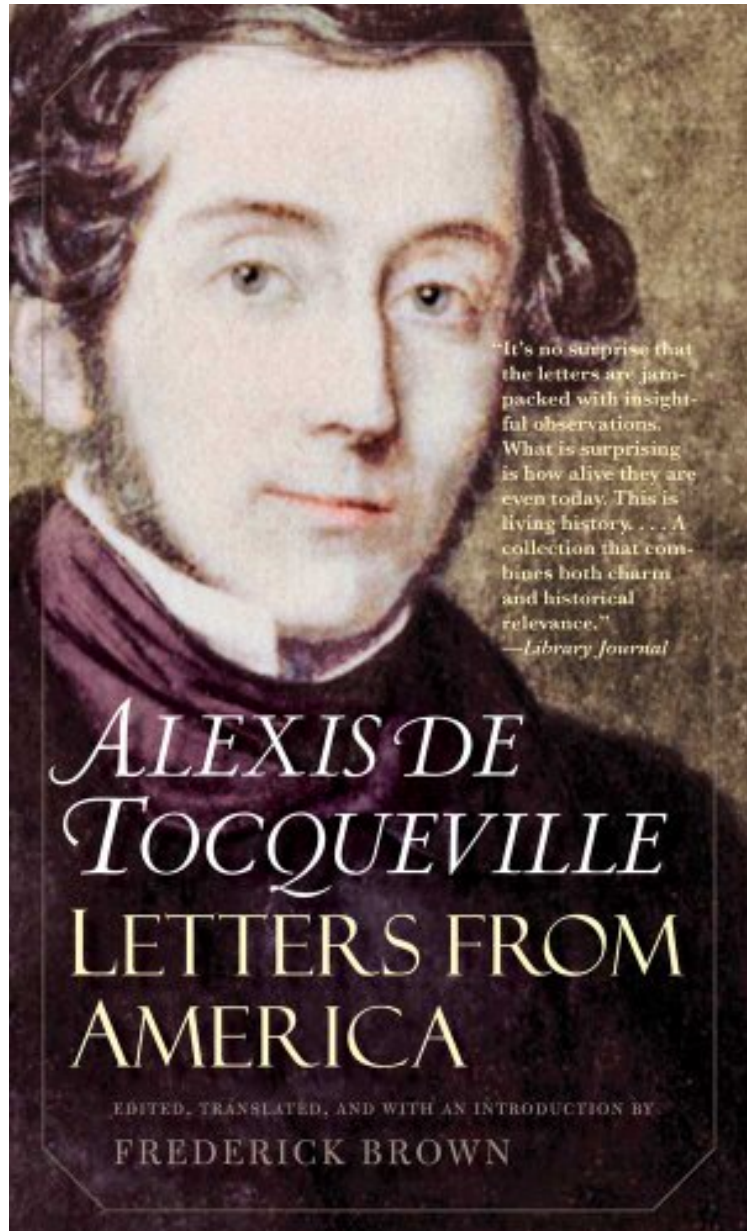


Letters from America

Alexis de Tocqueville

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Alexis de Tocqueville : Letters from America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Letters from America:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. deTocqueville's letters home edited and translated by Frederick

