How did capitalism come to be?

CAPITALISM

Ellen Meiksins Wood

Few questions of history have as many contemporary political implications.



"In most accounts of capitalism and its origin, there really is no origin. Capitalism seems always to be there. somewhere, and it only needs to be released from its chains—for instance, from the fetters of feudalism to be allowed to arow and mature."

-from the Introduction

In this incisive study, Ellen Meiksins Wood challenges most existing accounts of capitalism's origin, arguing that they fail to recognize its distinctive attributes as a social system, making its emergence seem natural and inevitable.

Wood begins with searching assessments of classical thinkers ranging from Adam Smith to Max Weber. She then explores the great Marxist debates among writers such as Paul M. Sweezy, Maurice Dobb, Robert Brenner, Perry Anderson, and E.P. Thompson. She concludes with her own account of capitalism's agrarian origin, challenging the association of capitalism with cities, the identification of "capitalist" with "bourgeois," and conceptions of modernity and postmodernity derived from those assumptions.

Only with a proper understanding of capitalism's beginning, Wood concludes, can we imagine the possibility of it ending.

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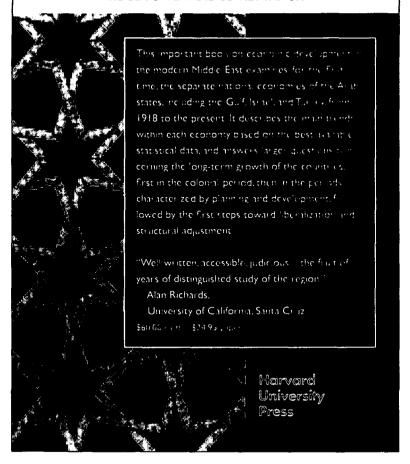
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