



Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought

By Howard Brick

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Transcending Capitalism explains why many influential midcentury American social theorists came to believe it was no longer meaningful to describe modern Western society as "capitalist," but instead preferred alternative terms such as "postcapitalist," "postindustrial," or "technological." Considering the discussion today of capitalism and its global triumph, it is important to understand why a prior generation of social theorists imagined the future of advanced societies not in a fixed capitalist form but in some course of development leading beyond capitalism.

Howard Brick locates this postcapitalist vision within a long history of social theory and ideology. He challenges the common view that American thought and culture utterly succumbed in the 1940s to a conservative cold war consensus that put aside the reform ideology and social theory of the early twentieth century. Rather, expectations of the shift to a new social economy persisted and cannot be disregarded as one of the elements contributing to the revival of dissenting thought and practice in the 1960s.

Rooted in a politics of social liberalism, this vision held influence for roughly a half century, from its interwar origins until the right turn in American political culture during the 1970s and 1980s. In offering a historically based understanding of American postcapitalist thought, Brick also presents some current possibilities for reinvigorating critical social thought that explores transitional developments beyond capitalism.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Howard Brick's *Transcending Capitalism* is a bold and penetrating analysis of modern social thought in the twentieth-century United States."? *Journal of American History*

"Brick asks thinkers from Marx to Radcliffe-Brown to Reisman to Talcott Parsons a single question: What can you tell us about what a postcapitalist society might be like as such a society appears to be emerging? An impressive scholarly effort. Highly recommended."? *Choice*

"Where most historians of the social sciences study the social sciences one at a time, Brick . . . links intellectual movements within sociology to those in cultural anthropology, political science, social psychology, and particularly economics. . . . *Transcending Capitalism* is a rich and imaginative historical argument, one from which sociologists will learn much about a major intellectual current in the development of their field."? *American Journal of Sociology*

"In *Transcending Capitalism*, Howard Brick has given us a fertile rethinking of twentieth-century American social thought, one that reveals the continuities that have bound a host of social liberals in a single tradition of postcapitalist speculation that bridges many conventional lines of division. This is a lucid and imaginative book that should have a profound effect on the way we think about recent American intellectual history. One may hope that it will, as well, alert contemporary liberals to an underappreciated, if often imperfect, theoretical inheritance that they might exploit as they struggle to regain their bearings."? Robert Westbrook, University of Rochester

"Howard Brick's analysis of the social liberal current in twentieth-century American thought is intellectual history at its very best, and, indeed, *Transcending Capitalism* is itself an important work of social theory. Brick repeatedly connects the dots among thinkers and movements in ways that force us to rethink our own mappings of the past."? Fred Block, University of California, Davis

"Howard Brick has written an extraordinary work of scholarship that will become a standard among historians of twentieth-century America. *Transcending Capitalism* is sweeping, important, and authoritative.

Brick's opus integrates and synthesizes a consequential body of work by a large number of U.S. and European intellectuals in a fashion mastered by just a few scholars in our time."?Nelson Lichtenstein, University of California, Santa Barbara

"In this brilliant book of astonishing range and depth?Henri Pirenne, R. H. Tawney, and Fernand Braudel here rub shoulders with Talcott Parsons, Karen Horney, Margaret Mead, Peter Drucker, David Riesman, Daniel Bell, and Martin Sklar?Howard Brick demonstrates that the intellectual specification of a postcapitalist society is the secret history of the twentieth century. Marx makes his appearance, to be sure, but Brick shows that a wide variety of writers without any Marxist affiliations or pretensions were able to measure, embrace, and even institutionalize the socialist possibilities residing in and flowing from postindustrial capitalism. In doing so, he both gives us pause and gives us hope-he makes us rethink American social thought, but he also equips us with a usable past. For anyone with an interest in the intellectual history of the twentieth century, or in the future of the planet, this is required reading."?James Livingston, Rutgers University

"*Transcending Capitalism* is an important analysis of a major dimension of twentieth-century social thought: the expectation and hope that modern capitalism was in the process of transformation to a more socialized form of economic system. Howard Brick displays a remarkable ability to deal in clear language with complex, sophisticated topics. This book has analytical rigor and critical bite."?Dorothy Ross, The Johns Hopkins University

About the Author

Howard Brick is Professor and Louis Evans Chair in U.S. History at the University of Michigan.

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