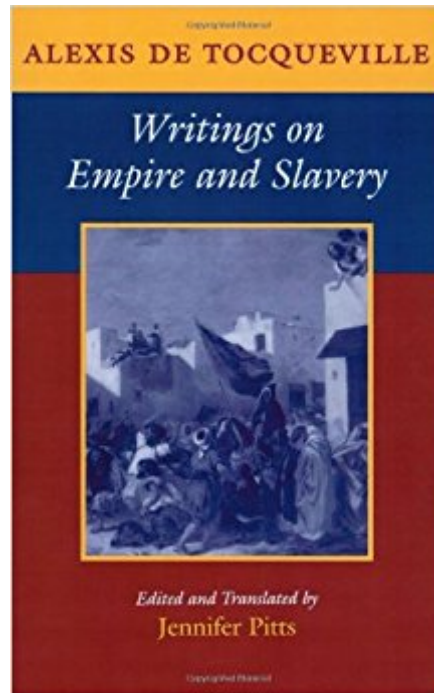




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# Writings On Empire And Slavery



## Synopsis

After completing his research for *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville turned to the French consolidation of its empire in North Africa, which he believed deserving of similar attention. Tocqueville began studying Algerian history and culture, making two trips to Algeria in 1841 and 1846. He quickly became one of France's foremost experts on the country and wrote essays, articles, official letters, and parliamentary reports on such diverse topics as France's military and administrative policies in North Africa, the people of the Maghrib, his own travels in Algeria, and the practice of Islam. Throughout, Tocqueville consistently defended the French imperial project, a position that stands in tension with his admiration for the benefits of democracy he witnessed in America. Although Tocqueville never published a book-length study of French North Africa, his various writings on the subject provide as invaluable a portrait of French imperialism as *Democracy in America* does of the Early Republic period in American history. In *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, Jennifer Pitts has selected and translated nine of his most important dispatches on Algeria, which offer startling new insights into both Tocqueville's political thought and French liberalism's attitudes toward the political, military, and moral aspects of France's colonial expansion. The volume also includes six articles Tocqueville wrote during the same period calling for the emancipation of slaves in France's Caribbean colonies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A highly readable translation of Tocqueville's writings on colonization and slavery and a useful introduction of just the right length... Tocqueville's writings on colonialism, rather than revealing the

limits of his liberalism, lead one to the core of it." (Delba Winthrop Society)"By offering the first translation of these documents in a single volume, Pitts has provided a valuable service to the nineteenth-century specialist. The book should enhance readers' perspectives of both European liberalism and French colonialism." (Jack B. Ridley *History: Reviews of New Books*)"As Jennifer Pitts points out in an informative and perceptive introduction to her edition and translation of Tocqueville's *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, his thinking remained in the mold of a nineteenth-century liberal, more sensitive to the fragility of free institutions in the French state than to the suffering of colonials." (Klaus J. Hansen *Canadian Journal of History*)"Should be required reading for anyone interested in the history of colonialism, imperialism, liberalism and Algeria... *Writings on Empire and Slavery* features the clarity and depth that one expects from the author of *Democracy in America*." (Michael Shurkin *Patterns of Prejudice*)"A highly useful collection." (Daniel Lazare *The Nation*)"A very fine piece of historical sociology. It is surprising that Tocqueville's views on empire and slavery have not been translated before; they shed light on a rather different Tocqueville—always perceptive, but here very much the empire-builder with a chauvinism not untinged with a form of racism. Here we learn not only about this new side of Tocqueville but also about Algeria as a case study in European colonization. An excellent introduction to Tocqueville the man, sociologist, and civil servant and to the early history of French Algeria." (Robert Forster, The Johns Hopkins University)

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I strongly recommend Alexis de Tocqueville's writings on Algeria for an excellent look, not only at the legacy of French colonialism which would lead to disaster in the 1950s, but at the man himself. For in them, you find de Tocqueville no longer the dispassionate, if admiring, observer of a new United States, but rather a French politician deeply involved in shaping the future of his own country. Algeria, it might be fairly said, appears to be where the rubber of de Tocqueville's ideals meets the road of political realities. And the result is illuminating, as you bear witness to a man fully alive to the evils of the colonial enterprise, yet fully committed to its success--believing, as did so many Frenchmen in the century which followed--that the vision of "Algerie francaise" was vital to national honor. A desperate vision which would one day damn them all, and there are moments of startling clairvoyance in which one suspects de Tocqueville knew that--but saw no way to escape it. The de Tocqueville of Algeria is thus by turns a troubled humanitarian and a ruthless pragmatist, torn between the ideals of the revolution and the realities of what \*must\* be done if France herself is

to survive. And the man which emerges is both conflicted and remarkably human, revealing aspects of a worldview guaranteed to rankle readers across the political spectrum. Conservatives will doubtless be offended by his damning indictment of French colonial policies toward the Arabs, particularly his bold claim that the French had left Muslim society "more ignorant and more barbarous" than they had found it. Liberals, by contrast, will be aghast at his pragmatic endorsement of conquest and subjugation, and the manner in which he explicitly condones the practice of carrying out razzias against the native population, even as he deplores the excesses of the French military. The truth is that, examined in the light of his day--as all historical figures deserve to be assessed--there's nothing at all shocking about the views he expressed. He was a man of his age, nothing less and a great deal more. And his "Writings On Empire & Slavery" offer a fresh and indispensable window into de Tocqueville, the man. Highly recommended.

This is such a valuable work! I use it a great deal when I'm working with teachers around the country. It provides keen insights to the history of relationships with the social, political, economic, and cultural elements in North Africa. A true gem!

This collection of Tocqueville's essays concerning the colonization of Algeria and slavery are useful in forming a historical analysis of North Africa and for civil rights analysis, but I found it to be very insightful in regards to modern policy analysis, too. Tocqueville is very articulate about his desires for France's occupation of Algeria. Although he begins steadfastly in favor of colonization and never totally abandons that position, the nature of France's method of occupation is heavily criticized. At one point, he paints a strangely accurate picture of the state of the region after colonization. The description ends with "we have made Muslim society much more miserable, more disordered, more ignorant, and more barbarous than it had been before knowing us." By describing colonial Algeria in terms of its utility to France, Tocqueville reminds us that the misuse of other nations still impacts our own welfare. By pointing out French abuses of themselves, he shows us that our own welfare is not the only important goal. In the end, the lesson he teaches is that we are interconnected. No one empire can pay attention only to local issues. It is true that Tocqueville was not for granting equal rights, or even citizenship, to natives...nor was he in favor of ending colonialism in any way. Rather, his comments worked within the system to encourage a more tolerant, more effective, means of working with natives. His plan did not succeed. France's heavy-handed ways ultimately ended in a violent overthrow of her regime. Algeria, like many Muslim colonies, is more barbaric and less educated now than before European rule. With the US attacks on Afghanistan and continued military

presence in Saudi Arabia, one hopes that we may learn the lessons offered by Tocqueville more readily than did the French.

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