



Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction

By Harvey C. Mansfield

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No one has ever described American democracy with more accurate insight or more profoundly than Alexis de Tocqueville. After meeting with Americans on extensive travels in the United States, and intense study of documents and authorities, he authored the landmark *Democracy in America*, publishing its two volumes in 1835 and 1840. Ever since, this book has been the best source for every serious attempt to understand America and democracy itself. Yet Tocqueville himself remains a mystery behind the elegance of his style. Now one of our leading authorities on Tocqueville explains him in this splendid new entry in Oxford's acclaimed *Very Short Introduction* series. Harvey Mansfield addresses his subject as a thinker, clearly and incisively exploring Tocqueville's writings--not only his masterpiece, but also his secret *Recollections*, intended for posterity alone, and his unfinished work on his native France, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Tocqueville was a liberal, Mansfield writes, but not of the usual sort. The many elements of his life found expression in his thought: his aristocratic ancestry, his ventures in politics, his voyages abroad, his hopes and fears for America, and his disappointment with France. All his writings show a passion for political liberty and insistence on human greatness. Perhaps most important, he saw liberty not in theories, but in the practice of self-government in America. Ever an opponent of abstraction, he offered an analysis that forces us to consider what we actually do in our politics--suggesting that theory itself may be an enemy of freedom. And that, Mansfield writes, makes him a vitally important thinker for today. Translator of an authoritative edition of *Democracy in America*, Harvey Mansfield here offers the fruit of decades of research and reflection in a clear, insightful, and marvelously compact introduction.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An accessible synthesis of the author's work that serves both as an introduction and as a provocative summary in its own right." -- *The Times Literary Supplement*

"Moving smoothly through all of Tocqueville's major writings, this small but magisterial volume offers an impressive analysis. It treats not only the highlights but the muted themes through which Tocqueville struggled to make sense of the modern world. This book is as singular as its subject and its present author; each has a distinctive voice. It is precisely that singularity of perspective and purpose that makes them so valuable for a reading, thinking public."--Ralph Lerner, Benjamin Franklin Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago

"Drawing upon his immense knowledge of Alexis de Tocqueville's work, Mansfield provides a succinct and readable introduction to one of the most important political thinkers of the last two centuries. With great skill and unfailing clarity, he not only informs the reader about Tocqueville the man and his life but also sets out the content of Tocqueville's two great masterpieces: *Democracy in America* and *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*. In doing so, Professor Mansfield enables us to understand why we still read Tocqueville today."-Jeremy Jennings, Professor of Political Theory, Queen Mary, University of London; author, *Tocqueville on America after 1840: Letters and Other Writings*

About the Author

Harvey C. Mansfield is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He translated Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* into English and has written such books as *Manliness and Machiavelli's Virtue*. He was awarded the National Humanities Medal and delivered the 2007 Jefferson Lecture for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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