

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French political scientist, historian, philosopher and politician, is most famous for a four-volume book he wrote called "Democracy in America".

He came to America in 1831 to study the American form of democracy and what it might mean to the rest of the world.

After a visit of only nine months, he wrote a remarkable book which is regarded as a classic.

De Tocqueville had unusual powers of observation.

He described not only the democratic system of government and how it operated, but also its effect on how Americans think, feel, and act.

Many scholars believe he had a deeper understanding of traditional American beliefs and values than anyone else who has written about the United States.

What is so remarkable is that many of these traits which he observed nearly 200 years ago, are still visible and meaningful today.

His observations are also important because the timing of his visit, the 1830s, was before America was industrialized.

This was the era of the small farmer, the small businessman, and the settling of the western frontier.

It was the period of history when the traditional values of the new country were newly established.

In just a generation, some 40 years since the adoption of the U.S.

Constitution, the new form of government had already produced a society of people with unique values.

He was, however, a neutral observer and saw both the good and bad sides of these qualities.

The first part of "Democracy in America" was written in 1831-32 and published in 1835.

A highly positive and optimistic account of American government and society, the book was very well received.

He attempted to get a glimpse of the essence of American society, all the while promoting his own philosophy: the equaling of the classes and the inevitable depth of aristocratic privilege.

The rest of the book he labored on for four years, and in 1840 the second part was published.

This was substantially more pessimistic than the first, warning of the dangers despotism and governmental centralization, and applying his ideas and criticisms more directly to France.

As a result, it was not received as well as the first part, except in England where it was acclaimed highly.