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Aaron Peron Ogletree on A Brief History of Neoliberalism by David Harvey. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005. 256 pp.

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A Brief History of Neoliberalism by David Harvey. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005. 256 pp.

Analyzing the social implications and political meanings of neoliberal practices in several countries-theoretically placing it within the broader framework of global free market capitalism-David Harvey's A Brief History of Neoliberalism is an important contribution to understanding neoliberalism. Harvey presents a thought-provoking overview of the effects of neoliberalism and the state of debates regarding neoliberalism. This book compellingly challenges mainstream reasoning embodied in works, such as Thomas Friedman's The World Is Flat, that argue neoliberal policies are necessary for the greater good and it is futile to resist these policies. Nevertheless, neoliberal practices in the nineteenth century, the origins of neoliberal theory, and the assumption that the creation of alternatives alone will cause people to reject neoliberalism remain largely unexamined.

The explicit narrative underpinning this book is how neoliberalism operates to transfer substantive decision-making authority and profits into the private hands of elites directly, or vis-à-vis corporations-both of which are largely unaccountable to the public-while making the public bear market risks and costs. The first two chapters examine the rise of neoliberalism and explain how the concept of freedom has degenerated into the mere advocacy of free markets in order to appeal to a mass base and so disguise the drive to restore the class power of elites to the level found in the 1920s. The following two chapters provide a realistic appraisal of the neoliberal state which subrogates the interests of its public in order to advance elites' interests through institutional arrangements, such as the World Trade Organization, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The next chapter provides a case study of public and private sectors that have been affected by neoliberal restructuring in China. It examines some of the concrete changes in each sector and points out similarities and distinctions between neoliberal practices in China and other countries. The final two chapters analyze the advantages of neoliberalism and consider the prospects faced by dissidents in confronting the *status quo*.

This book compellingly challenges arguments praising the supposed advantages of neoliberalism. This is particularly important when the claim that there is no alternative to neoliberal restructuring has been largely accepted (with the possible exception of South Korea, Cuba, and several countries in Latin America). Harvey's assessment of the shortcomings of neoliberalism and the practices used to distract attention from these shortcomings is indispensable to discussions of neoliberal policies.

More notably, the links between nationalism, poverty, and environmental degradation and the neoliberal agenda is presented. Harvey outlines compellingly how nationalism is mobilized in order to make countries compete and establish conditions favorable to business interests. He continues by documenting how the neoliberal agenda requires "a large, easily exploited, and relatively powerless labour force" and accelerated exploitation and destruction of natural resources (130).

Despite these strengths, this book appears to assume that neoliberalism remained a mere theory until the mid-1970s, contrary to the fact that Great Britain began neoliberal practices as early as 1846. This practice, though, was primary limited to Britain's colonies. In making this assumption, Harvey ignores how this practice hindered the economic development of British

colonies, while Western countries built their economies using protectionists measures which were denied these colonies. Harvey also misconstrues Adam Smith as being a neoliberal-as have many neoliberal economists who have appropriated his theories to justify their own position-by, for example, glossing over the fact that Adam Smith's "invisible hand" theory only works in a perfect market-a condition that has never and will never occur.

The book fails to consider the possibility that the general public is unwilling, unable, or not informed enough to change the *status quo*. An in-depth examination of these considerations could potentially illuminate such an alternative. Regardless, this book is a significant advancement in the debate over neoliberalism. It should prove helpful for anti-neoliberal policy activists in developing strategies and prospects for change.

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