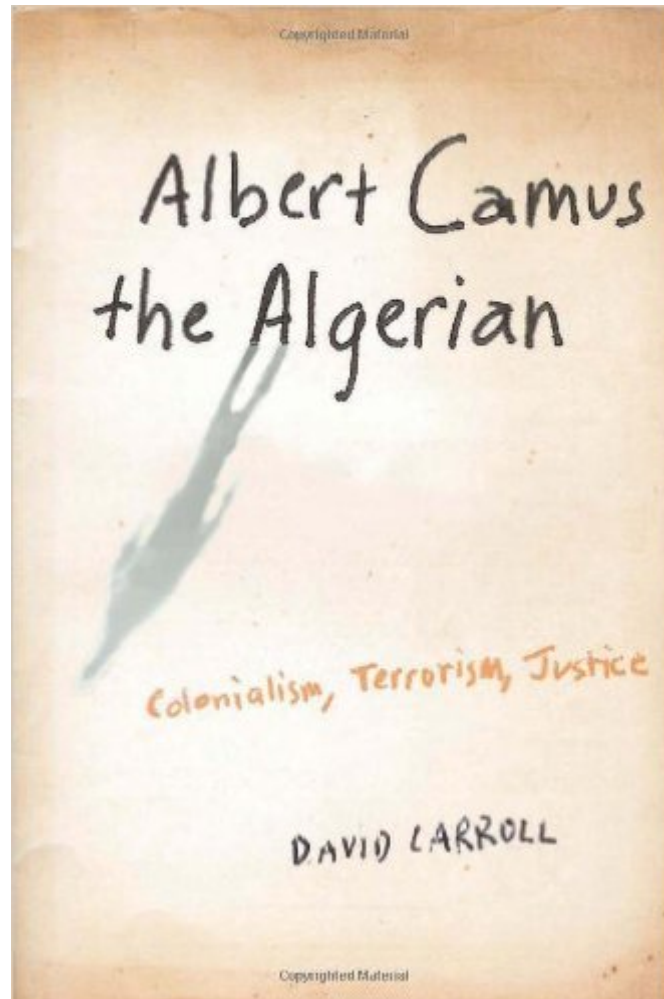


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Albert Camus The Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice



Synopsis

In these original readings of Albert Camus' novels, short stories, and political essays, David Carroll concentrates on Camus' conflicted relationship with his Algerian background and finds important critical insights into questions of justice, the effects of colonial oppression, and the deadly cycle of terrorism and counterterrorism that characterized the Algerian War and continues to surface in the devastation of postcolonial wars today. During France's "dirty war" in Algeria, Camus called for an end to the violence perpetrated against civilians by both France and the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and supported the creation of a postcolonial, multicultural, and democratic Algeria. His position was rejected by most of his contemporaries on the Left and has, ironically, earned him the title of colonialist sympathizer as well as the scorn of important postcolonial critics. Carroll rescues Camus' work from such criticism by emphasizing the Algerian dimensions of his literary and philosophical texts and by highlighting in his novels and short stories his understanding of both the injustice of colonialism and the tragic nature of Algeria's struggle for independence. By refusing to accept that the sacrifice of innocent human lives can ever be justified, even in the pursuit of noble political goals, and by rejecting simple, ideological binaries (West vs. East, Christian vs. Muslim, "us" vs. "them," good vs. evil), Camus' work offers an alternative to the stark choices that characterized his troubled times and continue to define our own. "What they didn't like, was the Algerian, in him," Camus wrote of his fictional double in *The First Man*. Not only should "the Algerian" in Camus be "liked," Carroll argues, but the Algerian dimensions of his literary and political texts constitute a crucial part of their continuing interest. Carroll's reading also shows why Camus' critical perspective has much to contribute to contemporary debates stemming from the global "war on terror."

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Customer Reviews

I don't disagree with the review that points out the author's "pseudo profundity" with regard to social and political issues and views in general, but I think that review fails to see the positive aspects of this work which are an extremely lucid and accurate analysis of Camus's work in relation to Algeria, France and the world at the time Camus wrote and, in the case of "The Stranger," at the time of the fictional events. I've read many, many analysis of Camus's "Stranger" and this is one of the few, in English, that sticks to the facts of the novel in the context of its time. Any Frenchman reading the novel in 1942 would expect Mersault to be found not guilty or, with very bad luck, guilty of some low level manslaughter. Few modern commentaries seem to get that and it's very important.

What I dislike so much about David Carroll's writing is this pervasive pseudo-profundity. For example, at one point he says this: "...respect for human life must come before the pursuit of any cause, even before the cause of freedom, even before justice itself. For to defend life before justice as a general principle is in fact to defend justice itself." (Carroll, 185). Doesn't it just sound profound? That's how you can sound when you don't properly define your terms--do we not enforce justice and freedom out of respect for human life? Yes we do, Mr. Carroll. This stream of boredom sounds intelligent if you don't analyze it, but what is he actually saying? Very little, and certainly nothing new. Anyway, if you are into vague academic-ese written by academics who are full of themselves, give this a read.

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