



The Virtues of Liberalism

By James T. Kloppenberg

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The Virtues of Liberalism By James T. Kloppenberg

This spirited analysis--and defense--of American liberalism demonstrates the complex and rich traditions of political, economic, and social discourse that have informed American democratic culture from the seventeenth century to the present. *The Virtues of Liberalism* provides a convincing response to critics both right and left. Against conservatives outside the academy who oppose liberalism because they equate it with license, James T. Kloppenberg uncovers ample evidence of American republicans' and liberal democrats' commitments to ethical and religious ideals and their awareness of the difficult choices involved in promoting virtue in a culturally diverse nation. Against radical academic critics who reject liberalism because they equate it with Enlightenment reason and individual property holding, Kloppenberg shows the historical roots of American liberals' dual commitments to diversity, manifested in institutions designed to facilitate deliberative democracy, and to government regulations of property and market exchange in accordance with the public good.

In contrast to prevailing tendencies to simplify and distort American liberalism, Kloppenberg shows how the multifaceted virtues of liberalism have inspired theorists and reformers from Thomas Jefferson and James Madison through Jane Addams and John Dewey to Martin Luther King, Jr., and then explains how these virtues persist in the work of some liberal democrats today. Endorsing the efforts of such neo-progressive and communitarian theorists and journalists as Michael Walzer, Jane Mansbridge, Michael Sandel, and E. J. Dionne, Kloppenberg also offers a more acute analysis of the historical development of American liberalism and of the complex reasons why it has been transformed and made more vulnerable in recent decades.

An intelligent, coherent, and persuasive canvas that stretches from the Enlightenment to the American Revolution, from Tocqueville's observations to the New Deal's social programs, and from the right to worship freely to the idea of ethical responsibility, this book is a valuable contribution to historical scholarship and to contemporary political and cultural debates.



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Editorial Review

Review

"An important book. With great learning, clarity, and passion, Kloppenberg has given us a fresh and richer understanding of the historical meanings of liberalism, and he has done so in a manner that exemplifies the very virtues he so effectively elucidates."--Thomas Bender, New York University

"These essays on the history of political argument in the United States constitute both a scholarly contribution and a distinctive political intervention in contemporary discussions of liberalism. Kloppenberg's liberalism is much closer to European social democracy than to what is attacked or defended in most of today's disputes about the 'l-word.' Kloppenberg is one of the best historians now working on any aspect of the intellectual history of the United States."--David A. Hollinger, University of California at Berkeley

"Everyone interested in the past, present, and potential of liberalism should read this passionate book. It sparkles."--Laura Kalman, University of California at Santa Barbara

"This book is indispensable for lawyers, political theorists, and others who look to history to uncover cultural resources for reviving progressive politics. Kloppenberg's nuanced readings of the interrelationships of republican, religious, and liberal themes in American politics are never schematic; yet they are framed with an eye towards the future as well as the past. Subtle, thorough, engaged: this book offers a pragmatism more chastened than Dewey's but still hopeful for the future."--Joan Williams, Washington College of Law, American University

"James Kloppenberg has written a scholarly book at odds with the temper of the times...Kloppenberg has crafted his essays on American political thought in clear, self-contained, unpretentious prose...Kloppenberg, who does not hesitate to proclaim in the opening pages his devotion to a principled liberalism, a prudent progressivism, and a non-doctrinaire pragmatism, provides in their name an intelligent and learned overview of the conflicting elements and multivalent ideas that, his book demonstrates, have constituted American political thought from before the birth of the republic...learned and thoughtful essays."--*The Boston Review of Books*

About the Author

James T. Kloppenberg is Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University. He is co-editor, with Richard Wightman Fox, of *A Companion to American Thought* (1995), and author of *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford

University Press, 1986), which was awarded the Merle Curti Prize in intellectual history by the Organization of American Historians.

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