



Tocqueville in America (Anchor books)

George Wilson Pierson

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Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835) has become a touchstone for almost any discussion of the American polity. Taking as its topic the promise and shortcomings of the democratic form of government, Tocqueville's great work is at or near the root of such political truths as the litigiousness of American society, the danger of the "tyranny of the majority," the American belief in a small government that intrudes only minimally into the daily lives of the citizenry, and Americans' love of political debate. *Democracy in America* is the work of a 29-year-old nobleman who, with his friend Gustave de Beaumont, traveled the breadth of Jacksonian America to inquire into the future of French society as revolutionary upheaval gave way to a representative government similar to America's. In his magisterial *Tocqueville in America*, George Wilson Pierson reconstructs from diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts the two Frenchmen's nine-month tour and their evolving analysis of American society. We see Tocqueville near Detroit, noting the scattered settlement patterns of the frontier and the affinity of Americans for solitude; in Boston, witnessing the jury system at work; in Philadelphia, observing the suffocating moral regimen at the new Eastern State Prison (which still stands); and in New Orleans, disturbed by the racial caste system and the lassitude of the French-speaking population.

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