



# History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies

*Dominick Charles LaCapra*

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## **History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies** Dominick Charles LaCapra

In this study Dominick LaCapra addresses the ongoing concern with the application of theory - namely that of literary studies and linguistics - to contemporary historical research and analysis. History and Reading is an attempt to address the concerns of those scholars who either resist theoretical discussions or disavow the use of interdisciplinary study.

LaCapra begins with an extensive discussion of the problem of reading and interpretation as it relates to the understanding of history. The focus then moves to two classic texts that serve as case studies: Alexis de Tocqueville's "Old Regime and the French Revolution" and Michel Foucault's "Folie et dTraison: Histoire de la folie + l'age classique" (partially translated into English as "Madness and Civilization"). In the final chapter, LaCapra deals with the problem of rethinking and reconfiguring French studies, suggesting how this discipline could itself profit from the theoretical innovations for which it has been so important a conduit in the last few decades.

LaCapra offers sensitive readings of Tocqueville and Foucault, authors who present vastly different narrative strategies and modes of analysis. Looking at these and other theorists whose work addresses the writing and understanding of history, he considers how their distinctive textual practices have transformed standard modes of interpretation and analysis.

A distinguished and widely respected European historian, LaCapra offers a sophisticated consideration of how to combine textual analysis with traditional historical practices, and shows how this practice can be brought to bear on French studies and help to shape its future directions.

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