BrownBy GderfEach book on democracy in America has an obligatory reference to deToqueville. It's about time someone gave a comprehensive popular easily readable insight into the man and his writing. This is an opportunity to observe the great observer. It's a quick read about T's trip to America in 1831-2. The book is a compilation of letters to his friends and relatives in France. It starts with his family background and how his relatives managed to survive the period of Robespierre's terror. His observations of American statesmen limited to Jackson, JQA, Webster and Joel Poinsett. Colonel Fish a friend of Hamilton and a daughter of Robert Fulton. The loquacious, hyperactive writing style is strangely very readable, somewhat like a stream of conscience mixed with very prescient observations. He generally shows concern for European politics as well as for the USA. He fears another terror after the upheavals of 1830. In citing a mercantile nationalism, he makes the curious observation that it's easy to get rich in the USA. He poses interesting and prescient questions about banking and judicial systems in America. He observes that we don't need either a standing army or an intelligent foreign policy. I wish it was still true. Besides observing the American penal system, the object of T's voyage, he made observations on society, religion, Indians, travel, geography, and politics and especially the court system. In a study of American banking, he noted that paper is replacing coin. That before the demise of the second BUS. I would have been interested in a similar observation after 1836. In America there is no lower class nor upper. It's still true, but now we deplore income disparity. Treaties are interpreted by the mightier. Indians practiced foot binding, making women pigeon toed. Postal rates are ruinous. The quarrel of the moment was between N and S on the issue of the tariff. T is not so interested in history as in the present. He failed to observe that was the first division between N-S and presaged the quarrel over slavery. Later T does make first hand observations about slavery without prognosis of the resulting war. There are many surprises, including the many apt observations from T's traveling companion, Gustave Beaumont, that I might have attributed to deToqueville himself. Kudos to Brown for including Beaumont in his book. T didn't get it all right and was not always sympathetic. He exhibits a questioning attitude rather than a pretense to have all the answers. I wish more politicians would hold that attitude although one probably couldn't get elected without pretending to know all the answers. Some more observations include: Openness leads to opportunity and incurs an obligation to advance in status and condition. Americans display an astonishing proclivity to participate in politics, clubs and private associations. With mobility there is a risk of downward mobility. In America "rich" is a relative position, not permanent. A "class of rich men" does not exist. Americans reflect dedication and are at ease with religion. Americans are energetic - the most necessary thing is not sinking in the world. Not everyone enjoys the same opportunity. Participation strengthens underlying democracy. People are more willing to support public endeavors when incomes are rising. Americans display a love of well being, America is classless with a proclivity towards equality of condition. Preparing a chapter in 'Democracy in America', he says 'All honest callings are considered honorable'. In France areas with the most improvements were the cause of most subsequent problems. Americans display a "restlessness of temper" and "fervish ardor". [does he mean feverish?] He observed a slow rise of wages, saying as wages rise social conditions become more equal. Abuses remedied draw attention to others. T demonstrates his ability to turn a phrase with "virtuous materialism". He observes large numbers of foreign born inhabitants in the US. T makes no stale static analyses. He leaves the reader of each century to draw our own implications for our own time. T is not always consistent, but that's part of his charm. In his letters he asks many questions. One would like to read some of the responses. There are only first hand observations substantiating his premise that experience is better than books. This is a valuable reference and serves as motivation to read 'Democracy in America.' It illustrates that, in spite of T's all too human faults, he well deserves his reputation as an acute perceptive observer. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Marvellous, insightful, funny. By N.. Martin I made the mistake of leaving this on my shelf for months. Turns out it is one of the best reads I've encountered in ages. Tocqueville and his companion Beaumont are invariably smart, perspicacious, warm, and witty. What wonderful bloggers they would be. Tocqueville doesn't always hit the mark, but his accuracy percentage is remarkably high. There was little of merit that escaped his attention, and his interpretative ability continues to astound. He's also a fair enough wit to have me laughing out loud from time to time. His letters to his sister are particularly interesting and amusing. The book is a worthy companion to his famous book, and it stands well on its own. Sometimes the translation seems almost too good to be true. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A fresh look at the New World. By Guillermo Maynez. During their nine-month journey through the United States in 1831, Tocqueville and his companion-friend Gustave de Beaumont wrote several letters which illustrate their opinions on the new and exciting phenomena they were encountering. Perhaps the most interesting part is the two-week trip they undertook, with the aim of finding "the last frontier", the remotest corner colonized to that date by Europeans within the US territory. They travelled by land to Buffalo, from which they sailed through the Erie lake to Detroit, from where they rode to Saginaw, in the Michigan peninsula. As it was to be expected, Tocqueville mixes his travel observations with intelligent reflections on the possible future of the civilization that was beginning to take shape in those cold lands. One of the things that shocked them was that the colonizers were amazed and amused by the travellers' interest in finding virgin lands and seeing the indigenous populations. "Why look for forests? Come see our new town and the bridge!" Tocqueville sadly feels and anticipated nostalgia for those forests and those tribes which, he knows, will soon disappear, trampled underfoot by the rapid advance of the Western civilization. One of the most intriguing passages

concerns an Indian who seems to be following them on foot. Whenever they speed in their horses, the Indian speeds too, marching at the same pace. When they pause, he pauses too. The situation becomes uncomfortable and even frightening, until at some point it stops in a funny way. Although only a footnote to Tocqueville's masterpiece, "Democracy in America", his letters are also a very good and entertaining source on information on this great observer of politics.

Young Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in the United States for the first time in May 1831, commissioned by the French government to study the American prison system. For the next nine months he and his companion, Gustave de Beaumont, traveled and observed not only prisons but also the political, economic, and social systems of the early republic. Along the way, they frequently reported back to friends and family members in France. This book presents the first translation of the complete letters Tocqueville wrote during that seminal journey, accompanied by excerpts from Beaumont's correspondence that provide details or different perspectives on the places, people, and American life and attitudes the travelers encountered. These delightful letters provide an intimate portrait of the complicated, talented Tocqueville, who opened himself without prejudice to the world of Jacksonian America. Moreover, they contain many of the impressions and ideas that served as preliminary sketches for *Democracy in America*, his classic account of the American democratic system that remains an important reference work to this day. Accessible, witty, and charming, the letters Tocqueville penned while in America are of major interest to general readers, scholars, and students alike.

From Booklist: Lately a historian of the first decades of the Third Republic (*For the Soul of France*, 2009), Brown here translates Tocqueville. A 2007 biography (*Alexis de Tocqueville*, by Hugh Brogan) and a 2010 narrative of his famous 1831-32 journey through the U.S. (*Tocqueville's Discovery of America*, by Leo Damrosch) evidence the enduring contemporary curiosity about the French traveler. The latter title tapped the source of Brown's present work, letters Tocqueville and his traveling companion, Gustave de Beaumont, mailed back to France. Even 180 years later, they are eminently readable as their authors' initial impressions of Americans and of American landscapes, as missives to entertain or commiserate with their recipients, and, in Tocqueville's case, as Brown notes, as a reflection of his fretting about French politics. Tocqueville was connected to the Bourbon dynasty overthrown in 1830, and his trip was, in effect, a temporary self-exile. If the letters exude homesickness, their bounty of acute aperçus of America's social and political conditions, for which Tocqueville became famous, should ensure interest wherever the above titles or Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America* circulate. --Gilbert Taylor "It's no surprise that the letters are jam-packed with insightful observations. What is surprising is how alive they are even today. This is living history, not embalmed. A collection that combines both charm and historical relevance." *Library Journal* (starred review)