

**Online Reviews**

**Craiutu, Aurelian and Jeremy Jennings, eds. *Tocqueville on America after 1840: Letters and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 550. ISBN: 978-0-67683-0**

**Craiutu, Aurelien and Jeffrey C. Isaac, eds., *America Through European Eyes: British and French Reflections on the New World from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. University Park, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Pp. 299. ISBN: 978-0-271-03390-7**  
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The first volume of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was published in 1835, the second in 1840. After that, Tocqueville published a book reappraising the French Revolution, and wrote papers on important political topics, such as colonialism, prison reform, and pauperism. He also wrote letters to his American friends inquiring about the country he left behind. These letters, collected in the excellent edition under review (along with some of Tocqueville's speeches, letters to his French admirers and critics, and three helpful appendices), satiate our curiosity about Tocqueville's thoughts on democracy in America after the publication of *Democracy in America*.

In their informative introduction, Craiutu and Jennings ask whether Tocqueville's post-1840s writings constitute a third volume to *Democracy in America*. To be sure, letter writing lacks the heft of treatises. But Tocqueville wrote more than one hundred letters between 1840 and 1859 to his American correspondents, and received an equal number back. Tocqueville's letters cover the expansion of slavery, the political jockeying of parties and his concern regarding the possible demise of democracy in America. In 1852, Tocqueville wrote to Jared Sparks, then the president of Harvard College, that he, Tocqueville, was experiencing "a certain anxiety toward your America." Tocqueville's anxiety stemmed from "the excesses of democracy" that America was undergoing (139). This "rapid change," he wrote, "has no parallel in the history of civilization" (144).

While these letters do not constitute a true third volume to *Democracy*, they provide us with keen insight into Tocqueville's thoughts on the prospects of democracy after he became a famous writer. As such, this book is essential reading for anyone interested in Tocqueville and the state of antebellum America by one of France's best writers and thinkers.

In *America Through European Eyes*, Aurelian Craiutu and Jeffrey Isaac have assembled a stellar group of thinkers from across the political spectrum to examine the question: what does America mean to Europe? The book consists of ten chapters and a conclusion, the latter written by Isaac. The book is divided into four parts. Part one contains one essay by Alan Levine, on the history of the idea of America from 1492 to 2001. Levine sees America going through four symbolic transformations. The first occurred with the Spanish discovery of America and the conquest of the Indians. The symbol here is of a land that is an extension of Spain and Christianity. The second era was the revolutionary period, just before the Constitution was written. America was a natural state, but the Indian, who was closer to nature than the European, was about to be replaced by Europeans. In the third era, the United States was formed, but it was a "mixed blessing" (31). The United States is a democracy, but it is also a consumer society; the manners of Americans are solid, but they are not refined. The fourth symbolic era is the present: America as technology, Levine calls it. Technology is more than just material advancement; it is a metaphysical understanding that the way of the world is the American way, the low

road to consumerism, hegemony, and soul-crushing conformity. The essay is thought provoking, to say the least, and it sets the standard for the essays that follow.

Part two is called “America and the Enlightenment.” Costica Bradatan writes on a utopian tract by George Berkeley; Guillaume Ansart discusses *philosophe* thought on colonial America; and Nick Nesbitt examines the anti-slavery thoughts of two travellers to America, Tocqueville and Victor Schoelcher. Part two is held together by the promise of the Enlightenment and by its reality. Berkeley’s utopian idea, to build a theology and fine arts college in Bermuda, demonstrates the hope of the Enlightenment for the advancement of learning in the New World. The *philosophes*, “the rationalist, liberal, reform-minded intellectuals” (71) from Paris, promoted the idea that America was a virtuous republic. This, too, has more than a hint of utopianism, and, as the reality of everyday American life set in, Tocqueville and Schoelcher set off to examine, among other things, slavery in America. Neither Tocqueville, nor the less-well known Schoelcher, were utopians. But Schoelcher was far more liberal and universalist than Tocqueville, and so we learn from this part of the book the important lesson that liberalism and excellence are not incompatible.

Part three should be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. It is on French views of America. Three essays constitute this part, one from each editor, and another from Christine Dunn Henderson. The topics range from slavery and religion to what it means to be free. The essays here are insightful. They each deal with a great deal of historical and philosophical material, which each author explains with the requisite amount of care and discernment. Craiutu makes the observation that the period from the 1820s to the 1850s was a period of transition in France regarding liberal and Enlightenment thought. During this time, the French flocked to America to see what was in store for France. Tocqueville, Madame de Staël, Gustave de Beaumont (Tocqueville’s travelling companion, co-author with Tocqueville of a book on prisons, and the author of a novel about slavery, which Christine Dunn Henderson explicates with grace and intelligence), and an assortment of French (and English) writers visited and wrote about America during this time. Craiutu sets up the theme of part three, the promise of liberalism in post-revolutionary America. Dunn Henderson shows what slavery does to manners and the idea of equality over time, and Jennings charts the movement of French liberal thought to the American Civil War.

Part four is on British views of America. It is not surprising that these three essays focus on manners. The Americans, Tocqueville wrote, are a restless people. Restlessness manifests itself in a number of ways: in terms of manners, as Richard Boyd makes clear in his perceptive and absorbing essay on Frances Trollope’s writings on American manners; in terms of politics, as Russell Hanson demonstrates in his critical evaluation of James Bryce’s *The American Commonwealth*; and in terms of values, as Patrick Deneen explains in his essay on G. K. Chesterton.

Explaining a country’s manners, habits, and ideas is both a serious and delicate matter. All the authors in this distinguished collection approach their subjects with the right degree of intelligence, knowledge, humor, and respect. This is an important and necessary work, for the age of globalization has made us all aware of the need to understand how nations work. The authors explain in careful detail some of the most essential and neglected works of the nineteenth century. That this collection is valuable goes without saying. That it is worth reading is incontestable.

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